

## Civilization and its Failures in the Unpublished and Lesser-known Twain

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**Abstract** Critics of Mark Twain are well acquainted with what have been referred to in various instances as the author's ambivalent, contradictory or dialectic attitudes. It is in Twain's approach towards science, technology and the concept of progress itself that this ambivalence is particularly evident. These themes underlie some of Twain's most famous novels such as *The Gilded Age* (1873), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889); however, it is in a series of lesser-known and unpublished sketches, short stories and novels that we find more explicit and creative examinations of the mixed blessings and failures of progress. This paper will analyze a selection of texts that include "Cannibalism in the Cars" (1867), "Sold to Satan" (1904) and Twain's original manuscripts for *The Mysterious Stranger*, with the objective of garnering a more precise perspective on the author's varying attitudes towards progress which have often been inserted into comfortable linear schemes based on biographical interpretation rather than textual data. Moreover, we will go beyond the convenience of simply presenting Twain's ambiguity in an attempt to understand the actual point the author is making or at least to explain what lies behind his lack of partisanship in the specific cases of these texts.

**Summary** 1. The Paige Typesetter/Conversion Narrative. – 2 Defining Progress and Civilization. – 3 Imperial Concerns. – 4 Satan as Dialectical Adversary in *The Mysterious Stranger*. – 5 The Enlightenment and Positivism in "The Secret History of Eddypus" and "Sold to Satan". – 6 Social Progress in "The Great Revolution in Pitcairn". – 7 Civilized Savages on the Railroad. – 8 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Mark Twain. Progress and civilization. Imperialism. Technology and science.

### 1 The Paige Typesetter/Conversion Narrative

*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) is, perhaps, the work in which Mark Twain offers his most in depth analysis of the themes of progress and civilization. Since it was first published, it has also been one of the texts that has produced the most divisive interpretations regarding its literary merits and its overall message. Within Twain's literary production it is often characterized as a watershed novel that divides a more creative and humorous period from an abortive, bitter and existentially pessimistic one. One of the most influential and highly biographical analyses of Twain's works in this sense is that offered by Bernard DeVoto in *Mark Twain at Work* (1942, 105-30). DeVoto characterizes the period

leading up to and immediately after the publication of *A Connecticut Yankee* as the beginning of Twain's disillusioned phase and ascribes Twain's transition from "incarnation of Southwest humor" (Cox 1966, 223) to "Mad Prophet" (DeVoto 2004, 61) to a series of personal and economic misfortunes; among these, Twain's failed investment in the infamous Paige typesetting machine has been given a central role in past criticism, particularly with regard to *A Connecticut Yankee*. Henry Nash Smith, in his seminal work *Mark Twain's Fable of Progress* (1964), also seems to adhere to the notion that these personal and economic hardships begin to heavily influence Twain's views on capitalism, technology, progress and civilization. Smith uses what we will refer to as the 'Paige typesetter narrative' or 'conversion narrative' to partially explain Twain's supposed difficulties in formulating a coherent celebration (or denunciation) of progress, technology and "laissez-faire liberalism" in *A Connecticut Yankee* (58-9, 90). This notion has already been questioned,<sup>1</sup> but not effectively challenged and is partially adhered to, by James M. Cox. In fact, Cox further expands upon DeVoto's and Smith's biographical analysis and views the development of *A Connecticut Yankee* in particular as flawed or confused due to Twain's personal and creative upheavals (1966, 224-5; 1982a, 398-9). Moreover, Cox insists upon the importance of the abortive development of the Paige typesetter as it influences and parallels Twain's "extravagant failure" in writing *A Connecticut Yankee* (1982a, 391); he suggests that Twain increasingly identified himself with the failed invention while writing the novel (397) and that the protagonist Hank Morgan "is to a large extent the concrete embodiment of Twain's obsession with Paige's invention" (398).

