

## **The Authority of the Spoken Word: Speech Acts in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court***

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In real life, Mark Twain—Samuel Clemens—fantasized that his investment in the Paige typesetting machine would bring the wealth he needed to continue to support his beloved wife Olivia in the fashion she deserved. Bruce Michelson, citing an unpublished manuscript, gives attention to his unbridled enthusiasm for the machine. As Twain described its capabilities (Michelson 10-11):

To begin, then, the operator makes a dart at the keys with both hands; a word instantly appears in the raceway before him; it came from the channels under the glass, but too quickly for anyone to see how it was done. The machine takes the measure of that word, automatically, and then passes it along to the front tooth of the long comb; it measures the next word and the next, and passes them to the comb-teeth; and so on and so on, stringing the words along the raceway about three inches apart until the operator touches the justifying bar; by this time the machine has exactly determined what kind of spaces are required in that line, and as the procession moves past the space-sash, the proper spaces emerge and take their places between the words, the completed line is then gently transferred to the galley by automatic mechanisms, and the thing regarded for four centuries and a half as an impossibility is accomplished. And no spacing by hand could be so regular, no justifying by hand could be so perfect.

The Paige typesetting machine, Justin Kaplan observes, could work four times as fast as a human printer, set whole words at a time, space words, and justify its own margins—when it was working (1966:282-88). But unfortunately the miracle machine's time had not yet come.

Samuel Clemens' investment in the Paige compositor began with two thousand, then five thousand dollars and continued, Albert Bigelow Paine noted in his introduction to *Mark Twain's Autobiography* (Twain 1924:78), until it reached a total of about \$190,000. According to his own account, in which he refers to his caution as that of a "burnt child" (1939:232), Twain passed up a chance to invest in Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, an invention for which the time *had* come, because he had no illusions about the capability of an invention of man to carry the sound of the living voice. For him this required physical travel and speaking in person to large, enthusiastic audiences. As he tells this part of his own story, "the lecturing raid around

the world” that enabled him to emerge from the bankruptcy to which his typesetting machine investments led started in July 1895, and he had paid all his creditors 100 per cent on the dollar by the beginning of 1899 (260-64).

Louis J. Budd writes that Hank Morgan, the protagonist of Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, “comes the closest of his major characters to being Twain himself” (1962:112), while Kaplan takes the comparison a step further, claiming that “to a great extent Hank Morgan *is* Mark Twain . . . both are showmen who love gaudy effects” (1966:297). Furthermore, Michelson, who begins his story of Sam Clemens’ real-life involvement with the development of print technology with “the first surviving image” of Sam Clemens as a printer’s apprentice in Hannibal, Missouri, points out that Morgan did not just introduce the printed word to King Arthur’s kingdom. He mass-produced it and rejoiced in the pleasure his sixth-century readers took in the “feel” of the strange new thing in their hands. Although Twain acknowledged certain shortcomings of his print journalism, he declared that he was “vastly pleased” with its general success (Michelson 2006:174-77).

In Stein’s edition of *Connecticut Yankee*, Hank Morgan uses his newly established newspaper to tell the story of his successful restoration of the long dry fountain of the Valley of Holiness (302-4) and to promote his forthcoming joust with Sir Sagramor (428-29) in highly individual, if not very well typeset style. And, though Twain may have underestimated the potential value of the telephone in real life (speaking as the Connecticut Yankee, he declared that it could be a “very demon for conveying similarities of sound that are miracles of divergence from similarities of sense”) (276), he enables his fictional hero to use this triumph of technology, with its ability to extend the communicative power of the spoken word, to good advantage.

The nineteenth-century technology Morgan takes with him when he travels back in time to sixth-century England includes, along with methods for producing and reproducing words, the means for manufacturing arms. He uses nineteenth-century explosive devices to win a contest for prestige with Merlin, in which he blows up the rival magician’s ancient stone tower and then reconstructs it; and he wins his duel with Sir Sagramor by shooting him through his chain mail with a dragoon revolver. He wins his last battle—if what happened can be called a victory (Chadwick Hansen described his Battle of the Sand-Belt as an act of genocide [1973:70]) by using explosives, electricity, and barbed wire. These successes, along with a number of others, are to some degree the result of the careful coordination of support made possible by telephone and telegraph communication with Clarence, who, as the story of Morgan’s assumption of the control of King Arthur’s kingdom develops, becomes The Boss’s chief assistant. But without his own well-developed ability to use the spoken word, Morgan might well have perished when he first found himself in King Arthur’s country.

