Reimagining Hank Morgan and Billy Pilgrim as American Anti-Heroes: The Dystopian Satire of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*

By

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July, 2011

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Many critics have noticed the ties linking the satirical novels of Mark Twain and Kurt Vonnegut. This is not surprising as Twain's influence on Vonnegut's work is virtually inescapable. However, thus far critics have not conducted any rigorous, sustained attempts to analyze the works of both authors together. Comparisons of the authors have thus far been casual, insubstantial references made in passing. This thesis will attempt to link the authors as American satirists and explore where the satire of Twain and Vonnegut overlaps and where it diverges.

This discussion of the satirical voice of Twain and Vonnegut leads into a discussion of their protagonists Hank Morgan and Billy Pilgrim. There have been a wide range of interpretations of both authors, ranging from analyses describing the protagonists as heroes while others assume that they were created to ridicule societal problems. This thesis will attempt to shed light on this debate by placing *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* within the tradition of dystopian literature, thereby changing the parameters of the debate and creating a new reading of both novels.

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A Masters Thesis

Presented To

The Faculty of the Department of English

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of English

By:

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July, 2011

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Tom Douglass for his insightful guidance and encouragement throughout this entire project. His support made this research possible and helped me through every step of the writing process. I would also like to thank Joy Bailey who supported me throughout this project and encouraged me when I encountered problems along the way. Thanks also to my parents and family whose passion for knowledge and continued emotional support has led me to pursue academic challenges.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One

Mark Twain and Kurt Vonnegut: American Satirists

> I was goofing around like everybody else in Indiana, and all of a sudden stuff came gushing out. It was disgust with civilization.
>
> Kurt Vonnegut, *Armageddon in Retrospect* 233

By combining humorous, satirical social criticism in a dystopian structure, both Mark Twain and Kurt Vonnegut were able to provide scathing commentary on contemporary issues while pointing out the absurdity of American behaviors and institutions. Twain and Vonnegut have been critics of the destructive aspects of American identity for their respective generations; they both set out to capture the American experience while satirizing the weaknesses of American society. Startlingly, there have not been significant scholarly attempts to connect the works of both authors in order to describe the evolution of American satirical fiction. In a recent collection of Vonnegut's previously unpublished short fiction, *While Mortals Sleep* (2011), Dave Eggers describes Kurt Vonnegut as "a hippy Mark Twain" (ix). Likewise, in an introduction to an essay which Vonnegut published concerning Twain's novels, Shelly Fishkin remarks that, "Vonnegut, like Twain, was famous for blending satire with science fiction, for raising questions about war that troubled his compatriots, and for using the assault of laughter (often in the form of dark subversive comedy) to chip away at falsehoods that masqueraded as truth in the world around him" (431). However, apart from casual inferences such as these, there have been no sustained attempts to link the authors.

Mark Twain is well known for his satirical works, including *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), *Puddn'head Wilson* (1894), and several of his short stories. It appears, however, that *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889)

was Twain's first, and only, foray into the realm of dystopian literature. While *The Prince and the Pauper* utilized a similar historical setting to satirize the economic inequality of Twain's time, it does not share the same dystopian characteristic as *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Twain's masterpiece *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* satirizes the racism in southern antebellum society. This novel was Twain's scathing indictment of slavery through the naïve first-person narrator, Huck Finn. Twain satirizes American society through Huck and Jim's attempt to free Jim from the bonds of slavery. Shelley Fishkin argues that readers should "understand the novel as a satire on the callousness of the South—and of the nation—to its black citizens" (xx). *Pudd'nhead Wilson* likewise critiqued the racial inequality of the antebellum South which allowed for individuals with minute traces of African American ancestry to be treated as inferior by their "pure" white counterparts.

Another example of Twain's satire can be witnessed in his posthumously published short story "The War Prayer" (1916). In this satirical story, a religious congregation prays for victory in battle by asking God to "watch over our noble young soldiers and aid, comfort, and encourage them in their patriotic work; bless them, shield them in the day of battle and the hour of peril, bear them in His mighty hand, make them strong and confident, invincible in the bloody onset; help them to crush the foe, grant to them and to their flag and country imperishable honor and glory" (Twain 580). A stranger claiming to be a messenger of God enters the church and tells the congregation about the bloody subtext of their prayer. The stranger puts the unstated nature of their prayer into the following words, "O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle—be Thou near them! With them, in spirit, we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe. O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their

patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of their guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain" (582). In "The War Prayer" Twain uses overstatement to analyze the subtext to a prayer which would otherwise seem innocuous. Twain's satire is completely realized when the townspeople do not comprehend the message of their visitor, as the narrator remarks, "It was believed afterward that the man was lunatic, because there was no sense in what he said" (583). Twain's story satirizes blind patriotism and religious hypocrisy, which are used as justification for war. Ron Powers suggests that "'The War Prayer,' taken in sum with Mark Twain's other polemic essays of the 1900s, forms the Rosetta Stone of dissent from American imperialist folly" (451). Powers views Twain's story as a rejection of the notion that "God is pro-war" (450). "The War Prayer" demonstrates Twain's consistent indictment of war which is also witnessed in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. The destructiveness of war was a constant concern for Twain and he became increasingly concerned with the potential for technological invention to be used for destruction rather than creation. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is unique in Twain's work for combining a satirical critique of his society with a dystopian nightmare scenario.

Unlike Twain, Kurt Vonnegut is well known for his dystopian novels and stories. Curiously enough, however, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) is not typically counted among Vonnegut's dystopian works. Vonnegut has become known for his propensity to create satirical dystopias. Jay McInerney, in *The New York Times Book Review*, described him as "a satirist with a heart, a moralist with a whoopee cushion" (1991). In fact, Vonnegut's first novel, *Player Piano* (1952), decries the dehumanization of an obsolete workforce which occurs due to the complete automation of society. Vonnegut's novels *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), *Cat's Cradle* (1963), and *Slapstick* (1976), as well as his short stories "Harrison Bergeron" (1961) and "Welcome to the

Monkey House" (1968), similarly detail the destructive potential of technological development in the modern age. Vonnegut's message throughout these works is consistent: machines make humans feel obsolete and lead to a society-wide inertia which precludes the possibility of purposeful action. This message is similar to Jacques Ellul's claims in *The Betrayal of Technology* (1992), in which he illustrates that while technology is believed to increase human freedom, in reality technology limits freedom and determines actions of individuals. Vonnegut's technological future is one devoid of meaningful relationships; it is a dystopian future of loneliness and isolation with little or no outlet for the need of social interaction. However, Vonnegut's dystopian world is not bleak, but reaffirms the value of human life and relationships, while acknowledging the hope for a better future which can be realized through self-directed action. Conrad Festa sums up Vonnegut's dystopian message: "Vonnegut's satires offer us hope, not despair—but not hope without action. They tell us simply that we are not necessarily bound to a determined future and that we are capable of making a better world if we have the will and the courage" (147).

In his futuristic novel *Slapstick*, Vonnegut discusses the tragedy of modern humanity in which extended families have become obsolete, leaving individuals increasingly isolated and lonely. Technological and scientific breakthroughs eventually lead to cataclysmic disease and destruction in a post-apocalyptic landscape which lays bare societal ills. *Cat's Cradle* likewise explores a post-apocalyptic scenario in which scientific invention makes the world virtually uninhabitable. In his essay, "Rescuing Science From Technology" (1986), Daniel Zins discusses *Cat's Cradle* as an attempt to "employ SF [science fiction] to help us to stop and think about our most important problem, and the one we seem to have the most difficulty confronting: the increasing possibility of our destroying the world by our own stupidity and our deification of

science and technology" (68). Vonnegut criticizes scientific discovery unaccompanied by moral considerations and illustrates the necessity for morality in technological development, which is generally thought to be pure and unencumbered by such abstract, unstable concepts. *Cat's Cradle* also satirizes scientific discovery purely for the sake of discovery; Vonnegut shows that even if inventors of the atomic bomb, for instance, had no intention of using their invention for evil purposes, it still takes on a life of its own and cannot be unmade after it is created.

Nevertheless, in critical studies, so far, there has been a significant amount of disagreement concerning Hank Morgan and Billy Pilgrim. Are the protagonists heroic representatives of Twain's and Vonnegut's philosophies and world view? Or did the authors craft their protagonists as satirical figures to be subjected to ridicule for their inadequacy? This thesis attempts to demonstrate that a critical discussion of these protagonists is incomplete without analyzing them as anti-heroes within the context of dystopian literature[1]. By all appearances Twain and Vonnegut crafted dystopian settings in an effort to satirize their own society through the experiences of their protagonists. This thesis then addresses the following questions: How are Twain and Vonnegut's satirical dystopias similar and/or different? Are the authors satirizing the same aspects of American culture and society? Finally, is the message of these novels still relevant to American society, or have the novels become dated and peripheral to modern societal concerns?

[1] For the first scholarly attempt to describe dystopian literature, see J. Max Patrick's *The Quest for Utopia* (1952), in which he advocates for a clear delineation between utopian and dystopian inclinations in fiction.

Chapter Two

Competing Perspectives of Hank Morgan and Billy Pilgrim

We might as well have been throwing cream pies.

Kurt Vonnegut, *Armageddon in Retrospect* 1

In the scholarly criticism of *Slaughterhouse-Five* there is a serious divide concerning the interpretation of Billy Pilgrim's character. Many critics have asserted that Kurt Vonnegut wrote Billy as a satirical character who is to be ridiculed for his extreme passivity. On the other hand, several critics have claimed that Billy Pilgrim is a heroic figure for being able to survive in a chaotic world over which he has no control. Still others have argued that Billy Pilgrim is a representation of Vonnegut's own black humor and hopelessness. John Somer, author of "Geodesic Vonnegut: Or, if Buckminster Fuller Wrote Novels" (1973), claims that Billy Pilgrim is a hero who should be admired as a survivor of a catastrophe; he goes so far as to label Pilgrim a "transcendent hero" (251). "[A]fter a tortuous journey through six novels," writes Somer, "Vonnegut has finally created a hero who can survive with dignity in an insane world" (230). In this sense, it is the Tralfamadorian world view which allowed Billy to survive the Armageddon aftermath of Dresden. According to Somer, it is necessary for modern man to model his behavior based on the actions of Pilgrim if we expect to survive in this seemingly meaningless, predetermined universe.