The Paige typesetter debacle still finds its way into interpretations of *A Connecticut Yankee* and is largely referred to as direct influence on the genesis of text; however, something we have inherited from New Criticism and reader-response criticism which we can take advantage of is the possibility of pushing an author's biographical data into the background or even completely eschewing it if necessary. In offering my own analysis of Twain's work I wish to partially embrace the critique of the intentional fallacy to the extent that I am under no obligation to "assume the role [...] of a psychologist who must define the growth of a particular artist's vision in terms of his mental and physical state at the time of his creative act" (Kuiper 2012, 228), but without being orthodox in my position. Indeed,

1 In *Mark Twain. The Fate of Humour* (1966), James M. Cox partially departs from DeVoto's "speculations" regarding Twain's later period as they "rest on the assumption that the life 'causes' the art, that behind the work lies the experience" (224). Cox espouses Henry James' thesis that it is "art" that "makes life" and rejects H.G. Wells conclusion to the contrary (224). However, both in *Fate* and in "The Machinery of Self-Preservation" (1982), Cox does maintain positions that are highly dependent on biographical interpretation.

I would also adopt enough of a rhetorical approach to be able to use the name 'Mark Twain' to indicate either the implied-author or something closer to the "flesh-and-blood author" (Phelan 2011, 134), and to speak of his possible intentions when analyzing the strategies he adopts in his authorial agency. I am interested, to use James Phelan's terms, "not in private intention but in public, textualized intentions" (133), allowing "elbow room for intentionality" but without necessarily "driving the anti-intentionalists out of the Hermeneutic Temple" (134-5). I wish to perform an analysis that is not bogged down in biographical minutiae (such as letters to friends, editors and acquaintances) but which deals with Twain (implied-author-Twain or otherwise) whose intentionality and perhaps even opinions, are represented by a series of literary texts. Deliberately ignoring the 'Paige typesetter/conversion' narrative and the implications it has for the interpretation of Twain's texts is one of the healthiest and most productive tendencies critics have more recently begun to adopt; however, I wish to recuperate it once more if only to offer a counternarrative so that its relevance can be put into perspective and somewhat attenuated. Rather than a biographical narrative, I propose a brief text-based one in which we will analyze a series of texts that span Twain's entire literary career and demonstrate how in his works the theme of progress evolves over time. In Twain's portrayal of progress and civilization there are attitudes which remain constant and others that vary, but hopefully this reading will present an interpretation that sees the treatment of these themes as relatively coherent and of central importance throughout his literary career: to the Paige typesetter 'failure/conversion' narrative I oppose one that describes a more linear development wherein the critique of progress and civilization are constant and differ more in terms of degrees of intensity than in terms of a fundamental changing of position. Let us - like Hank Morgan - go backwards in time to discuss Twain's idea of progress in a series of texts, some of which were written almost a decade from one another, and which range from the beginning of his literary career to incomplete works published posthumously. These texts are: "Sold to Satan" (1904), "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (1901), Twain's original manuscripts for *The Mysterious Stranger* (1897-1908 circa), "The Secret History of Eddypus" (1901), *A Connecticut Yankee* (1889), "The Great Revolution in Pitcairn" (1879) and "Cannibalism in the Cars" (1867).

## 2 Defining Progress and Civilization

First of all, it would be useful to define exactly what is meant by Twain when using the terms 'progress' and 'civilization' and how these terms stand in relation to technology and scientific advancement. To do so, let us briefly observe how these concepts are delineated in *A Connecticut Yan-*

kee, being that it is the text which deals most explicitly with these themes and is at the center of our polemic. Henry Nash Smith's *Mark Twain's Fable of Progress* (1964) is one of the critical works that has propagated the 'conversion' narrative and it deals expressly with the themes of progress and civilization in *A Connecticut Yankee*. According to Smith, in the novel, progress is expressed by Twain as:

The contrast [...] between poverty-stricken, ignorant, tyrannical feudalism and the enlightened industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century. Mark Twain, in common with virtually all his contemporaries, held to a theory of history that placed these two civilizations along a dimension stretching from a backward abyss of barbarism toward a Utopian future of happiness and justice for all mankind. The code name for the historical process thus displayed was progress, and in nineteenth century America it had the status of secular theology. (82)

However, I would argue against this generalization which takes one particular aspect of *A Connecticut Yankee* and applies it not only to the entire novel but to the author himself; to expand this hypothetical attitude so broadly so is to ignore much of Twain's precedent literary production from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) to *Roughing It* (1872). In these and in other works, we have an almost limitless amount of examples wherein Twain displays attitudes towards the concept of progress - as expressed by Smith - that vary from an irreverent tone to a highly condemnatory one. This is not to say that a negative view of civilization that we might find in one text represents any true or sole opinion that is universally applicable to Twain's works in their entirety; nor does it mean that Twain never celebrates the technological marvels of his age or the virtues of democracy and republicanism, however, both leanings need to be given at least equal relevance in order to appreciate the profoundly dialogic qualities of Twain's works.