Twain’s hero, despite his willingness to act as a critic (he finds his guide Alisande’s word-for-word repetition of Malory’s narrative unendurable<sup>1</sup>), knew as little about twentieth-century critical theory as he knew about the wonders of the word-processor or the miracles of telecommunication—and of course there is no reason for him to have demonstrated knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> As Twain tells the story of his real life, Olivia Clemens was the critic. *She* had a sure sense of how a story ought to begin (see Twain 1959:267).

of any of the three. Twain was writing the kind of fiction in which the hero travels backward, not forward, in time. Nevertheless, Hank Morgan's performance of acts that J. L. Austin first introduced in a 1955 series of Harvard lectures makes it seem that an understanding that *promising* and *threatening*, *asserting* and *predicting*, *commanding* and *demanding*, indeed perhaps all the acts whereby a speaker in saying something does something, were part of his stock in trade. The Connecticut Yankee was an accomplished performer of speech acts. Morgan's *locution* (utterance of speech sounds) was, according to his own account, impressive; his *illocution* (performance of acts like *commanding*, *threatening*, and *promising*) was quite consistently felicitous; and his *perlocution* (achievement of intended effect) was close to foolproof.

In the following consideration of the Connecticut Yankee's triple-barreled verbal power I will be using the terms "speech act," "locution," "illocution," and "perlocution" as they are defined in Austin's *How To Do Things with Words* (1962) and further developed by John R. Searle in *Speech Acts* (1969). I will first give attention to a scene in which Hank is saved by an opportune eclipse (it comes just in time to save him from being burned at the stake), then move on to his restoration of the fountain of the Valley of Holiness, to the rescue of Morgan and the king by Sir Launcelot and his bicycle brigade, and finally to a concluding account of the defeat of ten thousand armored knights by Morgan and his "boys."

### The Eclipse

The eclipse scene comes very soon after Hank Morgan, a nineteenth-century munitions maker, sustains a blow to the head, awakens in the kingdom of King Arthur, and is taken captive by Sir Kay, King Arthur's seneschal. He is almost immediately sentenced to be executed on June 21<sup>st</sup>, 528, which, if his young guide Clarence's knowledge of the date of his arrival can be depended on, is two days away. Clarence, however, is wrong about the date at which this sequence begins. It is now June 20<sup>th</sup>, not the 19<sup>th</sup>. But the Yankee's memory of an eclipse he read about in his former life is right. It *did* occur on June 21<sup>st</sup>, 528. So it would seem, as Morgan calculates it, that what he has to do, as he expresses it, is just "keep my anxiety and curiosity from eating the heart out of me for 48 hours" (63). But as he soon learns, he has less time than that because the date for his execution has been advanced by one day.

He nevertheless begins a defense that depends on his power to effectively perform a series of speech acts. Morgan, then, is the *performer*. The situation? He is condemned to be burned at the stake at high noon of a day he mistakenly thinks is June 20<sup>th</sup>, not the 21<sup>st</sup>. But he nevertheless assumes the right to *command* his young messenger to carry a message to the king.

All the prisoner has to back up himself up at this point is the power of his own *locution*, but he pulls out all the stops. As he describes his manner of utterance when he *commands* Clarence, whom he has barely met, to deliver a message to King Arthur, "I paused, and stood over that cowering lad a whole minute in awful silence; then in a voice deep, measured, charged with doom, I began, and rose by dramatically graded stages to my colossal climax, which I delivered in as sublime and noble a way as ever I did such a thing in my life" (87-88).

The message he orders Clarence to deliver is a *threat*, and here the syntax is most formal. With just one exception—the concluding prediction of starvation and death to all—each verb phrase is given its full construction, with every auxiliary “will” and “shall” provided explicit realization as the Connecticut Yankee orders his messenger to “Go back and tell the king that at that hour I will smother the whole world in the dead blackness of midnight; I will blot out the sun, and he shall never shine again; the fruits of the earth shall rot for lack of light and warmth, and the peoples of the earth shall famish and die, to the last man!” (88).

As for the *perlocution* of the order just given, Clarence, Morgan’s audience of one, collapses. And this is the immediate effect of the *command* (Go tell the king . . . ) and of its embedded *threat* (I will blot out the sun . . . ), the two speech acts that constitute the preparatory action for the eclipse scene.

Now for the big scene itself, which Twain presents in Chapter Six, “The Eclipse.” Morgan, who has been led to the stake, begins his *illocution*, or act of doing something by saying something, as the eclipse begins. The timing is right after all! But it will take more than this to demonstrate that, as he has told young Clarence, Merlin may be a powerful magician but Hank is a better magician than Merlin is. Twain gives attention to the placement of the faggots beneath the stake, to the expectant silence of the audience, and to Morgan’s use of physical gesture as he prepares to validate his claim by calling upon his own superior communication skills.