Somer urges readers to regard Billy Pilgrim as an extension of Vonnegut, who "needs his optometrist, Billy Pilgrim, to help the reader see a deep, surprising, and beautiful image of life" (243). In this reading, Somer makes it clear that Vonnegut and Billy are one and the same, united through their experiences in the war and their desire to look at only the beauty of life. Somer continues, "It shows that the narrator and Billy are united in some spiritual way" (248). Somer's reading affirms Billy Pilgrim's role as Vonnegut's messenger.

Steven Weisenburger, in his book, *Fables of Subversion* (1995), interprets Vonnegut's message similarly to John Somer. Weisenburger interprets Vonnegut's message as essentially fatalistic in suggesting that there is no possible hope for individual action. Weisenburger writes that "He [Billy] lives in utter resignation before the glacial shiftings of Time's inevitable becoming. Most of all, to him (as, apparently, to Vonnegut) *wars* are like glaciers" (175). In this interpretation Billy Pilgrim is used by Vonnegut as a microphone to transmit his fatalistic message of the hopelessness of individual action. Essentially, Weisenburger thinks that it is impossible to separate Vonnegut from Billy Pilgrim. Weisenburger continues, "Time is a sick joke. The totalizing view therefore commits one to inertia" (175). This view of *Slaughterhouse-Five* places the novel in the tradition of Black Humor and assumes that Vonnegut was merely using gallows humor in order to laugh at tragedy rather than suggesting any definite course of action.

Weisenburger laments that Vonnegut does not provide readers with any suggestions for how to break free from the deterministic inertia of modern life. The only cure to such powerlessness is to try to enjoy what is pleasant and humorous in life. Weisenburger complains that in *Slaughterhouse-Five*

> There is no plan for reform here, no useful purpose to which the communal power of empathy can be put, hence nothing to offer the "sick" people Vonnegut describes as too captivated by their own powerlessness against institutional violence. Vonnegut's message is to exercise free will and put your own guns in the closet, "don't look at them," hope others do the same, and then like the Tralfamadorian toilet-plunger-men you too can "spend eternity looking at pleasant moments." (178)

Weisenburger argues that Vonnegut has completely bought into the Tralfamadorian philosophy. In this interpretation, Vonnegut is not writing an optimistic anti-war novel but suggesting that modern humans give in to the unalterable circumstances which govern life and merely appreciate the pleasant moments and laugh while laughter is still possible.

Charles B. Harris seems to agree with the label of Black Humor which has been affixed to *Slaughterhouse-Five.* He refers to the novel as "absurdist fiction" (139) in his essay "Illusion and Absurdity: The Novels of Kurt Vonnegut" (1971). While Harris never fully defines what he means by "absurdist fiction," it seems to share several characteristics which are also found in the gallows humor described by Weisenburger. Harris writes,

> The detached tone of Vonnegut's novels is the primary device by which he suggests the hopelessness of the human condition and the resignation he feels is necessary to that hopelessness. As Vonnegut's absurdist vision intensifies with each successive novel, the tone of those novels becomes increasingly "distant." Such "distance" does not suggest "an elaborate novelistic impasse to feeling and judgment," as one critic has maintained. Rather, it indicates Vonnegut's growing resignation to the futility of caring as a viable response in an absurd world. His use of tone constitutes an important part of Vonnegut's absurdist method. (139)

This interpretation proposes that Vonnegut has thrown up his hands and given up on the world and merely wishes to make dark jokes at the expense of humanity's hopelessness.

Harris advocates that "[t]he main idea emerging from *Slaughterhouse-Five* seems to be that the proper response to life is one of resigned acceptance" (137). Billy is described merely as a mirror-image of Vonnegut as they have both learned to drift through a life which they cannot control. In fact, Harris cautions readers against trying to separate Vonnegut's message from that

which Billy learned on Tralfamadore, “Such bland acceptance of ‘things as they are’ seems strange in a Vonnegut novel,” writes Harris. “Initially, one suspects the novel ridicules rather than recommends such passivity. Yet little in the novel supports this contention” (138). Harris warns against reading Billy Pilgrim as a satirical figure which Vonnegut is holding up to criticism because he feels that Vonnegut does not clearly admonish Billy’s philosophical stance and instead seems to treat Billy with the utmost sympathy.

There are, however, several critics who argue that Vonnegut is not advocating Billy Pilgrim’s fatalistic attitude but instead satirizing his philosophy and highlighting not only its ridiculousness but also the potential harm to which this philosophy can lead. Conrad Festa argued this position in his essay “Vonnegut’s Satire” (1977). Festa argues that Vonnegut does not advocate the Tralfamadorian philosophy which repeats the phrase “So it goes” to shrug off any form of death, from the death of dead batteries to the annihilation of entire cities and even worlds. Festa insists that Vonnegut’s phrase “So it goes,”

> At first strikes us as resignation born out of experience, and it is sometimes even humorous. But the frequency of its repetition and its use to explain every death from that of a bottle of champagne to that of Martin Luther King finally creates in us a rising fury at its utter banality and meaninglessness. We feel increasingly that it explains nothing, and in fact obscures the difference between the death of a bottle of champagne and the death of Martin Luther King. By the end of the book we feel the urge to rise up in impatience and cry, ‘that isn’t the way it is!’ And we want to move beyond the feeble shrug and make those moral distinctions a clear reality. (144-45)

Festa interprets Vonnegut's message as one of moral outrage and a call to action rather than resigned passivity. The fact that Billy Pilgrim makes no distinction between the death of a bottle of champagne and the massacre of thousands in Dresden illustrates the absurdity of Tralfamadorian philosophy.

Festa claims that Vonnegut's works all share the characteristics of Menippean satire, which he describes as "an extensive use of irony for satirical effects, of a mixture of forms, of a complexity of form, and of a sense of moral outrage" (147). Festa describes Vonnegut as having a feeling of moral outrage which would be incompatible with the suggestion that Vonnegut advocates the fatalistic Tralfamadorian philosophy. In Festa's terms:

> Vonnegut focuses our attention on evils in our society which make life unnecessarily painful, dangerous, and destructive—evils which, for the most part, can be corrected if only we would avoid our greatest folly: our tendency to escape unpleasant, threatening reality which demands corrective action, either by slipping into private dream worlds or by pretending that nothing can be done about it anyway. (147)

While Festa argues that Vonnegut's satire is developed form a feeling of "moral outrage," it still provides a sense of hope or regeneration. "Vonnegut's satires offer us hope, not despair—but not hope without action," Festa writes. "They tell us simply that we are not necessarily bound to a determined future and that we are capable of making a better world if we have the will and the courage" (147). Festa argues that Vonnegut's world view directly contradicts that of the Tralfamadorians and Billy Pilgrim; while Billy suggests that change is impossible as we are trapped in the amber of every moment, Vonnegut counters that while change may seem impossible, there is always hope.

John Tilton, in his book *Cosmic Satire in the Contemporary Novel* (1977), agrees with Festa in positing that Vonnegut's intention in *Slaughterhouse-Five* was to satirize the fatalistic Tralfamadorian philosophy. However, while Vonnegut may not share Billy's philosophy, Tilton suggests that Vonnegut sympathizes with Billy's need to fantasize: "Vonnegut's compassion for Billy Pilgrim's desperate need of 'a beatific vision' is not to be mistaken for approval of that vision and its consequences" (Tilton 70). By writing a novel of this nature, Vonnegut refuses to give up on humanity even after living through human nature at its blackest, most destructive. While Vonnegut is sympathetic to this desire to only look at the brighter side of life, it is impossible for him to turn away from this moment in his life. According to Tilton, "Vonnegut is writing a novel that rejects the Tralfamadorian philosophy while Billy is actively disseminating that philosophy" (73). Tilton theorizes that Vonnegut's world view is not to be confused with that of the Tralfamadorians, which is actually being held up for ridicule.

Like Festa, Tilton also points out the satirical effect of the phrase "So it goes." Tilton suggests that the repetition of such a phrase makes it increasingly absurd and subject to ridicule. "One can hardly conceive of an apter phrase to encapsulate the Tralfamadorian indifference to death," writes Tilton, "Properly alerted to the significance of its constant reiteration, readers can hardly fail to miss Vonnegut's intensely satirical denunciation of that attitude toward death" (91). Tilton points to the repetition of this phrase as a satirical device to highlight its inaccuracy, or even harmfulness.

Tilton also describes Vonnegut as an optimist and makes his opinion clear that Vonnegut is not an advocate of Tralfamadorian philosophy.

> The satirist that I have earlier shown at work is the satirist self or voice of this persona of Vonnegut, the skeptical, subtly critical, and admirably skilled satirist

> who in unobtrusive ways exposes and ridicules the deficiencies and absurdities of Billy Pilgrim's Tralfamadorianism, attacking the deterministic nihilism that his responsible moral character finds deplorable. He is a moderately optimistic realist and humanist, determined to fight to preserve the humane values he represents; his sober awareness of the possibility of failure will not deter him from trying to counter a philosophy that would reduce man to a machine. (96-97)

This description of Vonnegut's satire mirrors that of Festa and describes Vonnegut as an optimist who is not willing to give up on humanity in order to live insulated inside his own fantasy world. They both insist that Vonnegut is not a messenger for Billy's philosophy and not only remains skeptical of that message but actively fights against it with his own satirical voice.

Lawrence Broer, in his book *Sanity Plea* (1989), similarly interprets the Tralfamadorian philosophy as a fatalistic cage which prevents any meaningful action. Broer warns that while their philosophy initially seems comforting, over time the insidious effects of such thoughts become apparent. Broer remarks that "[t]he consolations of Tralfamadorian fatalism are hideously booby trapped—leading to a form of moral paralysis which precludes action" (95). Broer asserts that the possibility to act is a significant part of an individual's humanity, and by rejecting Tralfamadorian philosophies of predetermination, Vonnegut is affirming humanity's responsibility of free will. "Billy in his tranquilized existence becomes the very embodiment of what Vonnegut had warned against for years," writes Broer. "Insulated from pain, Billy has simply abdicated his humanity, trading his dignity and self-integrity for an illusion of comfort and security, and becoming himself a machine" (95). Broer affirms the notion that humanity is coupled with a certain level of responsibility for one's own actions; he argues that Billy has

essentially forfeited his place in humanity in order to stay insulated from any pain or responsibility for meaningful action.