With regard to the relationship between progress/civilization and technology, Smith affirms that: "the most obvious exemplification of progress in the story is the Yankee's technological achievements - his creation of a complex of factories, railways, and telegraph and telephone lines. This aspect of the contrast between civilizations is an allegory of the industrial revolution; its emphasis is primarily economic" (1964, 84). Smith points out how Hank often equates civilization and progress with industry and technology: in chapter X, entitled "Beginnings of Civilization", Hank lists the various infrastructures he has created in his role as self-proclaimed "despot [...] with the resources of a kingdom at his command" (Twain 1982a, 51) and refers to the "nuclei of future vast factories" as "the iron and steel missionaries of my future civilization" (50); in chapter XLII ("War!"), when Hank and Clarence talk of "blow[ing] up our civilization" they are referring to

"all our vast factories, mills, workshops, magazines, etc." (243). Beyond the more technophilic or materialist aspects of Hank's revolution there is also a socio-political dimension which, according to Smith, makes *A Connecticut Yankee* an "allegory of the French Revolution" (1964, 84). I would, however, expand the limits of this conclusion so that the text becomes a partial allegory for all conflicts in which the concepts of progress and civilization have been involved, so as to include many other historical events such as the English Civil War – "Cromwell's soldiers" (6) are mentioned in the first chapter of the book and put in relation with Hank's own feats –, the settlement of the Frontier and the American Civil War in particular.

According to Smith, with his "practical knowledge of machines" and "his devotion to republican institutions", Hank is "meant to be a representative American", however, "at different times Mark Twain emphasized first one aspect and then the other" (1964, 84) and dealt ineffectively with both themes (85-86); part of my understanding of *A Connecticut Yankee* is that these flaws are to be seen as part of the character of Hank Morgan rather than flaws of the text itself which we can ascribe to hypothetical uncertainties on Twain's part. Hank often expresses his high socio-political ideals but when these are translated into more practical terms they are reduced to mere means of production: the terms "man-factories" (50), "civilization-factories" (249) and even "teacher-factory" (50) are perhaps symptomatic of the limits of his project or of the mindset which he superimposes upon Camelot. For the moment we can use Smith's defining parameters of progress as they well describe the spirit of Hank Morgan's theory of history and his relationship with technology. However, one of our main objections, which remains valid for the successive discussion is that Smith, in his discussion of *A Connecticut Yankee*, generally tends to identify the author with the protagonist; by doing so, and by adapting his analysis to the questionable limits of a biographical interpretation, he not only misses some of the most interesting developments of Hank's character but diminishes the dialogic merits or paradoxical ambivalences that render this text a more interesting and contemporarily valid treatment of the theme of progress. It is my belief that a certain distance exists (and necessarily exists in any work of fiction for that matter) between narrator/character and author, and that Twain is offering a critical analysis, but not necessarily a denigratory one, of Hank Morgan himself. Moreover, an exact definition of the terms 'civilization' and 'progress' that is valid for all of the texts we will be analyzing is impossible, however, the different perspectives and variations that each text offers will give us an overview of Twain's idea of such complex concepts.