The eclipse begins, and the Yankee prepares to make use of its opportune timing. As he describes the physical gesture that precedes his acts of speaking he says, “I was in one of the most grand attitudes I ever struck, with my arm stretched up pointing to the sun. It was a noble effect” (93). The word “kinesics” might not yet have entered the language when Twain wrote his story of the Connecticut Yankee (Ray L. Birdwhistell’s *Kinesics in Context*, a “brilliant pioneer study” in Marshal McLuhan’s introductory judgment, was not published until 1970), but Hank clearly knows how to use his body language to support his spoken words.

Three *commands*—performed by Merlin the magician, the king, and the Yankee—now dramatize a conflict of intention. Almost simultaneously Merlin commands, “Apply the torch,” the king says “I forbid it,” and Hank Morgan says to the torch bearer, “Stay where you are,” then adds force to his *command* with the *threat*, “If any man moves—even the king—before I give him leave, I will blast him with thunder, I will consume him with lightnings” (94). And the force of his utterance is sufficient.

As Hank describes the *perlocution*, or effect, of his command and supporting threats, the spectators sink to their seats, and Merlin hesitates but sits down. And now the king *requests* that they be spared. As Searle spells out the conditions for *requesting*, this speech act involves 1) the future act of a Hearer (or Hearers) as its “proposition,” 2) the ability of the Hearer to do what he is asked to do and an understanding that he will not do what he is asked to do unless he is asked to do it as “preparatory conditions,” 3) the Speaker *wants* his Hearer to do what he asks him to do as a “sincerity condition,” and 4) the Speaker’s words count as an attempt to get the Hearer to do what he is being asked to do as an “essential condition” (1969:66). There can be no doubt that the king wants the Yankee to spare him and his people, and the audience adds its “supplications,” or fearful requests. And at this point, Hank, having the advantage now, confident as the darkening sky resolves his confusion about what day it is (it is the day it *needs* to be for his “prediction” of the eclipse to come true and his life to be saved), presses his advantage.

He *demand*s to be appointed perpetual minister and executive to the king, and in performing this act he has not exceeded the expectations inherent in the situation. As the sky continues to darken, Hank presents the king with two choices: he can spare his captive and award power to him that will be second only to his own, or he can allow the execution to proceed, with the result that his kingdom will be plunged into eternal darkness. Arthur chooses the first alternative, and his newly appointed minister is permitted to “clothe himself with power and authority,” or, literally, to put on clothes. Properly attired, and speaking now from his newly acquired authority, he *command*s the sun to shine again; and once again he suits his physical action to his act of speaking as he lifts his hands, stands with them raised for a moment, and says, “Let the enchantment dissolve and pass harmless away” (96).

The response of the audience is immediate: “It [breaks] loose with a vast shout and [comes] pouring down like a deluge to smother [Hank] with blessings and gratitude” (96). And thus, despite Clarence’s mistake about what day of the month it was when the action here began (and the serious trepidations that resulted when Hank learned about the rescheduling of his execution), the series of speech acts the Connecticut Yankee performs culminates in wild success.

In the sequence just considered, every act performed by the hero required a certain overstepping, an assumption of authority he did not have. He had no right to *command* a boy he had just met to carry a message, he had no right to *threaten* the king or *demand* a high office, he had no right to *command* the sun to shine; but the result of his assumption of these rights is that his power is now exceeded only by that of the king.

All three of the acts Hank Morgan has just performed are forms of *requesting*, one of the basic categories of speech acts described by Austin and Searle. *Commanding*, Searle notes, has an additional preparatory rule: the Speaker must have an authority that is acknowledged by the Hearer (66), while *demanding*, as “a request made imperiously or as if one had a right,” according to its *Oxford American Dictionary* definition (168-69), involves an assumption of that authority. And *demanding* succeeds, we might add, only if the Hearer acknowledges the authority assumed.

Morgan, supporting his speech acts with effective use of verbal and physical gestures to communicate an *impression* of authority and power, has just convinced the *king* that he is worthy of promotion to the position he *demand*s. Every speech act he performs results in almost immediate success, and the effects of the acts just performed extend beyond the immediate situation and influence the outcome of every conflict that follows. Instead of having to rely on a memory of an eclipse that occurred on June 21st, 528, the Connecticut Yankee, his status firmly established in King Arthur’s kingdom, can now begin to develop a nineteenth-century technology that he can call upon for further success.

## The Fountain

Let us move on now to the speech acts that prepare for the big scene of Chapter 23, “Restoration of the Fountain.” These consist of two *promises* to restore a fountain that has not functioned in many years. Hank reassures the old abbot who has charge of the fountain of the

Valley of Holiness with the words “I shall use no arts that come from the devil, and no elements not created by the hand of God” (251). Merlin has already made a comparable *promise* and reinforced his pledge with a stronger act of promising. He has taken an *oath* that he will make his promise good. And thus the contest begins.