Broer goes on to discuss Tralfamadorians as a metaphor for modern humans and the inertia created through technological innovation. According to Broer, "Vonnegut knows the Tralfamadorians are merely ourselves—an appropriate symbol for the mechanistic insanity of our own planet, an extension into the future of our own warlike globe. He knows too that with sufficient imagination and heart, we can, like Salo in *Sirens of Titan*, dismantle our own self-imprisoning machinery and become whatever we choose to become" (96). Broer views *Slaughterhouse-Five* as an optimistic novel which rejects technological determinism; Broer insists that if this world has been constructed by human minds and hands, it can be unmade in the same fashion. Broer asserts that Vonnegut's message is one of hope—but this hope must be accompanied by meaningful action in order to avert a technological catastrophe of humanity's own design.

Just as there has been significant disagreement about the meaning of Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and the role of the hero Billy Pilgrim, there has likewise been a wide divergence of interpretation concerning Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. A significant point of contention between critics is whether Twain intended for his protagonist Hank Morgan to be an admirable hero for the audience to emulate, or if he is instead a satirical figure whom Twain used to critique American society. In a 1943 article titled "Mark Twain—The Licensed Jester," George Orwell described Twain essentially as a clown who was unwilling or unable to critique American society. Orwell criticized Twain for not openly attacking the issues which Orwell felt were wrong with society while referring to him as a

"licensed jester" (208). Orwell did not view Twain as a serious writer and felt he was unable to make any significant or thought-provoking social commentary.

When writing about *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Orwell was frustrated that Twain did not attack prevailing American sensibilities but instead stayed in step with the popular attitude of the day. Orwell was convinced that "Mark Twain, except perhaps in one short essay 'What is Man?', never attacks established beliefs in a way that is likely to get him in trouble. Nor could he ever wean himself from the notion, which is perhaps especially an American notion, that success and virtue are the same things" (208). Orwell viewed Hank Morgan as a typical American character who becomes successful through his own ingenuity and resourcefulness. In Orwell's view, Hank Morgan is the ultimate American who with ingenuity and hard work is able to pull himself up by his boot straps. Orwell also traced Twain's admiration of the victor to his days as a soldier during the Civil War. "It is also clear enough, however, that he (Twain) changed sides because he saw that the North was going to win," commented Orwell, "and this tendency to side with the stronger whenever possible, to believe that might *must* be right, is apparent throughout his career" (208). Orwell suggested that Twain was essentially an opportunist who was afraid of taking a moral stand which was unpopular because he did not want to alienate those in power. It followed that Twain crafted Hank Morgan as an heroic character because Morgan is able to use his superior intellect and ingenuity to squash any opposition to his world view.

Orwell heaped a significant amount of scorn on Twain's career and took particular exception with what he views as vulgarity in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Orwell consistently lamented what he sees as Twain's clownishness and fear to shake up the established order of American values and beliefs:

> He squandered his time on buffooneries, not merely lecture tours and public banquets, but, for instance, the writing of a book like *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, which is a deliberate flattery of all that is worst and most vulgar in American life. The man who might have been a kind of rustic Voltaire became the world's leading after-dinner speaker, charming alike for his anecdotes and his power to make businessmen feel themselves public benefactors. (209)

Orwell regretted that Twain did not have the courage of a satirist such as Voltaire in order to critique his own society. Instead, Orwell saw Hank Morgan as praise for the American entrepreneurial spirit of the era.

Henry Nash Smith, in his book *Mark Twain's Fable of Progress* (1964), likewise agreed with Orwell's assessment of Hank Morgan as a heroic figure with whom Twain closely aligned himself. Unlike Orwell, however, Smith did not heap scorn on Twain's representation of American ingenuity but praised Twain's representation of the entrepreneurial spirit which is able to bring about progress through technological inventiveness. According to Smith,

> Mark Twain chooses to identify himself with the businessman. Hank Morgan is an engineer and an executive who undertakes the task of bringing about an industrial revolution in Arthur's kingdom. Ostensibly this program has Mark Twain's complete approval: the Yankee is the standard-bearer of progress, determined to overthrow feudal tyranny and to bring such decencies as food, clothing, shelter, and education to the impoverished and exploited common people of Britain. (37)

Smith describes Hank Morgan as a humanitarian who will bring progress through technological advancement which will also break the spiritual, philosophical, and physical oppression of

Medieval England. Smith also describes Morgan as a superhero with god-like powers who is capable of freeing the masses from their slavery through the innovation of free enterprise. Smith posited that Morgan's "plan of industrializing Arthur's Britain resembles Prometheus' defiance of the tyrannical gods for the sake of bringing to man the priceless gift of intellectual light and technological power. *A Connecticut Yankee* is thus not a mere tall tale but a philosophical fable which sets forth a theory of capitalism and an interpretation of the historical process that has brought it into being" (39). Smith characterizes Morgan's introduction of capitalism and scientific inventiveness as a curative to superstition and brutality—Morgan is the mighty hero who is able to selflessly introduce these innovations to make the world a better place.

Smith comments that, in the end, Morgan's innovations are all oppressed by the church which refuses to accept the superior capitalist and technological advancements which Morgan has encouraged. Any progress Morgan has made is erased and Arthur's kingdom has reverted to even more extreme levels of repression. Smith asserts that

> [t]he Yankee's disillusionment is remarkably bitter. When he learns that the Interdict has, as he says, shriveled the common people of Britain into sheep, he exclaims: "Imagine such human muck as this; conceive of this folly!" The crusade against tyranny, the great project for conferring enlightenment, freedom, and comfort on the nation by means of an industrial revolution, has ended in failure and despair. Mark Twain's charming dream of himself in armor has revealed deeper and deeper levels of meaning. It has exfoliated into a long book: and has become at the end a nightmare. (66)

Smith believed that Morgan's dream of creating a technologically advanced nation had been squashed by forces which refuse to accept such progress. According to Smith, the nightmare of

Twain's world is that scientific rational thought will always be overcome by superstitious, backward thinkers, and technological progress is a threat and those with advanced capacity for thought are persecuted by the inferior masses.

James D. Williams, author of "Revision and Intention in Mark Twin's *A Connecticut Yankee*" (1964), agrees with Smith's assessment that Mark Twain aligned himself closely to Hank Morgan and intended Morgan to be a champion of industrialization and modern inventiveness. Williams rejects the idea that Twain may have been satirizing 1880s America and maintained that Twain's only satirical touch was to criticize the customs and culture of Medieval England. Williams scoffs at the notion that Twain may have been using his novel as a means of satirizing 1880's America and warns against any attempt of doing so. Williams maintains that

> It is difficult, therefore, to accept a recent writer's assertion that "most critics now agree that *A Connecticut Yankee* was written to point up the injustices both of Victoria's England and of Mark Twain's America." If such agreement exists, it is based on the understanding that what is apparently peripheral in the novel reflects the author's central intention. To classify the *Yankee* as an "inverted satire" is both to misread it and to damn it. In the context of Mark Twain's inveterate antimedievalism, we cannot infer a single initial intention from the series of burlesque "contrasts" which he rarely used but continued to plan almost until the *Yankee* was completed. (290)

Williams clearly feels that Twain's intention was solely to critique medieval Britain and that any attempt to view Twain's novel as a satire of 1880s America would do a disservice to the novel.

Williams goes so far as to discredit Twain's own interpretation of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*: "It could not have supported his [Twain's] contention that the novel

satirized by indirection the 'shams, laws, and customs of today.' Moreover, he made this claim only briefly and at a time when his animosity toward England was being freely vented in his notebook entries, letters, and interviews, which apparently afforded him the same sort of relief as his 'unmailed letters'" (2-3). Williams views Twain's assertion that his intent was to satirize 1880s America as a mere passing fancy which can be rejected out of hand. Because Twain was able to vent his scorn toward England in a different forum, Williams viewed his comments as an afterthought to his ultimate purpose of writing *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

Lydia Cooper, on the other hand, remains convinced that Twain was also using his critical satire as a critique of 1880s America. In her essay "Human Voices: Language and Consceince in Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court"* (2009), Cooper claims that Twain was expressing a certain disgust with humanity which is unchanging throughout time. According to Cooper, "*A Connecticut Yankee* is not a novel of linear progression, either internal or external, but rather a dramatic exploration of an essential humanity consistent throughout history and place. The novel fuses time, place, and ultimately, language in order to demonstrate the consistency of human nature" (5-6). Cooper insists that although Hank Morgan initially creates vivid distinctions between medieval England and his own time, by the end of the novel these distinctions have become obsolete as the two cultures are revealed in their similarity. In this way, Cooper claims that Twain insisted on the unchanging nature of humanity, with its capacity for violence and malice.

When analyzing Hank Morgan's character, Cooper is reluctant to classify him as purely heroic or villainous. Cooper recognizes an ambiguity in Morgan's character which defies any form of straight-forward classification. Cooper writes, "Part of the difficulty in assigning Hank to either heroism or anti-heroism is that his narrative seems to waver between humane anti-

imperialist rhetoric and violent imperialism, both implicit and explicit" (8-9). In this analysis Morgan cannot be pigeonholed into any simple classification because of his complexity. Cooper continues by suggesting, "Perhaps Hank is both hero and villain, an embodiment of the human capacity for both malice and mercy, a man who both conquers and is conquered" (9). According to Cooper, Twain claimed that human behavior is constant over time and the only changes that occur are technological advancements which change the scale of violence, not the intent.

Ruben Sanchez agrees with Cooper's assertion that one of Twain's central aims was to satirize the self-destructive tendency of humanity. In his 2006 article, "Mark Twain, Hank Morgan, and Menippean Satire in *A Connecticut Yankee*," Sanchez focuses more on Twain's message to contemporary readers. Sanchez regards *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* as an example of Menippean satire in which Twain is warning humanity against technological development which can lead to devastating advancements in weaponry. Sanchez describes Twain's satire as "the means by which to engage the literary world by offering it, not confession, but a cautionary tale both immediate and timeless" (39). In this sense, Sanchez assumes that Twain was warning against the evils which can accompany technological innovation when such development is unaccompanied by moral considerations.

Sanchez rejects the notion that Twain did not have his attention trained on his own time. Sanchez insists that the technological innovations developed by Morgan cannot be ignored because it speaks more to the violence of modern warfare than that of medieval England. Sanchez cites the concluding scenes of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* as proof of Twain's concern with modern militarism: "Twain's description of The Battle of the Sand Belt is intended to tell us something about militarism and imperialism in nineteenth-century America and to tell us something about ourselves" (38). Sanchez goes on by writing that "Twain was a

writer committed to his own time, a time to which he responded, in this case as a writer of satire" (38). Sanchez asserts that Twain was a persistent critic of his own time and that *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* continues in that same literary tradition.