### 3 Imperial Concerns

In Many of Twain's later texts, those that were written after his loss of faith if we refer back to our 'conversion narrative', civilization and progress are inevitably associated with the language of imperialism; moreover, these late works are unequivocally and universally understood as being critical of the concepts of civilization and progress, particularly when used in terms of hierarchical opposition of peoples. In pieces such as "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (1901), "The Stupendous Procession" (1901) or "The Fable of the Yellow Terror" (1904-05) the term 'civilization' is mostly characterized as a collective deception, a fraudulent global marketing scheme, or as the thin veil of propaganda that disguises predatory colonial action. In "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (Twain 1901) we find various exhortations for the Western world to stop "conferring our Civilization upon the peoples that sit in darkness" and "give those poor things a rest" (164). This specific text is not merely a paternalistic puff piece that celebrates the innocence of the 'noble savage' and there are intimations of a profound ethical conviction that civilization is not something to be conferred from one entity onto another. Apart from denouncing the hypocrisy of Western missionary and colonial exploits by juxtaposing such "Civilization-tools" as "Glass Beads and Theology, [...] Maxim Guns and Hymn Books, and Trade-Gin and Torches of Progress and Enlightenment (patent adjustable ones, good to fire villages with, upon occasion)" (165), Twain's text also hints towards principles of cultural relativism. Referencing current events, he laments the fact that the United States have not allowed the "Filipino citizens" to "set up the form of government they might prefer [...] according to Filipino ideas of fairness and justice - ideas which have since been tested and found to be of as high an order as any that prevail in Europe or America" (170). Moreover, it is declared that "most of those People that Sit in Darkness have been furnished with more light than was good for them or profitable for us" (165), statement which not only ridicules the idea of savagery that the concept of "Sitting in Darkness" itself refers to, but implicates economic interests in the arbitrary assignation of a certain degree of civilization to a nation or a people. This critical assessment of the concepts of civilization and progress is almost indistinguishable from his critique of imperial politics; in order to stay on topic and not trespass into the vast and complex field of discussion that surrounds Twain's anti-imperialist writings - in order, that is, to find an analysis that is more abstractly conceptual than political - we must look to other works such as the manuscripts for the incomplete novel conventionally referred to as *The Mysterious Stranger*. However, what we may find is that more often than not, the analysis of the idea of civilization/progress in Twain inevitably leads us back at some point to the topic of colonialism/imperialism telling us one of three things (or all three): that in Twain's mind the discussion of one necessarily leads to the other; that in this age of global

imperialism the discussion of one unavoidably leads to the other; or that to speak of civilization/progress inevitably means to speak of empire.

#### 4 Satan as Dialectical Adversary in *The Mysterious Stranger*

The three distinct manuscripts for *The Mysterious Stranger* which were never published or completed during Twain's life have been assigned this collective title based on that of the fraudulent version published in 1916, after the author's death, by Albert Bigelow Paine.<sup>2</sup> The stranger in question and central character of all three versions is a figure who is both Satanic and ambiguously Angelic and whose origin and motives remain, as per the title, mysterious. A recurring figure in the works of Twain, Satan is often employed as the voice that can properly act as dialectical opposite to conventional knowledge, religious dogma or humankind's vainglorious view of itself. Beyond reprising his folkloristic role of bringer of mischief, Satan is one of the many mysterious, magical or time-travelling outsiders that Twain uses to offer a counterpoint to the dominant narratives and perceptions pertaining to the society the external element is introduced into. In a way this figure retains his biblical role of 'adversary,' however, in Twain's works Satan remains more of an intellectual or philosophical opponent than one animated by malice. In an age of boundless and often blind enthusiasm, of absolute faith in progress, machines and empires, an age, perhaps, of hubristic arrogance, the presence of an existential adversary is intended to have a sobering, undercutting effect. The first manuscript, *The Chronicle of Young Satan*, is set in the Austrian village of Eseldorf in 1702; in this version, Satan seems mostly indifferent to human concerns and he inhabits a higher plane of existence from which human beings are not viewed as individuals but only as one of many species, perhaps the cruellest of species. Totally removed from the human condition, the young Satan of *Chronicle* sees 'Civilization' as but a series of deceptions and inventions, such as "modesty, and indecency", and maintains a Rousseauan appreciation for "the natural man, the savage" who has "no prejudices about smells, and no shame for his God-made nakedness" (Gibson 1969, 139).

In all three versions that exist of *The Mysterious Stranger*, Satan is a figure who like Hank Morgan possesses knowledge of times to come. What is particularly interesting for our analysis is the fact that Satan is a being for which all moments, past present and future, are simultaneous, there-

2 Paine's version of the story represents a patchwork of parts of the first (*The Chronicle of Young Satan*, 1897-1900 circa) and third manuscript (*No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, 1902-1908 circa) in chronological order.