When the time for public conflict arrives Merlin is the first to perform. As Hank Morgan describes the congruence of his physical and speech acts, Merlin raises a great smoke and pours out “volumes of speech to match. He contort[s] his body and saw[s] the air in a most extraordinary way. At the end of twenty minutes he drop[s] down panting, and about exhausted!” (262-63). Defeated, Merlin acknowledges his failure and *predicts* that no one will ever restore the well, thus performing a special kind of *assertion*. Performance of a speech act of *prediction*, for which the *Oxford American Dictionary* provides the synonyms “forecast” and “prophecy,” involves asserting in advance that something is likely to happen or foretelling things as if by divine inspiration, and thus goes beyond what can be immediately demonstrated to make a questionable claim of knowledge. But Merlin provides this support for his prediction of failure: the magician who put the spell on the Well of Holiness, he says, is so powerful that no one will ever dare to speak his name.

Hank Morgan takes Merlin’s negative prediction as a challenge. Now he can not only use his nineteenth-century expertise to restore the fountain—he has already learned that what will be required is simply the repair of a leak, Clarence has sent on the needed materials and tools, and the repair has been made—he can also humble his rival and enhance his own reputation by performing a speech act that requires the highest degree of courage. He will utter the unspeakable name. He will name the great magician who, Merlin claims, has bewitched the well and thus negate his power. His assistants have installed the lead pipe and pump needed to prepare the well and Hank has the “Greek fire, sheaves of big rockets, roman candles, colored-fire sprays, electric apparatus, and a host of sundries—everything needed for the stateliest kind of miracle” on hand (264). The stage is set, and Hank rises to the occasion. As the Yankee describes his performance, his body language can be seen as suitable preparation for the speech act that will show that Merlin is wrong. To produce the word that will prove his own superiority Morgan says, “I stood up on the platform and extended my hands abroad, for two minutes, with my face uplifted—that always produces a dead hush—and then slowly pronounced this ghastly word with a kind of awfulness which caused hundreds to tremble, and many women to faint” (267). The word he utters is indeed of ghastly length, but a currently available typeface enables its representation here as

Constantinopolitanischerdudelsackspfeifenmachersgesellschaft!

and the blue glare that accompanies its utterance produces an immense effect.

Next, saying “Now was the time to pile in the effects,” The Boss tells how he again lifts his hands and groans out a word as if in agony. The audience moans and howls as the red lights go off to accompany the utterance of another word of impressive length. He waits 60 seconds, then shouts another, even longer word and lights “the green fire”; then 40 seconds later he spreads his arms once again and “thunders out the devastating syllables” of the longest word of all. He then gives his listeners a few moments to prepare themselves for the naming of the evil

magician who has bewitched the fountain, makes “a grand exhibition of extra posturing and gesturing,” and shouts ““Lo, I command the fell spirit that possesses the holy fountain to now disgorge into the skies all the infernal fires that still remain in him, and straightway dissolve his spell and flee hence to the pit, there to lie bound a thousand years. By his own dread name I command it—BGWJJILLIGKKK!”” (269). His command that the evil magician relinquish his control is accompanied by a magnificent display of fireworks. The language of Morgan’s commands to the evil magician can be read in terms of the requirements for fully explicit speech acts. He uses the first person nominative pronoun “I” and the imperative verb “command” not once but twice. The first “I command” is followed by a fully developed proposition that obligates the magician who cast the spell on the well to 1) release the powers of fire that may still remain within him, 2) deprive his spell of its power, and 3) flee to the pit [of hell, it can be assumed], where he is to be rendered powerless for years to come. The second “I command” is followed by the fearful name that guarantees that the Speaker will achieve the result he intends to achieve. With this utterance, accompanied by a magnificent display of fireworks, and (we can assume) a flip of the switch that turns the pump on, the people see the “freed water leaping forth!” (269). The result? Jubilation and gratitude on the part of the people, and for Hank Morgan a pleasure in his success so great that he can hardly go to sleep that night for glorying in it.

A stronger contrast with Merlin’s pitiful performance can hardly be imagined, and the effect on the audience is all that Hank could have hoped for. A wild hosanna follows a groan of terror. Choking with tears, the abbot embraces him, and the people fall down to kiss the water and then fall back in reverence to make way for the restorer of the fountain. The sequence just presented includes a preparatory action that consists of the performance of conflicting *promises*, which involve an obligation on the part of the performer to do what he says he will do. Merlin fails to keep his promise, then attempts to excuse his failure; and Hank takes Merlin’s negative prediction as a personal challenge to which he responds with defiant courage and a splendid display of showmanship. Thus once again a conflict is resolved in favor of the hero, whose reputation is now even more firmly established than it was before. Indeed, as we learn later, the news of this great success will spread far and wide by means of the print technology Hank has brought to King Arthur’s kingdom.