In her 2007 article, "Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and U.S. Imperialism," Jennifer O'Neill also cautioned against reading Hank Morgan's character as a heroic symbol of progress and inventiveness. O'Neill recognizes that while Twain is critiquing the power of the church and monarchy in medieval England, "it can be argued that Twain's *Yankee* aims to speak out against a third power structure, imperialism, depicted by Hank Morgan's cultural and technological infiltration of sixth-century England" (1). O'Neill analyzes the satirical critique in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* as a three-pronged attack which includes an indictment of nineteenth-century American imperialism. In her essay, O'Neill sketches the development of Twain's distaste of cultural and technological imperialist efforts in Hawaii. O'Neill recognizes that while Twain was initially supportive of imperial expansion in Hawaii, by the time he wrote *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court,* Twain had changed his mind and become an outspoken opponent of U.S. expansionist efforts. O'Neill argues that Hank Morgan's attempts to advance medieval England symbolize the destructiveness of American militarism in imperialist conflicts.

Like Sanchez, O'Neill points to the concluding chapters of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* as evidence that Twain was satirizing his own society. "In the conclusion of the novel, the Battle of the Sand-Belt reinforces the argument that Twain sought to critique more than just the Church and Monarchy," theorizes O'Neill. "[T]he final chapters speak of a power just as hideous, and equally capable of bringing darkness upon humanity" (7). In this interpretation, Morgan's "innovations" are just as harmful as the church and monarchy which

they were intended to replace. O'Neill goes on to suggest that the English knights should be considered heroes as they were willing to resist the highly technologically advanced force of Hank Morgan. In explaining this heroic resistance, O'Neill explains that "[T]he Battle of the Sand-Belt, through Morgan's use of his highly touted technological developments, destroys most of the English population, all because of their daring resistance to his incessant demands for progress" (7). O'Neill makes it clear that she feels Morgan is a character that Twain intended as a warning against destructive technological imperialism, not the symbol of progress and innovation which other critics have asserted.

While O'Neill views "The Battle of the Sand-Belt" as an indictment of the uses of technological imperialism, she suggests that Twain did not take an exception to the advancement of technology itself. According to O'Neill:

> While some may insist the closing chapters merely present a critique of technology—for indeed, Twain did have many concerns dealing with the new industrial age—we have to consider other implications. Since some of Twain's most heartfelt endeavors involved the advancement of technology, it would not make sense for him to level such a stark criticism against industrialization in and of itself. His concern seems to lie in the forceful implementation of technology, capitalism, and other US—American ideals on a people who had not come to value them on their own terms. (7)

O'Neill maintains that any study which analyzes Twain's critique of technological advancement without considering the implications of U.S. imperialism is incomplete. In essence, O'Neill insists that any discussion which describes Twain's intent as merely a critique of technological

advancement is too simplistic and disregards biographical evidence from Twain's life as "some of Twain's most heartfelt endeavors involved the advancement of technology" (7).

In his 2010 analysis of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Bennett Kravitz agrees with O'Neill that Hank Morgan's character is not a symbol of American progress but instead a warning against America's thirst for world power. Kravitz claims that, "Twain, as it were, exposes the dark side of the American Dream by creating, in Hank Morgan, a Yankee embodying the features of Nietzschean heroism" (4). Kravitz posits that Twain is satirizing the typical rags-to-riches American story while highlighting societal and self-destructive effect that such a story can have. Kravitz draws parallels between Nietzsche's desire to create supermen and Hank Morgan's desire to become "The Boss." Kravitz proposes that Morgan's lust for power leads to the destruction of a society which is not ready for his technological and societal advancements. "He [Hank] simply cannot impose the gains of thirteen hundred years of civilization on the Arthurian world without disastrous effects," explains Kravitz (13); imposing technological advancements on a society which is not ready or willing to except such advancements only leads to destruction and bloodshed. Kravitz views Morgan's failed quest for power as an indictment of American imperialism and claims that "Twain's text insists that absolute power is unsafe in any hands, whatever one's strategy or motive for social amelioration" (14). According to Kravitz, Hank Morgan represents Mark Twain's warning about the possibly disastrous effects of U.S. imperialism and exercise of superior technological power in less technologically advanced societies.

Kravitz goes on to explain that Morgan's attempt to create a technological utopian paradise in Camelot soon degenerates into a nightmare society which becomes more barbaric and destructive than it had been previously. Kravitz highlights that even Morgan's admirable goal of

educating the population becomes something much more insidious as Morgan begins to describe his schools as factories. Kravitz argues that Morgan's "terminology reveals his coarser and darker nature. The idea of a factory implies for Hank, as well as for the reader, some type of mass production. Machines, not thinking creative people, are the end products of factories" (21). In this sense, Morgan's education factories are merely brainwashing facilities for indoctrinating the population with Morgan's ideals rather than a setting to encourage free thought; Morgan's inventions and innovations, which were intended to bring increased freedom to the world, end up enslaving the population under a new power and in the end create cataclysmic destruction never before witnessed.

The overall thrust of the debate concerning Billy Pilgrim and Hank Morgan is whether they are heroic figures or satirical criticism of society. This presents the reader with two distinct ways to analyze the character but creates a problem in determining the validity of these widely divergent readings. While it appears that most recent analyses of Hank Morgan and Billy Pilgrim have examined them as satirical characters, the debate does not appear to have ended. By suggesting a new reading of these novels, it may be possible to shed new light on the debate.

Chapter Three

A New Reading of Hank Morgan and Billy Pilgrim

He didn't look like a soldier at all. He looked like a filthy flamingo.

Slaughterhouse-Five 42

A review of the critical literature concerning *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* reveals that there is a wide divergence of opinion about the meaning of these two novels. The main disagreement centers on whether Twain and Vonnegut are using satire to critique the actions and philosophy of their protagonists or if the authors are advocating that society embrace the values represented by Hank Morgan and Billy Pilgrim. Critics have described Twain and Vonnegut's novels as black humor, absurdist, clownish, cynical, entrepreneurial, and hopeful. But the most accurate critical reading of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* regards the novels as works of satire. While this is an appropriate reading of both novels, it only tells part of the story. Both novels are indeed satirical, but critics have not recognized these novels for what they truly are—works of dystopian fiction.

Dystopian works aim to warn society against oppressive/totalitarian governments and systems of thought which aim to dehumanize the society by perverting or distorting utopian promises. While dystopian authors present us with "the worst of all possible worlds" (Gottlieb 3), it is the implied message that society can prevent such a world, which leads to optimism for the future. While Erika Gottlieb assumes that the writing of dystopian fiction is an optimistic exercise, in his book *Critical Synoptics* (2000), Carter Kaplan describes dystopian fiction as pessimistic and humorless, "Except in rare instances, literary dystopia is not funny. The mood of dystopia is usually dark, pessimistic, and often reflects paranoia, alarm, or hysteria" (147). For this reason, Kaplan argues that although satire and dystopian literature are closely related, and

occasionally overlap, they are two distinct literary forms. Kaplan states that there are two criteria used to distinguish satirical works from those which are dystopian. First, satirical works are intended to be humorous and often have an optimistic message, whereas dystopian novels are dark and pessimistic. Second, Kaplan argues that the time frame of satirical novels concerns contemporary issues, whereas dystopian works forecast the world of the future. Kaplan summarizes this distinction as a rule to distinguish between the two literary genres, "A simple test for distinguishing dystopia from satire might be as follows: If the work describes how bad things are, you have a satire on your hands. If the work describes how bad things could be, you are tangling with a dystopia" (148).

Kaplan does, however, maintain that dystopian literature sprang from the satirical tradition-"notwithstanding the prophetic element, the roots of dystopia are found it Menippean satire and its diagnoses of euphemism and intellectual mythology" (148). But Kaplan insists that dystopian authors' preoccupation with the future eliminates them from consideration as satirical works. However, Kaplan does recognize that there is a considerable amount of overlap between the two genres as "both forms are concerned with intellectual mythology, which they critique by exploring the interrelationships that exist among ignorance, intolerance, conflict, brutality, euphemism, passivity, scientism, and various modern orthodoxies" (147). It is this critique of brutality, passivity, and scientism which is perhaps most central to this argument as those are societal characteristics attacked by both Vonnegut and Twain. But ultimately Kaplan feels that satire and dystopia cannot be unified because of the differing temporal preoccupation which is inherently different between the two genres.

Erika Gottlieb, however, feels no need to keep satire separate from dystopian fiction. Gottlieb often refers to dystopian novels as "dystopian satire" (5), and maintains that dystopian

works are often characterized by their "political satire" (7). Furthermore, unlike Kaplan, Gottlieb does not believe that dystopian literature deals exclusively with the future. Gottlieb recognizes that many critics regard dystopian literature as a novelistic forecast of the future, but she insists that "[i]f we listen to postmodern criticism, relying on thinkers like Foucault, for example, any society functioning at the present time (or possibly at any other time as well) could be regarded as such a 'bad place'" (5). Gottlieb rejects the notion that dystopian worlds can only be the realm of the future and can be set in the present, or even the past, for that matter. Gottlieb continues, "There are historical phenomena that create societies that should be described as dystopic, societies where the literary imagination refuses to envisage a world worse than the existing world of reality" (5). Thus, Gottlieb does not hold the notion that dystopian novels can only concern themselves with the future of society, but argues they can also be a product of current societal repression or horrific events.

As with Gottlieb, neither John Clark, author of *The Modern Satiric Grotesque* (1991), nor M. Keith Booker, author of *Dystopian Literature* (1994), characterizes satire and dystopian literature as mutually exclusive forms of writing. In his book, Clark muses about the future of satirical writing and sees future satirical efforts being funneled through the lens of dystopian worlds. Clark seems to eagerly anticipate the marriage of satirical and dystopian literature when he writes, "Once again, the satirist will step in to humble us; he will create mock science fictions and ruptured utopias, showing us how, in the future, mechanisms will have fully dehumanized us and letting us know that subsequent generations will become the slaves and victims of metallic and mathematical monsters" (140). Clark suggests that the combination of satirical and dystopian literary themes is not only possible but inevitable for these two forms of writing. Clark, however,

does seem to agree with Kaplan's assertion that in order for a novel to be classified as dystopian, it must take place in the future.