fore he is the most qualified to comment upon what Smith refers to as the “theory of history” (1964, 82) that he credits Twain as adhering to in *A Connecticut Yankee*. On the subject of war, for example, Satan declares that “there has never been a just one [...]. I can see a million years ahead and this rule will never change” (Gibson 1969, 155). It is from this perspective that Satan debates with the human protagonists of *Chronicle* upon the concepts of progress and civilization and the immortal being repeatedly offers but a burst of cruel laughter (“unfeeling” and “unkind laugh”, 137; “evil chuckle”, 138) in response to humankind’s claims to improvement: “But Satan, as civilization advances - ‘Of Course he broke in with a laugh. He could never hear that word without jeering at it and making fun of it. He said he had seen thirteen of them rise in the world and decay and perish to savagery [...] and they were all poor things: shams and hypocrisies and tyrannies, every one” (156). When pressured by his human interlocutors to elaborate, he offers to show them human existence from his perspective: “would you like to see a history of the progress of the human race? - its development of that product which it calls Civilization?” (134); he proceeds to offer visions of human history or as Satan puts it “this long array of crimson spectacles [...], from the time that Cain began it down to a period of a couple of centuries hence” (136-7). Once they have completed their voyage through time Satan sums up the history of human civilization by stating: “you have made continual progress. Cain did his murder with a club; the Hebrews did their murders with javelins and swords; the Greeks and Romans added protective armor [...]; the Christian has added guns and gunpowder” (135-6). Progress is therefore reduced to series of improvements in offensive technology, “to kill being the chiefest ambition of the human race” (137). The apex of this process is contemporary “Christian Civilization” without which “war must have remained a poor and trifling thing” (136). Satan then proceeds to list various more recent and contemporary events, including the “bloody exhibitions” of the French Revolution, leading up to the age in which “the lands and peoples of the whole pagan world will be at the mercy of the sceptred bandits of Europe, and they will take them. Furnishing in return, the blessings of civilization” (136). Once again Twain’s critique of the concepts of progress and civilization tends to lead into a discourse on the evils and inherent hypocrisy of imperialism.

It should be clear why this phase of Twain’s production is often considered one of pessimism and despair and the content of *Chronicle* is certainly overtly darker than that of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; however, it is undeniable that even in the latter novel a critique of the “sivilized” (Twain 1999, 38) society of pious slaveholding widows and oxymoronically **violent** Southern **gentlemen** is present. It would be an error to limit the critique of human civilization, in *Huck Finn* and in other texts, to any specific chronologic and geographical confines. Moreover, as we have stated



in the case of Hank Morgan, character and author, in this case Satan and Twain, do not necessarily coincide. From a rhetorical perspective, the author may be using the voice of Satan to expose unacknowledged truths about human nature and his dialectical opponents may be inferior to him in every way, but perhaps their basic human empathy and instinct have their say in the final equation of what is to be taken from the text. We are not, in other words, necessarily asked to adopt Satan's perspective in full. As the narrator points out multiple times, we are dealing with a being who from a purely emotional stand point can seem unnecessarily cruel or who, in the narrator's words, has "strange notions of kindness" (53). Satan shows himself to be indifferent to human death and suffering when he fails to intervene against the various individual acts of cruelty they witness, even though he clearly has the power to do so. This power, on the contrary, is mostly used to play cheap tricks (143, 153), and occasionally to punish (119); and when confronted with the spectacle of unjust and senseless death which causes his human companions' hearts to break Satan simply comments: "Oh, it is no matter, we can make more" (52).

## 5 The Enlightenment and Positivism in "The Secret History of Eddypus" and "Sold to Satan"

In a short story of around the same period as *Chronicle* entitled "The Secret History of Eddypus" (written 1901), Twain offers a slightly different perspective on human progress which initially seems to be more in line with the positivist zeitgeist described by Henry Nash Smith. In this text, the focus seems to be more on the advances of science and technology and the point of view is that of historian living in an obscurantist religious dystopia who is looking back at the past through badly translated documents. The nineteenth century is described as being "sown thick with mechanical and scientific miracles and wonders that ha[ve] changed the face of the world" (1984a, 185); moreover, it is stated that during the 1800s "a host of extraordinary men were born - the future supreme lords and masters of science, invention and finance, *creators of the Great Civilization*" (205). The term, 'the Great Civilization', used to indicate Twain's era, expresses the absolutistic faith in progress by which it was characterized; however, the term is used so repeatedly and the achievements of the era so often punctuated with exclamation points that one begins to suspect that there may be more than a fanatical celebratory intent behind the rhetoric and that there is a level of irony to be added. All great scientists and inventions are transposed, in this erroneous reading of history, to the nineteenth century and scientific discoveries are celebrated and immediately after burlesqued within the same section. For example, Galileo and Joseph Priestly (among