## **The Rescue**

The third scene to be considered here, like the first, involves a life placed in jeopardy. It is precipitated by a series of infelicitous speech acts performed by King Arthur on a journey that he, persuaded by Hank Morgan (now referred to as “The Boss”), has been convinced to take in the guise of a humble peasant.

The Yankee, who wishes to inform the king about the conditions in which his people live, has taken pains to instruct him on appropriate behavior, but the king, to understate the case, is a slow learner. In Chapter 28, “Drilling the King,” we are permitted to see the Yankee’s teaching methods in action as he tells the king to abandon his “soldierly stride” and “lordly port” and to lower his chin and look at the ground, all of which takes practice and further practice but continues to seem “amateur.” Nevertheless, Morgan determines to move to a stage at which the

king will knock at the door of a peasant's hut and introduce himself. Given this challenge, the king immediately reverts to his accustomed behavior. His self-introduction takes the form of a *command*, ““Varlet, bring a seat; and serve to me what cheer ye have”” (321), which clearly does not fit the role the king must play for their mission to succeed. But though the king has barely passed his kinesics test and miserably failed his speech exam, the Yankee persists in his effort to teach him how to play the role he has persuaded him to take on.

In Chapter 33, “Sixth-Century Political Economy,” Hank fails to make clear the lessons in economics he undertakes to teach to a group of farmers, but wins an argument in which he assumes a position that the pillory should be abolished—and takes his usual pleasure in having defeated an opponent. The pleasure, however, is short-lived. He soon realizes that his pro-pillory opponent and the men who have served as audience here do not really understand the implications of what he has just demonstrated. They do not agree that men do not deserve to be clodded with dirt, pelted with dead cats, and finally—if others bear grudges against them—with mutilating bricks and stones. But *this* is not what causes the farmers to turn against Hank and the king. Unable to understand the Yankee's lecture on buying power and the proper rewards for labor, they respond as dead men, unable to act. But in Chapter 34, when the king assumes a right to lecture on the topic of agriculture, the assembled farmers turn against the two travelers.

As Hank listens helplessly—he can't whisper a precaution into the king's ear for fear of being taken as a conspirator—the king goes on about onions, using legalistic syntax as he is heard to say (383-84):

. . . were not the best way, methinks, albeit it is not to be denied that authorities differ as concerning this point, some contending that the onion is but an unwholesome berry when stricken early from the tree . . . whileas others do yet maintain, with much show of reason, that this is not of necessity the case, instancing that plums and other like cereals do be always dug in the unripe state—yet are they clearly wholesome, the more especially when one doth assuage the asperities of their nature by admixture of the tranquilizing juice of the wayward cabbage . . . .

Intently watching the audience, Hank notes that as the king speaks his listeners—who have at first just begun to show signs of life—show signs of distress and then terror, and finally, with the king's introduction of the topic of the life cycle of the goat, grow determined to kill both Hank, who they suspect will betray them, and the king, who in their judgment is clearly mad.

The results of the king's infelicitous acts of speaking are nearly catastrophic, but he and Hank are saved—for the moment—by the intervention of a nobleman. Despite Hank's protests that he and the king are but peaceful strangers, the nobleman responds to their appearance, which has been carefully planned to place them in a social order far below their actual status, and issues this *order*: ““Lash me these animals to their kennels”” (389), determining to sell the two as slaves.

At this point the Yankee needs all the natural ingenuity, technological savvy, and verbal skills at his command. They do not fail him. Having managed to steal a pin from one of three potential buyers, he picks the locks that bind him and manages to escape from the prison in which he and the king are held. Having noted that there are wires above one of the streets (the



prison to which he and the king have been brought is in London), he follows a line to a telegraph office. The young man he finds there, though his basic training is adequate, is sadly lacking in communication skills, so Morgan sends this message directly to Clarence himself: “Send five hundred picked knights with Launcelot in the lead; and send them on the jump. Let them enter by the southwest gate, and look out for the man [Hank] with a white cloth around his arm.” Clarence promptly answers, “They shall start in half an hour” (416).

A minor conflict between speech acts now ensues. Hank *predicts* that none of the slaves who have been condemned to hang along with the king will be hung. He strengthens his first prediction with a second, saying that before another day passes not only will they not be hung, but they will be free to go as they please. The prison guard’s ironic agreement constitutes a counter prediction: “Out of prison—yes—ye say true. And free likewise to go where ye will, so ye wander not out of his grace the Devil’s sultry realm” (419). And the forces of pessimism win this round when the laconic nay-sayer pulls out his trump card to reveal that the execution has been advanced a day.