Booker holds a very similar view to Clark in that he believes dystopian fiction is a critique of the author's contemporary era. In this way, Booker views dystopian works as satirical critiques of existing society which are disguised by futuristic settings. Booker maintains that "dystopian literature generally constitutes a critique of existing social conditions or political systems, either through the critical examination of the utopian premises upon which those conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions" (3). Booker illustrates how dystopian fiction is merely a tool to reveal the worst aspects of modern life and amplify them so that they do not appear to be the natural order of life. Booker makes a clear warning against lumping novels into the dystopian genre which are purely satirical and, therefore, do not include the typical dystopian conventions. Booker distinguishes between works that are merely satirical and those which are also dystopian because he "considers the principle literary strategy of dystopian literature to be defamiliarization: by focusing their critiques of society on imaginatively distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural or inevitable" (4). While Booker insists that in order for a novel to be considered dystopian it must take place in a distant setting, he does not claim that the setting has to be futuristic. But Booker does maintain that a certain amount of social distance, "defamiliarization," is necessary, otherwise such a novel would be purely satirical.

With the exception of Gottlieb, most critics seem to agree that in order for a novel to be considered dystopian fiction, it must involve a certain amount of social distance from the

author's present era. Kaplan and Clark maintain that this social distance must be applied by projecting social concerns into the future in order to amplify them. But Booker's notion of "defamiliarization" from modern society is much more apt for this discussion. In order to critique 1880s America, for example, Mark Twain chose not to imagine a dystopian society of the future but instead illustrated the disastrous impact of advanced technological development by imagining the industrial revolution set in medieval England. In this way, Twain was able to warn readers of the destructive nature of modern technology by providing a social distance from the problem. Kurt Vonnegut, meanwhile, followed a more traditional dystopian pattern when he created the planet of Tralfamadore which is essentially the planet Earth projected into the future. The Tralfamadorians are an extension of Vonnegut's society who have resigned themselves to an extreme form of passivity in the face of technological determinism, to the point where they are unwilling to prevent the complete annihilation of the world, even though it is quite within their power to do so, if only they would take action.

A further point of contention between Kaplan and Gottlieb seems to be whether dystopian fiction is an exercise in pessimistic grumbling about the fate of the world or if it is an optimistic call for action in order to prevent the feared dystopian conclusions of the novel. Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* seems to confirm Kaplan's notion that dystopian fiction is a pessimistic genre. The pessimistic nature of Twain's *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* distinguishes it substantially from most other dystopian literature. When Twain wrote this novel, he had become increasingly pessimistic about technology due to his experiences investing a significant amount of his money in the Paige typesetting machine. While Harriet Elinor Smith does not provide an exact figure of how much Twain lost in the venture, his losses were certainly substantial. Smith informs us, in her introduction to *The Autobiography of*

Mark Twain (2010), that "[b]y the fall of 1890, Clemens had been investing money in the typesetting machine invented by James W. Paige for almost ten years. It was, however, still not complete" (12). It was in part, perhaps, this failed venture which caused Twain to become disillusioned with technology and entrepreneurship which he attacks in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

Vonnegut himself even wrote about Twain's novel. In a 1996 essay, "Some Comments on Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*," Vonnegut goes so far as suggesting that Twain's failure in business led to a pessimism about the fate of the entire human race: "This book had already forced him to the conclusion, when he was a mere spring chicken of fifty-three, that the human condition was hopeless, no matter what the century" (433). According to Vonnegut Twain is not so much warning society of a grisly future, but instead feels he is documenting the horrors of the present. Vonnegut goes on to write:

> How pessimistic was he, even without having seen World Wars I and II, and all the high-tech atrocities which followed, and which follow still? He didn't even think highly of peacetime. When he was seventy-four, and he had only one more year of life to go, and a beloved daughter and his closest male friend had just died, he wrote as follows: "I have never wanted any released friend of mine restored to life since I reached manhood." (433-34)

Vonnegut quotes this passage from Twain's essay "The Death of Jean" (1909) concerning the death of his youngest daughter. It is clear from reading Twain's comments on death that by the time he wrote *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* he had lost any optimism which he felt for the world. Even death becomes viewed as a welcome release from the drudgery of life. This is where Twain's work departs from other dystopian works of literature; while he is

warning his audience of their misplaced faith in technology, he has become increasingly pessimistic, to the point where he sees no hope for change. This pessimism is a far cry from Vonnegut's optimism in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Unlike Twain, Vonnegut is writing in the dystopian vein in order to provide a sense of optimism or hope for the future. As Conrad Festa argues, "Vonnegut's satires offer us hope, not despair—but not hope without action. They tell us simply that we are not necessarily bound to a determined future and that we are capable of making a better world if we have the will and the courage" (147). Vonnegut is trying to shake his audience into rejecting the fatalism spouted by Billy Pilgrim and to take action against the mentality that there is no hope for meaningful action in such a technologically determined world. While Vonnegut sees hope in the future, he makes it clear that the hopeful promise of the future can only be fulfilled if society is willing to take action against a desire for passive acceptance of what seems outside of human control.

Erika Gottlieb goes on to suggest that dystopian fiction is a "strategy of warning, each a hellscape from which the inhabitants can no longer return, so that we realize what the flaws of our own society may lead to for the next generations unless we try to eradicate these flaws today" (4). All the critics seem to agree with this characterization that dystopian fiction is a warning of the harm that social systems will have on our society. From this definition it becomes obvious that dystopian fiction is far from pessimistic. It is a call to action to prevent a possibly bleak future. The authors writing these messages are far from pessimistic but instead see hope for the future as long as action is taken in the present. Gottlieb insists that dystopian works function as warnings concerning the fate of human kind if we continue on our current path. Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* serves as a prime example as Vonnegut implores his audience to heed his warning and pay attention to his story. The repeated refrain "Listen:" appears at the

beginning of chapters and paragraphs. Vonnegut is crying out to the world to persuade people that war is not glorious but instead a means for the human race to destroy itself. That is why, in his book *Timequake* (1997), Vonnegut refers to World War I as "Western Civilization's first unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide" (78) and World War II as "the second botched effort to end it all" (79). *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is also a warning against the technological development of weapons which are used to wage war. In his book *Palm Sunday* (1981), Kurt Vonnegut asserts that with *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Mark Twain predicted the future technological development of warfare. Vonnegut writes, "Mark Twain died in 1910, at the age of seventy-five and four years before the start of World War One. I have heard it said that he predicted that war and all the wars after in *A Connecticut Yankee*" (155). Twain's prediction is seen by Vonnegut as a warning of what was to come.

In Erika Gottlieb's study of dystopian literature, *Dystopian Fiction East and West* (2001), she describes the characteristics that are shared by all dystopian works. Gottlieb argues that "each dystopian society contains within it seeds of a utopian dream" (8). This is essentially suggesting that dystopian philosophies and worlds develop from a desire to create a utopian/perfect society. This is the case with the philosophy favored by the Tralfamadorians and subsequently Billy Pilgrim. The Tralfamadorians teach Billy that there is no such thing as free will and that everything that happens was always meant to happen and will keep on happening indefinitely. This philosophy comforts Billy Pilgrim and removes any responsibility to act on his own behalf. When Billy Pilgrim is living in the zoo on Tralfamadore, it initially seems like a utopian world, especially when Montana Wildhack is brought to the planet as part of a breeding program at the zoo. This utopic vision is set up as the ultimate male fantasy—Billy is placed in captivity with a blindingly beautiful female porn star and they are the only two homo sapiens on

the planet. This is straight from the fantasy of every fourteen-year-old heterosexual boy in America. This becomes a very pastoral image with Billy and Montana playing the role of Adam and Eve. Their love for each other is very simple and innocent—they almost become like children in the life they have created together. But what begins as a utopian fantasy ultimately devolves into a dystopic scenario. Billy's escapist male fantasy serves as a drug to numb Billy and prevent him from participating actively in his own life—fantasy is equivalent to Aldous Huxley's soma of *Brave New World* (1932) and allows Billy "to feel nothing, and still get full credit for being alive" (134).

Vonnegut presents us with a philosophy which initially seems to offer comfort or hope in a world which is out of human control, but over time we learn that this way of viewing the world turns Billy Pilgrim into a machine and injects him with morphine until he has no more feeling. So, the basic structure of a dystopian text is inherent in Vonnegut's novel, a seemingly utopian society and worldview is uncovered for its insidiousness for turning human beings into machines. In the hospital, even a disinterested observer such as Professor Rumfoord is able to recognize Billy's inhumanity when he states, "That is not a human being anymore" (243). Billy essentially chooses to forfeit his humanity in order to live in his own "morphine paradise" (126), where he can be insulated from pain but subsequently becomes shut off from the outside world. As Lawrence Broer points out, Tralfamadore is an anagram for "or fatal dream" ("Pilgrim's Progress" 145). Broer argues that "[i]nsulated from pain, Billy has simply abdicated his humanity, trading his dignity and integrity for an illusion of comfort and security, and becoming himself a machine" ("Pilgrim's Progress" 145). Billy's "utopian" philosophy protects him from harm but ultimately strips him of his own free will.

The Tralfamadorian philosophy is not only embraced by Billy but is also utilized by soldiers during the war. When an American soldier is beaten by a German guard, the soldier cries out in anguish, "Why me?" the guard responds, "Vy you? Vy anybody?" (116). This is an extremely Tralfamadorian sentiment; the German guard's reaction echoes exactly the response that Billy receives when he asks the Tralfamadorians why they selected him to take aboard their spaceship. The answer he receives is, "That is a very *Earthling* question to ask Mr. Pilgrim. Why *you*? Why *us* for that matter? Why *anything*? Because the moment simply *is*. Have you ever seen bugs trapped in amber? Well, here we are, Mr. Pilgrim, trapped in the amber of this moment. There is no *why*" (97). This philosophy denies any responsibility for an individual's actions and denies any possibility of free will. If this were true, humans would merely be acting a play in which all of our lines have already been scripted, and we can only perform what is already on the page. If humans are the playthings of a merciless fate, then there is no point in trying to improve the world. From the Tralfamadorian perspective, wars and massacres will continue unchecked because it is pointless to try and avert such catastrophic atrocities.

Another believer in Tralfamdorian fate is Professor Rumsfoord who talks with Billy about the inescapable fate to bomb Dresden:

> "It *had* to be done," Rumfoord told Billy, speaking of the destruction of Dresden.
>
> "I know," said Billy.
>
> "That's war."
>
> "I know. I'm not complaining."
>
> "It must have been hell on the ground."
>
> "It was," said Billy Pilgrim.

"Pity the men who *had* to do it."

"I do."

"You must have had mixed feelings, there on the ground."