Hank Morgan despairs. Help cannot possibly arrive in time. The drama, however, must be played out. The preparatory speech acts have put the wheels in motion, and Clarence has responded by dispatching five hundred knights on bicycles. The crowd assembles and tension runs high. The king now performs another infelicitous speech act. Clad in rags, he *threatens* everyone in the crowd with punishment for treason. In doing so, he speaks from his own authority as king, but because he is not in his present condition recognizable as the king his act fails to have its intended effect. The crowd responds with insults. The first slave is hung, the second, and then the third. Tension builds to a climax until they are blindfolding the king himself!

Hank finds himself momentarily incapable of speech. His tongue, he says, is petrified; but he recovers his powers of locution when Launcelot, leading a troop of cyclists, comes riding in. Back in charge, the Connecticut Yankee now *commands* all those assembled to fall to their knees, and, as he has done before, follows his command with a *threat*: “Who fails shall sup in hell tonight” (426).

As Frank Parker and Kathryn Riley (1999:18) spell out, the requirements for *threatening*, *promising*, and *threatening* both function as *commissives*, or utterances that commit a Speaker to do something. But while *promising* requires that the Speaker believe the Hearer wants an act to be performed, *threatening* requires that the Speaker believe that the Hearer does *not* want the Speaker to perform the act to which he commits himself. The farmers of Chapter 33 may not have understood the Connecticut Yankee’s lectures on social justice and human rights, but judging from the compliance of the people who have gathered for the hanging scene of Chapter 38, “Sir Launcelot and Knights to the Rescue,” there can be no doubt that they understand what they must do to avoid a punishment their religion has taught them to fear. Their response to Hank’s threat-supported *command* is immediate. All those assembled fall to their knees. The king is recognized again as king, and Morgan *congratulates* himself once again on the “high style” he always uses when “climaxing an effect.”

### The Defeat of the Knights

As *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* approaches its conclusion, Malory's story of King Arthur and his court—all but forgotten through much of a book that centers on the successes of the Connecticut Yankee—reasserts itself. Queen Guinevere is reported to have been rescued from burning at the stake; the uneasy peace between Arthur and Mordred is broken when a knight raises his sword to strike an adder, thus unintentionally breaking an agreement the two have previously made; King Arthur dies; and Guinevere enters a nunnery. Morgan, who remains fully confident of his own power, reveals the support on which this power depends—a well-established system of schools, mines, factories and workshops—to the world; and he considers the possibility that he may become the president of a republic that will follow the reign of King Arthur. With a hubris transcending anything he has shown before, he issues a *challenge* by having it engraved in brass, posting it where any priest can read it, and publishing it in his newspapers. As he recalls this act, he represents himself as having said, "I not only renewed it, but added to its proportions. I said, name the day, and I would take fifty assistants and stand up *against the massed chivalry of the whole earth and destroy it*" (442-43). And then his carefully established system begins to fall apart, not because of the revelation of the Launcelot and Guinevere affair—everyone but the king has known about this all along—but because Launcelot has scored a tremendous financial success through manipulation of another of The Boss's successful enterprises: the stock market. It was this, Hank says, that caused Arthur to turn against Launcelot.

War results, and in Chapter 42, which carries the one-word title "War!," Twain inserts a representation of Malory's account of the meeting of King Arthur and his son Mordred on the field of battle (462),<sup>2</sup> commending the language with which it is represented and giving credit to Clarence for his "good piece of war correspondence." Twain then proceeds, with an account of a following conversation between The Boss and Clarence, to show how Morgan, with the help of his assistant, prepares for a revolution. The schools, colleges, factories, and workshops may have resisted all opposition before, but now, at least in Clarence's opinion, they are confronted by a force they cannot defend themselves against: the Church.

And this is The Boss's response. Unintimidated (his perspective on matters of religion is his own individual nineteenth-century perspective), he says that their defense, the construction of which Clarence has skillfully supervised, will become a method of *offense*. "The *defensive*," The Boss says, "isn't in my line, and the offense is." Next, in response to Clarence's question, "When does the performance begin?" he answers "Now! We'll proclaim the Republic," and having determined not just when but also how the performance will begin he dictates the following words to his amanuensis (469):

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<sup>2</sup> The language of the *Connecticut Yankee* account of King Arthur's last battle, except for Twain's modernization of Middle English spelling, is almost word for word the same as the language to be found in Malory (1977:713-14).