"It was all right," said Billy. "*Everything* is all right, and everybody has to do exactly what he does. I learned that on Tralfamadore." (253-54)

This philosophy allows for horrific events to occur and ultimately assumes a fatalistic attitude even in the face of events which could be altered. Bombing Dresden was not something that *had* to be done. Vonnegut makes it clear that there are no soldiers in Dresden and that there can be no possible military advantage in attacking that location. This fatalistic attitude allows those who ordered, carried out, or supported the massacre to feel morally justified in the knowledge that they had no possible choice to act differently.

With *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Kurt Vonnegut satirizes the felt need for escapism engaged in by Billy Pilgrim. Pilgrim escapes from the harsh reality of the world by being transported to Tralfalmadore which allows him to focus on the pleasant aspects of life while ignoring his unfortunate circumstances. It has been argued that Billy Pilgrim is a hero for being able to survive any catastrophe by essentially curling up into a tiny ball and waiting for the storm to pass over head. According to Somer, "after a tortuous journey through six novels, Vonnegut has finally created a hero who can survive with dignity in an insane world" (230). To say that Billy has "survived with dignity" seems to ignore many facets of Vonnegut's work. Billy has not actually survived. He believes it is unfortunate that he is still alive and does not feel any dignity in life. In fact, by the story's end he is reduced to a blubbering old man who is treated like a child by his own daughter.

This characterization of Billy as a dignified hero is extremely misguided and does not reflect the true meaning of the novel. In the introduction, Vonnegut discusses his need to write about his experiences in Dresden in order to grapple with what he experienced in the war. Vonnegut is intentionally looking back at the darkest moments of his life; he is not engaged in the escapism of Billy Pilgrim. Tilton remarks that "Vonnegut's compassion for Billy Pilgrim's desperate need of 'a beatific vision' is not to be mistaken for approval of that vision and its consequences" (70). By writing a novel of this nature, Vonnegut refuses to give up on humanity even after living through human nature at its blackest, most destructive. While Vonnegut is sympathetic towards this desire to only look at the brighter side of life it is impossible for him to turn away from this moment in his life. In the introduction Vonnegut writes, "I've finished my war book now. The next one I write is going to be fun" (28). Vonnegut felt a strong pull towards living the fantasy life of Billy Pilgrim, but in reality, Vonnegut never stopped looking back at the war because he did not want to feel numb and disconnected from humanity.

There are several examples of Billy's ridiculous determinism in several casual observations he makes throughout the novel. For instance, when Montana Wildhack is breast-feeding their child on Tralfamadore, Billy notices that "she moved the baby from one breast to the other, because the moment was so structured that she *had* to do so" (Vonnegut 266). It is so absurd to think that every single moment of our lives is laid before us on a track, and it is impossible for humanity to turn aside from that path. John Tilton explains the satirical touch of this microscopic determinism, "This Determinism is a very busy fellow, indeed, especially since he has to see to every incident in the universe and at the same time tell every mother in the world just when to shift her baby to the other breast" (93). It is highly implausible that every meaningless moment in life is structured without our input. In fact, this would create a nightmare

scenario in which we are essentially locked into a cage from which we cannot break free. This is not as comforting as Billy's philosophy to only look at the pleasant moments of life. Essentially, though, Billy uses this extreme determinism as a way to remove the guilt and responsibility he feels in his life. By claiming that every moment is structured in advance, Billy does not have to take any responsibility for the death of Edgar Derby, for example. Unfortunately, this loss of guilt is accompanied by a loss of control—a reason to participate actively in life. Billy is effectively disconnected from the world of the living. When he is in the hospital in the British compound of his prison camp, one of the English Officers looks in on him and learns that Billy is "Dead to the world" to which the officer replies, "How nice—to feel nothing, and still get full credit for being alive" (134). In essence, Billy is drifting through the world but he is desensitized to all that is happening around him in the world—his deterministic philosophy is equivalent to a shot of morphine and keeps him from feeling any pain, or pleasure, for that matter.

But, what begins as a utopian fantasy is actually dystopian because it involves the rejection of reality and humanity. Billy's escapist male fantasy serves as a numbing drug and prevents him from participating actively in his own life. Vonnegut warns us against what he sees as a societal trend to adopt a nihilistic attitude concerning the societal ills which most people believe they cannot alter. Vonnegut implores his readers and insists that they repeat this creed, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to tell the difference" (267). Sure, it may be impossible for one individual to stop the glacier of war, but if each individual chips off a little piece of ice, humanity would be that much closer to accomplishing that goal.

During his first exposure to the Tralfamadorians, Billy learns about their philosophy toward death. He learns that "[w]hen a Tralfamadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the

dead person is in bad condition at that particular moment, but that the same person is just fine in plenty of other moments, Now, when I myself hear that somebody is dead, I simply shrug and say what the Tralfamadorians say about dead people, which is 'So it goes'" (34). Initially, this thought seems humorous or perhaps even comforting—at the very least it appears to be a harmless philosophy. But as the philosophy is applied to a variety of situations the reader becomes increasingly aware of its callousness. After the bombing of Dresden, Billy describes what he sees when rising from the shelter in the slaughterhouse, "When the Americans and their guards did come out, the sky was black with smoke. The sun was an angry little pinhead. Dresden was like the moon now, nothing but minerals. The stones were hot. Everybody else in the neighborhood was dead. So it goes" (227). Billy has become so callous that he is no longer affected by the unnecessary slaughter of fellow human beings. We can see this callousness further in the fact that Billy makes no distinction between humans and inanimate objects. After a party Billy goes down to his kitchen and finds a bottle of Champagne, "So Billy uncorked it with his thumbs. It didn't make a pop. The champagne was dead. So it goes" (93). This philosophy which initially seemed comforting quickly becomes disturbing when it is applied simultaneously to the massacre of thousands of people and the "death" of a bottle of champagne. To make no moral distinction between these two forms of death illustrates that Billy begins to mark death with the cold calculation of an unfeeling machine.

Vonnegut, however, is also a realist and recognizes the futility of writing an anti-war novel; he knows that his work is not likely to affect any real change or stop future violence. In the first chapter Vonnegut describes the following scene in which he is asked if his novel will be an anti-war book:

"Yes," I said. "I guess."

> "You know what I say to people when I hear they're writing anti-war books?"
>
> "No. What *do* you say, Harrison Starr?"
>
> "I say, 'Why don't you write an anti-*glacier* book instead?'"
>
> What he meant, of course, was that there would always be wars, that they were as easy to stop as glaciers. I believe that, too. (4)

Even if there is a sense of hopelessness against the onslaught of war, it does not deter Vonnegut from writing his anti-war novel and at least attempting to have his message heard. Vonnegut establishes that Billy Pilgrim is not fully human because he is unable to look back on the tragedy of his life and use that history as means for effecting change in the future. "And Lot's wife, of course, was told not to look back where all those people and their homes had been. But she *did* look back, and I love her for that, because it was so human." Vonnegut goes on to say, "This one is a failure, and had to be, since it was written by a pillar of salt" (28). Lot's wife and Vonnegut have avoided the trap which caught Billy; they are both able to look back on tragedy in order to maintain their humanity and not become numb to the world. Although Vonnegut is up against a glacier, he feels that it is his responsibility to speak out against what he feels is wrong, even if his cause is destined from the beginning to be the failure that he claims it will be.

As with the corrupted utopian vision of Billy's fantasy in *Slaughterhouse-Five, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* begins with a utopian promise or vision which eventually devolves into a dystopian nightmare. Hank Morgan initially plans a utopian paradise which he will bring about in King Arthur's England in which scientific advancement and reason will replace the superstition of that time. Morgan's goal is to free the country from the oppressive rule of the state and religion. Morgan comments that "most of King Arthur's British

nation were slaves, pure and simple, and bore that name, and wore the iron collar on their necks; and the rest were slaves in fact, but without the name; they imagined themselves men and freemen, and called themselves so" (63). Morgan finds the caste system deplorable and wants to use education to create a democracy in order to free the population from the subjugation and humiliation they are forced to endure.

However, as Kravitz has made clear, Morgan's goal of educating the public devolves into the mass production of machines whom Morgan intends to indoctrinate with his worship of scientific rationalism. According to Morgan, the Brits of this time are barbarous children who are in need of his knowledge in order to civilize the nation. Hank Morgan describes the Knights of the Round Table in this manner:

> And plainly, too, they were a childlike and innocent lot; telling lies of the stateliest pattern with a most gentle and winning naïveté, and ready and willing to listen to anybody else's lie, and believe it, too. It was hard to associate them with anything cruel or dreadful; and yet they dealt in tales of blood and suffering with a guileless relish that made me almost forget to shudder. (19)

It is this childlike quality combined with an extreme level of ferociousness which Morgan claims makes the knights so dangerous. Essentially, Morgan succeeds in replacing the knight's ferocity with a new form of barbarism that includes advanced technology capable of increased violence. Twain is not praising Morgan's optimistic scientific realism which causes him to devalue human life, but illustrates the consequences of such attitudes. Orwell missed the satirical effect of Hank Morgan, similar to how several critics have neglected the satirical nature of Billy Pilgrim.

Early on in the novel, we are left with some indications that Morgan may not be the best candidate to create his utopia. First of all, from early on it appears obvious that Morgan's potential to seize power in the kingdom will eclipse his humanitarian goals. Morgan exclaims:

> Look at the opportunities here for a man of knowledge, brains, pluck, and enterprise to sail in and grow up with the country. The grandest field that ever was; and all my own; not a competitor; not a man who wasn't a baby to me in acquirements and capacities; whereas, what would I amount to in the twentieth century? I should be foreman of a factory, that is about all; and could drag a seine down-street any day and catch a hundred better men than myself. (60-61)

Morgan relishes the opportunity he will have when competing against those whom he describes as in every way inferior to himself. Morgan triumphantly continues, "I was no shadow of the king; I was the substance; the king himself was the shadow. My power was colossal; and it was not a mere name, as such things have generally been, it was the genuine article" (61). Even early in the novel, it is clear that Morgan will be unable to create his democratic, educated nation; he is corrupted by his power from the outset.

Morgan's thirst for power is seen when he relishes in his new title, "The Boss" (60). This is a title which goes to his head and causes Hank to feel a grand sense of self-importance. Essentially, he merely replaces the power structure which was in place with his own tyrannical rule. For instance, when Hank Morgan visits Morgan Le Fay, he prevents her from performing several executions, but when she wishes to execute the royal band, Hank Morgan responds earnestly:

> 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. This little relaxation of sternness had a good effect upon the queen. A statesman gains little by the arbitrary exercise of iron-clad authority upon all occasions that offer, for this wounds the just pride of his subordinates, and thus tends to undermine his strength. A little concession, now and then, where it can do no harm, is the wiser policy. (140-41)

While this passage is humorous, it is also very dark. Hank Morgan has become completely corrupted and seems to have lost sight of his principles and goal of creating a peaceful, just society; he does not reject the barbarity of Morgan le Fay, which highlights the fact that he has become a tyrant as hideous as what he meant to replace.