## “PROCLAMATION

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

Hank Morgan may not say “*I proclaim* that a republic now exists,” with a first-person nominative pronoun subject followed by a first-person present tense verb of speaking followed in turn by a proposition. Instead, he says ““A republic is hereby proclaimed,”” using a form that, as Austin pointed out, is “a very common and important type of . . . indubitable performative [which] has the verb in the *second or third person* (singular or plural) and the verb in the *passive voice*” (57). Having assumed the power to *proclaim*, or perform a special act of *assertion* that carries the authority of an official statement, Hank confers republican status upon sixth-century England. He next *commands* the people of England to assemble and elect a leader.<sup>3</sup> He signs his proclamation “The Boss,” which can be seen not as a new assumption of power—he has been going by this title for a long time now—but simply as a further assertion of control in this context, and then dates it “from Merlin’s Cave.” Clarence objects, ““Why, that tells where we are, and invites them to call right away,”” and Hank explains that this is his intention. He *is* inviting his enemies, or *requesting* that they come to him and do battle.

The Connecticut Yankee is prepared. Chapter 41, “The Interdict” (452-57), provides details about Twain’s hero’s plans to defend himself when the Church, acting from its long-established position of authority, first issued an interdict (an “authoritative prohibition,” to call once again upon the *Oxford American Dictionary*) against him. The bastion then and now to be defended is still known—though the magician no longer really possesses it—as Merlin’s Cave. The means of defense consists of twelve circles of electrified barbed wire along with a number of well-placed gatling guns and bombs prepared for detonation. The defenders, 52 English boys, Clarence, and the Connecticut Yankee are pitted against a force of 30,000 knights.

In Chapter 43, “The Battle of the Sand Belt,” Morgan prepares his boys for what is to come. First, The Boss, having now assumed the role of General, assesses the mental readiness of his 52 boys. He watches the expressions on their faces and the way they walk, and he intuits their unconscious attitudes, knowing that “all these are a language—a language given us purposely

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<sup>3</sup> At this point, as a reader and listener and viewer of twenty-first century news reporting, I find myself suddenly moving from Twain’s representation of Morgan’s plan for the reform of sixth-century government to visual memories of recurrent representations of the voters of Baghdad raising their ink-stained fingers to show that they have performed their obligation to vote.

that it may betray us in times of emergency, when we have secrets which we want to keep.” He knows they may be hearing the message “*All England—ALL ENGLAND—is marching against you!*” over and over again in their minds and hearts (473-74), and he waits for the expression of what they are thinking and feeling to come.

It comes. The boys’ spokesman tells their leader they have tried to forget that they are English boys, and to “put reason before sentiment, duty before love.” They do not feel that it will be wrong to oppose the nobility that have survived the recent wars, but they cannot deny their love for their people. He concludes his short speech with this eloquently expressed *request*: ““Oh, sir, consider!—reflect!—these people are our people, they are bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, we love them—do not ask us to destroy our nation!”” (475).

And The Boss congratulates himself for having, once again, looked ahead. First, with an admirably short series of parallel commendations, he tells the boys their hearts are in the right place, they have thought the worthy thought, they have done the worthy thing. They are English boys, and he assures them that they will remain English boys and will “keep that name unsmirched.” Continuing in this manner he says, “Give yourselves no further concern, let your minds be at peace,” all of which leads up to a question-answer sequence. Acknowledging that all England is marching against them, he asks, “Who, by the commonest rules of war, will march in the front?” and follows his apparent *request* for information with the *command*: “Answer me.”

The answer is “the mounted host of mailed knights.” The Boss responds with “True.” He has received the answer he clearly intended to elicit. He next says, “Now observe,” as if he did not already have complete control of their attention! and continues with “None but *they* will ever strike the sand belt!” and assures the boys that it is not just true but “absolutely true” that they will never have to fight anyone but the thirty thousand knights. And this leads to a *command* that the boys answer a single question and a *promise* that their answer will determine whether or not they fight the battle.

The question is “Shall we avoid the battle, retire from the field?” and the answer is a unanimous and hearty “NO!!!” The next “question”—and the manner in which it is presented shows that the Boss’s intention is not to elicit information but to reduce the tension—is “Are you—are you—well, afraid of these thirty thousand knights?” This brings forth laughter, and the stage is effectively set for battle. But what happens in this chapter, despite the fact that it bears the title “The Battle of the Sandbelt,” can hardly be called a battle if we consider the noun to carry its usual meaning, “a fight between large organized forces.”

True, the opposing force is seen to advance, and Morgan, with his consistent eye for drama, sees innumerable banners flutter and a sea of armor set aflash by the light of the sun. He hears the blare of trumpets and sees “acres” of “plumed knights in armor” advance at first in a slow walk, and then with the speed of a gallop. And then the ground explodes and he exclaims, “Great Scott! Why, the whole front of that host shot into the sky with a thundercrash, and became a whirling tempest of rags and fragments . . .” (476). But then he coldly advances to the next step of his plan. He pushes a button connected to all the “noble civilization-factories” he has taken years to build, and they too are destroyed.