Significant doubt also swirls around Morgan's ability to create his utopia because of what aspects of the new society he describes as top priorities. According to Morgan, "The first thing you want in a new country, is a patent office; then work up your school system; and after that, out with your paper" (70). This list hardly seems to address the reality of poverty and slavery in the kingdom which Morgan wishes to tackle. It is ludicrous to think that the first thing Morgan would need to create in order to establish his vision is a patent office. He is clearly thinking about the future and hoping to make money off the inventions he plans to unveil, but he is clearly oblivious to the fact that there is no law in place to protect those patents, or even any widespread need for what he may want to invent. Everything he creates seems to have no sense of order as he unveils his newspaper before he even has a public which would be capable of reading. One of his first significant innovations is to have the Knights of the Round Table strap billboards to their armor and travel about the country selling tooth paste. Hank Morgan seems to have no clear means of fixing the backwardness of Arthurian Britain and simply tries to introduce innovations,

based on American pragmatism, which they are not ready for (or do not need), but he does little to advance his utopian vision.

The technological advancements which Morgan created with the hope of planting the seed to create a new utopian paradise eventually grow into a dystopian nightmare with the invention of advanced weaponry. When Hank Morgan challenges all of the Knights of Camelot to a duel, he introduces a new kind of evil into the world. He fights against five hundred knights with only two pistols and is able to win the fight. The invention of these revolvers ushers in a new kind of violence which is cold, calculated, and rational. When the knights would engage in battle previously, it had certain innocence even in all of its brutality; the knights were essentially children who did not know any better. Morgan, however, decries such brutality and then not only practices it but heightens it with his technological advancements. Morgan's weaponry adds cold logic into the equation of warfare, which makes it far more dangerous than the childish battling of the knights. After he defeats the knights, Morgan exclaims, "The day was mine. Knight-errantry was a doomed institution. The march of civilization was begun. How did I feel? Ah, you never could imagine it" (396). Morgan feels that he has ushered in civilization when he has merely vanquished the naïveté associated with such a massacre by creating a much more efficient, calculated means of creating corpses. Morgan's violence is much more unforgivable than that of the knights and nobility of Arthur's time because he claims to know better and creates a means for massacre on a much grander scale.

Hank Morgan's true capacity for violence is not realized until the conclusion of the novel when he creates Gatling guns and electrified fences capable of creating corpses on a mass scale. As Kurt Vonnegut comments about the conclusion of the novel "How appalled this entertainer must have been to have his innocent joking about technology and superstition lead him

inexorably to such a ghastly end. Suddenly and horrifyingly, what had seemed so clear throughout the book was not clear at all—who was good, who was bad, who was wise, who was foolish. I ask you, Who was the most crazed by superstition and bloodlust, the men with the swords or the men with the guns?" (*Palm Sunday* 155). Technology has not ushered in Morgan's utopian dream of technological superiority but has instead created a corpse-filled dystopian moonscape. Technology ultimately becomes a way to increase man's ability to wage war and kill the largest number of people in the most efficient manner.

Perhaps the reason that critics mistake Hank Morgan and Billy Pilgrim as a heroic figures is because of the fact that they are confusing the characters for a fictional representation of Twain and Vonnegut. However, Vonnegut makes it very clear that he is a different person than Pilgrim. Vonnegut is careful to create separation between himself and Billy and, at several points in the novel, refers to himself as being present. For instance, when Billy is waiting on the prison train Vonnegut interjects, "I was there. So was my old war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare" (86). Then when the American troops arrive at the prison camp and become sick after the feast provided by the English officers, Vonnegut again inserts himself into Billy's narrative "That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book" (160). Finally, when the American prisoners of war first arrive in Dresden, Vonnegut inserts his own opinion concerning the beauty of the city: "Somebody behind him in the boxcar said 'Oz.' That was I. That was me. The only other city I'd ever seen was Indianapolis, Indiana" (189). Vonnegut is very careful to distinguish himself from Billy Pilgrim within the novel to ensure that his views are not confused with those of Billy.

Furthermore, Vonnegut makes it very clear that Billy is not a fictional representation of himself by expressing his skepticism of Billy's world view. For instance, when Billy talks about the rejection of free will he learned from the Tralfamadorians, Vonnegut distances himself from

such beliefs with the subtle phrase, "He says" (29). Vonnegut is not presenting Billy's philosophy as if it is absolute truth. He makes it clear that Billy's fatalistic view of the world is not correct while implying that humans do have the responsibility of free will. Vonnegut makes his skepticism about Billy's Tralfamadorian message even more clear when he writes, "If what Billy Pilgrim learned from the Tralfamadorians is true, that we will all live forever, no matter how dead we may sometimes appear to be, I am not overjoyed. Still—if I am going to spend eternity visiting this moment and that, I'm grateful that so many of those moments are nice" (269). Unfortunately, Vonnegut's understatement in the novel may have caused his satirical message to be lost. Several critics have, therefore, mistaken Billy for Vonnegut, but clearly there is a significant distance between the author and his protagonist.

There is also a significant divergence between Billy and Vonnegut based on what they have learned about warfare and how they have passed those lessons down to their children. For instance, even though Vonnegut's anti-war message is unlikely to stop the powerful in the country who are addicted to war, he is at least able to affect the attitudes of his sons, "I have told my sons that they are not under any circumstances to take part in massacres, and that the news of massacres of enemies is not to fill them with satisfaction or glee." He goes on to say, "I have also told them not to work for companies which make massacre machinery, and to express contempt for people who think we need machinery like that" (24-25). On the other hand, Billy Pilgrim has not learned any lesson from the massacre he experienced and seems to be pleased that his son has fought in a war, "Billy's son Robert had a lot of trouble in high school, but then he joined the famous Green Berets. He straightened out, became a fine young man, and he fought in Vietnam" (31). Billy is unable to affect even the life of his son while Vonnegut acknowledges that even if he cannot stop the glacier of war, he is at least able to chip off a couple chunks of ice. Although

Vonnegut is unable to sway politicians and generals, he is at least able to "poison the youth" with his novels (Scholes 123), and hopes that his novel will have an effect on future generations. Billy, on the other hand, sees himself as a bug "trapped in the amber of this moment" (97); he sees absolutely no hope of altering the future in any meaningful way.

Twain similarly distances himself from his protagonist Hank Morgan through the use of his frame narrative. While Twain does not systematically place himself as separate from his protagonist, the frame narrative makes it clear that Twain and Morgan are separate individuals. This distance from Morgan was surely intentional as Twain was actively critiquing Morgan and wanted to insure that they would not be linked as one. Unlike Vonnegut, Twain never openly expresses any skepticism or disappointment with his protagonist's actions. Twain leaves it up to the audience to interpret Morgan's actions and does not provide any subtle commentary to hint how he feels about Morgan's behavior.

Since Twain and Vonnegut are utilizing a similar dystopian framework there are interesting parallels between their dystopian, uninhabited moonscapes. The concluding bloodshed in each novel leaves the reader with a horrific image of corpses in the aftermath of extreme violence. After the terrific destruction from technological warfare, both authors describe the awful stench rising from thousands of dead corpses. Vonnegut writes:

> There were hundreds of corpse mines operating by and by. They didn't smell bad at first, were wax museums. But then the bodies rotted and liquefied, and the stink was like roses and mustard gas.
>
> So it goes.

> The Maori Billy had worked with died of the dry heaves, after having been ordered to go down in that stink and work. He tore himself to pieces, throwing up and throwing up (274).

Vonnegut tells us about the horrifying scenes which continue to persist in the aftermath of a slaughter. Compare this to the conclusion of Twain's novel, when Hank Morgan's followers begin to asphyxiate due to the noxious fumes coming from the corpses they have created, "I was among the first that were made sick by the poisonous air bred by those dead thousands. Others were taken down, and still others" (446). They both refer to these horrific stenches following a massacre in which thousands of rotting corpses pollute the atmosphere. This is an element of massacres that we often do not think about; what is often reported on is the spectacle of the bombing or the number of casualties, but we forget about the aftermath of such actions because it does not fit into the narrative of war. As Vonnegut writes, "there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never want anything ever again. Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds" (24).

While Twain and Vonnegut reach similar dystopian conclusions in their novels, they are satirizing two very different aspects of the American character. While Twain satirizes the entrepreneurial imperialistic spirit of his time, Vonnegut focuses more on American passivity and inertia which denies the moral responsibility of action. Although Twain and Vonnegut satirize different aspects of American identity, Hank Morgan does make appearances in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In one passage Billy sits through a lecture delivered by a major in the marines explaining why the United States was waging war in Vietnam. The major argues that "Americans had no choice but to keep fighting in Vietnam until they achieved victory or until the

communists realized that they could not force their way of life on weak countries. The major had been there on two separate tours of duty. He told of many terrible and many wonderful things that he had seen. He was in favor of increased bombings, of bombing North Vietnam back into the Stone Age, if it refused to see reason" (76). This major reflects the belief that if you cannot win your position through its own merits, it must be pounded into the opposition through the use of lethal force. This is reminiscent of Hank Morgan's fight against the whole population of England, in order to instill his reforms on a country that has rejected them. Likewise, Professor Rumfoord, who shares a hospital room with Billy, expresses a mania similar to Hank Morgan's. When Billy begins to tell Rumfoord about his time in Dresden, Rumfoord refuses to listen because he already has preconceived notions about the bombing campaign. Vonnegut writes "Rumfoord was thinking in a military manner: that an inconvenient person, one whose death he wished for very much, for practical reasons, was suffering from a repulsive disease" (246). Morgan, Rumfoord, and the Marine major characterize people with different beliefs as unreasonable or sick so that they can justify wishing for the death of such enemies.

It is clear that Vonnegut had been heavily influenced by Twain's *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Vonnegut seemed to have a special affinity to this particular novel and mentioned it in several essays and interviews. For instance, in *Timequake* (1997) Vonnegut wrote that Kilgore Trout's (Vonnegut's alter-ego) first story followed a similar story line as Twain's novel:

> His very first story, he told me as he was dying, was set in Camelot, the court of King Arthur in Britain: Merlin the Court Magician casts a spell that allows him to equip the Knights of the Round Table with Thompson submachine guns and drums of .45-caliber dumdums.