Finally, turning to performance of the speech act that seems to be the obligatory response, he offers formal words of *congratulation* to his troops. Searle provides the essential conditions

for *congratulating*: the event or act is related to the Hearer, it is in the Hearer's interest, the Speaker believes it is in the Hearer's interest, the Speaker is pleased at the event, and his utterance counts as an expression of pleasure at the event (1969:67). And all that is required to fit his definition to the exchange here is a pluralization of Hearer to Hearers. These are the words with which Morgan congratulates his boys (478):

SOLDIERS, CHAMPIONS OF HUMAN LIBERTY AND EQUALITY: Your General congratulates you! In the pride of his strength and the vanity of his renown, an arrogant enemy came against you. You were ready. The conflict was brief; on your side, glorious. This mighty victory, having been achieved utterly without loss, stands without example in history. So long as the planets shall continue to move in their orbits, the BATTLE OF THE SAND-BELT will not perish out of the memories of men. THE BOSS.

The tone is splendidly heroic, and The Boss, again following an established pattern, congratulates *himself* on its effect: "I read it well, and the applause was gratifying to me." But the glory has gone out of the enterprise.

Morgan's words may have overcome his men's—or boys'—defenses against killing their own countrymen, and he gives them credit for their help with his enterprise in an appropriate manner. The language of his proposed ultimatum to the surviving knights is also appropriately impressive. It concludes with a clearly expressed presentation of a choice: "We offer you your lives; for the sake of your families, do not reject this gift. We offer you this chance, and it is the last: throw down your arms, surrender unconditionally to the Republic, and all will be forgiven" (480), and it is signed, once again, The Boss. Thus, with carefully balanced phrases, the Connecticut Yankee *promises* his opponents that they will be permitted to continue to live if they surrender, and *threatens* them with certain death if they refuse.

Clarence, who knows his people better than the Yankee does and seems to have learned from demonstrations of his Boss's argumentation strategies, asks that he be permitted, for the moment, to take on the role of commander of the knights while Hank plays the role of the messenger entrusted with the ultimatum. The Boss decides to "humor" his assistant, and, approaching Clarence, receives this answer to the proposed message: "Dismember me this animal, and return him in a basket to the base-born knave his master; other answer have I none" (481). Having received this answer (without actually sending his message), which echoes the superiority of class distinction with which the noble who earlier rescued Hank and the king from hanging only to sell them as slaves, The Boss checks his electrical connections to make sure he can control every fence from the cave, orders his boys to keep their two-hour watches, and prepares for his final act: destruction of the remaining 10,000 knights by creating a river a hundred feet wide and instructing a force of thirteen gatling guns to open fire.

The result of the Connecticut Yankee's years of successful entrepreneurship and careful planning is a triumph of superior nineteenth-century technology, but not of the human beings who use it. The electrified barbed wire fences successfully defend Morgan's fortification. Men in armor, which is obviously worse than useless here, die as they touch the fences. Thirteen gatling guns "vomit death into the fated ten thousand," who, if they are not electrocuted or shot, drown in a flood engineered by Hank Morgan and his loyal crew. The 54—Hank, Clarence, and the 52

boys—defeat the 10,000, but, surrounded by the dead, they themselves have little hope for survival.

The enemy has been destroyed. The “battle” is over. But there is no victory. The two postscripts with which Twain’s novel concludes, one written by Clarence and one by M. T., present a Boss who will have no consciousness of life until he has slept “like a stone” for over a thousand years, and a human being longing for the comfort of contact with his wife and child.

Mark Twain, who took his own nineteenth-century concerns back to the time of Sir Thomas Malory’s *King Arthur*, tells a story that may not just predict technological achievements of the twentieth century, as when Clarence, permitted to use the telephone after the restoration of the Fountain of Holiness, was sure that his Boss could *hear* him wink and smile if he listened sharply to his voice (276). His story may also carry this message: there are important things that cannot be accomplished through use of the most highly developed technologies of war. But my intention here has not been to judge The Boss’s final “success” or to claim the predictive power or essential wisdom of his creator. I have simply tried to show how Twain used his understanding of some of the ways that language works to tell the story of a Connecticut Yankee who, through no intention of his own, found himself in a past world. Though our methods for reproducing the written word may have gone far beyond what Samuel Clemens hoped to achieve with the Paige typesetting machine, sometimes the Connecticut Yankee’s world seems not to be too different from the world in which we live and try to do things with words.

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