> Sir Galahad, the purest in heart and mind, familiarizes himself with this new virtue-compelling appliance. While doing so, he puts a slug through the Holy Grail and makes a Swiss cheese of Queen Guinevere (xvi).

Vonnegut paid tribute to Twain by including this altered version of Twain's novel in his book. Vonnegut's work is very heavily influenced by Twain, and he even admits to paying homage to the great American author by choosing to name his first-born son Mark. In his collection of essays *Palm Sunday* (1981), Vonnegut simply states, "I named my firstborn son after him" (156). Vonnegut was extremely conscious of Twain and this becomes clear in the dystopian satire of *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Chapter Four

Humorous Dystopia in the 21st Century

> And always we had wars, and more wars, and still other wars—all over Europe, all over the world.
>
> Mark Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger* 718

Reading dystopian novels such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell's *1984* (1948), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), the sense is that humanity's future is not a laughing matter and such humorless novels have no place for joking about a society which is potentially so bleak. Although *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* share many characteristics with more traditional dystopian novels, as discussed earlier, it is also clear that Twain and Vonnegut were innovators within the genre for providing a comic atmosphere in their dystopias. This is a significant departure from what are perhaps the most famous works of dystopian fiction by George Orwell and Aldous Huxley.

While authors such as Huxley and Orwell use the futuristic settings of their dystopian satire to critique their societies, Vonnegut and Twain are unique in using humorous irony. For instance, at the conclusion of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* Twain leaves the audience with the irony of the victor becoming stuck in his own trap: "We were in a trap, you see—a trap of our own making. If we stayed where we were, our dead would kill us; if we moved out of our own defenses, we should no longer be invincible. We had conquered; in turn we were conquered" (446). Twain creates a humorous scenario in which Morgan is trapped in his self-imposed hell. Vonnegut, on the other hand, uses understatement to create the humor of his novel. For instance, when Vonnegut rejects Pilgrim's Tralfamadorian philosophy he does it in

such a subtle understated manner which causes the reader to recognize the absurdity of Billy's philosophy: "If what Billy Pilgrim learned from the Tralfamadorians is true, that we will all live forever, no matter how dead we may sometimes seem to be, I am not overjoyed" (269). Vonnegut uses understatement throughout the novel to poke fun and laugh at Billy's worldview. Although these humorous stories are untraditional for the genre it is extremely important to recognize Twain and Vonnegut's novels as dystopian satires. If the characters Hank Morgan and Billy Pilgrim are read as straight heroes who express the opinions of their authors, this leaves the reader with a distorted vision of each novel. But, if the protagonists are recognized as dystopic anti-heroes who are being satirized by the author, it becomes obvious that Twain and Vonnegut are critiquing destructive characteristics of their respective contemporary societies.

While Twain and Vonnegut both satirized characteristics of American society, their satirical torch illuminated very different societal problems. Twain leveled a powerful critique at the capitalist/imperialist drive of his society that forced its way of life on another society in order to gain increased wealth and power. Twain's imperialist experiment ends with his civilizing hero revealed as a maniacal dictator who relishes his power over the masses. At the conclusion of "The Battle of the Sand-Belt," Morgan exclaims "Within ten short minutes after we had opened fire, armed resistance was totally annihilated, the campaign was ended, we fifty-four were masters of England! Twenty-five thousand men lay dead around us" (444). Morgan has become a villain who has destroyed a society in order to accomplish his own selfish gains. Twain used Morgan to admonish American society for its imperialist efforts and capitalist drive to wage war.

Kurt Vonnegut, on the other hand, used his dystopia to satirize a very different aspect of American society. Vonnegut created Billy Pilgrim to deride the passivity of his culture that did not stand against war. Billy's passivity in the face of inevitable warfare is reflected in the

following passage: “Billy was not moved to protest the bombing of North Vietnam, did not shudder about the hideous things he had seen bombing do” (76). Billy is Vonnegut’s critique of American society which he felt did not stand up in the face of injustice and instead settled into a determined passivity. While Twain and Vonnegut are satirizing different aspects of American society, it is interesting to note that Morgan’s active imperialism and Billy’s dejected passivity ultimately have the same result. The Tralfamadorians’ and Billy’s passivity is just as culpable for destruction as is Morgan’s active role in such atrocities.

While Twain and Vonnegut examine dystopian societies with the utmost seriousness, they also recognize the hilarious absurdity of dehumanizing technologies which lead to passivity and, ultimately, annihilation. Twain and Vonnegut leveled their satiric critique at American traits which they felt would lead to societal self-destruction. While Twain aimed his scorn at the scientific rationalism which allows humans to calmly justify the slaughter of other human beings, Vonnegut critiqued the tendency toward technological deterministic thinking which leads to paralysis and a denial of human responsibility. Technology certainly has the catastrophic potential to create destruction in the novels of Twain and Vonnegut, it is the human response to such technological weaponry, either cold, unfeeling rationalism in the case of Twain, or inevitable passivity as is the case in Vonnegut, that guarantees destruction. While Twain seems to offer no hope for the future of humanity by suggesting that violence can only be heightened by extreme rationality, Vonnegut does provide a glimmer of hope for the future. For Vonnegut, there is hope as long as humanity does not follow the example of the Tralfamadorians. Vonnegut implores his audience to take a moral stand in the face of atrocities and not fall into the comforting trap of believing in the inevitable destruction of life; he implores readers not to become callous and shrug off atrocities with the morally void, vacuous echo, “So it goes.”

Unlike Twain, Vonnegut's future is one of hope, but it is a hope which must be accompanied by the weighty, daunting, responsibility of free will.

Although *Slaughterhouse-Five* encourages optimism and action in the face of immorality of war, like Twain, Vonnegut became increasingly pessimistic as he advanced in age toward the end of his career. In the final collection of essays Kurt Vonnegut published before he died, *A Man Without A Country* (2005), it is easy to sense his pessimism and increasing desperation at the shape of the world. Vonnegut writes, "It may be that I am no longer able to joke—that it is no longer a satisfactory defense mechanism. Some people are funny, and some are not. I used to be funny, and perhaps I'm not anymore. There may have been so many shocks and disappointments that the defense of humor no longer works. It may be that I have become rather grumpy because I've seen so many things that have offended me that I cannot deal with in terms of laughter" (129-30). In this passage Vonnegut sounds tired, and it seems that he has given up on American society and human beings in general. The pessimistic tone of this essay continues: "I really don't know what I'm going to become from now on. I'm simply along for the ride to see what happens to this body and this brain of mine. I'm startled that I became a writer. I don't think I can control my life or my writing. Every other writer I know feels like he is steering himself, and I don't have that feeling. I don't have that sort of control. I'm simply becoming" (130). At this point in his life Vonnegut does not feel like he is in control of his own destiny and has essentially given in and learned to float through life like Billy Pilgrim; he has caved in to the inertia and hopelessness which were satirized in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Vonnegut seems to have no hope for mankind as the continual onslaught of war has broken down any hope he had that human beings would tire of the lust for destruction.

This dark pessimism which was shared by Twain and Vonnegut becomes the most obvious when comparing two quotes which each author wrote late in his life. In the year before his death, Twain wrote, "I have never wanted any released friend of mine restored to life since I reached manhood" ("The Death of Jean" 1909). Compare that with a passage from Vonnegut's *A Man Without A Country*, which was published only two years prior to his death, "Life is no way to treat an animal" (123). While Vonnegut's tone sounds somewhat more playful or humorous, he is essentially suggesting the same thing as Twain; they are both suggesting that life is unnecessarily painful and brutal. Death, viewed in this way, is a welcome escape from the drudgery of life. For Vonnegut, this is a far cry from the optimistic aims of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. However, it is easy to target the source of Vonnegut's pessimism as he watched the constant march of war from the Korean War through the current conflicts in the Middle East. Vonnegut's anti-war novel and speeches were able to do little to prevent warfare and increased technological capacity of military might during his lifetime.

The current wars in the Middle East eerily echo the plot of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. The United States is attempting to export its own political and philosophical views on Middle Eastern nations from the outside. The United States believes firmly in its cultural superiority, and force is currently being used to try and control the region. Like Morgan, the United States uses the justification of spreading democracy as a mask for the economic interests in this region. While the stated goal of the United States is to free the people of the Middle East from tyrannical rule, it is clear that control over oil reserves in these nations is a driving factor in this conflict. As with Hank Morgan's attempts to free the people of Arthur's kingdom from the subjugation and superstition espoused by the church, The United States also attempts to "spread democracy" in the Middle East in order to liberate the people of Afghanistan

and Iraq from perceived Islamic narrow-mindedness. The subsequently predictable resistance has led to prolonged wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The United States has not learned from Hank Morgan that it is impossible to enforce an ideological shift through the use of exterior military might.

Moreover, the disparate level of casualties between the United States and Iraqis, strikes a disturbing resemblance to Hank Morgan's slaughter of King Arthur's knights at "The Battle of the Sand-Belt." Estimates of the number of Iraqis who have been killed since the beginning of the war in 2003 ranges between 101,426 and 110,810 (*Iraq Body Count*), compare this to the number of United States casualties at 4,463 ("Iraqi Coalition Military Fatalities"). In "The Battle of the Sand-Belt," Hank Morgan and fifty other men were able to massacre 25,000 knights due to their superior military technology. There is such a wide disparity in the quality of weaponry and training that the deck is stacked against any hopes the insurgents have of winning. However, like Hank Morgan, in victory, the United States military seems to have defeated itself as everyday it becomes further entangled in a quagmire of its own making. The United States could stand to learn a lesson from Hank Morgan about the failure of such technological and cultural imperialism, while also learning from Vonnegut to put away their guns and let them collect rust.

Likewise, Vonnegut's admonishment of the passivity of his society during the beginning of the Vietnam War still reverberates today. There has been very little protest against the wars in the Middle East as the American public seems content to sit passively by. American Society has slipped into a passivity which is content staying home watching reality television which serves as a drug similar to Billy's fantasy world. The casualty count from the wars in the Middle East is no longer mentioned in news broadcasts. Like Billy, the American public wishes to bury its head in the sand and ignore the grisly reality of war while focusing on the pleasant aspects of life.

Vonnegut implores readers to not become passive like Billy Pilgrim, or else the Hank Morgan's of the world will continue to play out their fantasies which ultimately lead to catastrophic annihilation.

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