many others) are listed as contemporaries (206) and the discovery of oxygen of the latter is described as having been obtained through a series of experiments in killing animals through asphyxiation, starting from mice and moving up to men in the belief that “the Scientist never allowed himself to be sure he could kill a man with a demonstration until he had followed the life-procession all the way up to that summit” (209). When the narrator is discussing Herbert Spencer and his “all-clarifying law of Evolution” (222), “the climaxing mighty law [...], binding all the universe’s inertness and vitalities together under its sole sway and command” (223), the reader could almost be fooled by the hyperbolic, overenthusiastic tone that celebrates: “the all-supreme and resistless law which decrees slow, sure, implacable persistent, unresting change, change, change, in all things, mental, moral, physical [...], never halting, never tiring, all the universe ranked and battalioned in the march, and the march eternal!” (222); these statements, seen from the point of view of a static multi-millennial dystopia, may easily be understood as ironic.

Twain ends this short story with an even more ironic twist by showing us the inherent contradictions or ethical incoherencies of the idea of progress when it is posited in necessary correlation with the market economy and personal profit. The “vast discoveries” of our fictional nineteenth century are described as having created “an intellectual upheaval [...] such as had never been experienced in it before from the beginning of time [...]. Men’s minds were free, now; the chains of thought lay broken [...]. This marked an epoch and a revolution [...], a revolution which emancipated the mind and the soul” (1984a, 224). However, the intellectual and material benefits of this enlightened Eden breed an unlikely hidden serpent in the form of “Arkwright’s spinning-frames” (224) and Watt’s steam engine which bring to the raise in demand, and therefore in price, of American cotton. Following a logical chain of events, cotton, which “had ceased to be profitable”, is now profitable; therefore, slavery, which “had long ago ceased to be profitable” and was “disappearing” in accordance with the “plans and prophecies” (224-5) of the enlightened elite, becomes once again profitable:

and the disappearing process stopped [...]. Slavery got a new impulse; the slave’s price rose higher and higher, the demand for him grew more and more pressing; men began to *breed* him for the market, other men [...] began to kidnap him in Africa [...]. Whitney went on improving his machine [the cotton gin] and – So many people stole his invention and manufactured it that another circumstance resulted – the enactment of a rational patent law [...]; and out of this grew a colossal thing, the stupendous material prosperity of the Nineteenth century! [...]. Slavery was gratefully recognized by press, pulpit and people, all over the land, as God’s best gift to man, and the Prophecy which had once been so

logically sound and mathematically sure drew the frayed remnants of its drapery about it and in sorrow lay down and died. (225)

So much for the liberating power of machines! Twain, in a move which would be highly unconventional for the milieu Henry Nash Smith positions him in, creates a direct correlation between capitalism and the institution of mass slavery, viewing the latter more as a recent development of the market economy than as the heritage of retrograde barbarism and anticipating conclusions later elaborated upon by historians such as C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, Stanley L. Engerman and Robert William Fogel. The implication of scientific and technological progress in the rebirth and expansion of the slave system serves as an example of the fallibility of Spencerian evolutionism and other positivist socio-economic ideologies, ideas and theories that dominated in much of the popular utopian-dystopian literature of the time.

In the short story "Sold to Satan" (written in 1904), the figure of Satan returns in a slightly different form. He remains a charming, intelligent and sociable character who has telepathic powers, however, he is now more Mephistophelean both in form and function. Satan is called upon by the narrator (Twain himself) so that a Faustian pact can be made: Twain's soul in exchange for wealth. What renders this Satan unique is the fact that his body is made of the radioactive element radium which is later revealed as the very substance Twain is promised he will make his fortune with. Its radioactive properties are prophetically described by Satan as being the energy source of the future: "In twenty million years [radium] has had no value for your race until the revolutionizing steam-and-machinery age was born [...]. It was a stunning little century, for sure, that nineteenth! But it's a poor thing compared to what the twentieth is going to be" (Twain 1984b, 228) - prediction which, perhaps, reveals radium's potential for both great and terrible things. Indeed, the radioactive properties of the element will allow Twain to "light the whole world, heat the whole world's machinery, supply the whole world's transportation power from now till the end of eternity" and for a healthy profit (232); however, Satan also tells fictional Twain that the power of radium can "blast [his house] like a breath from hell, and burn [him] to a crisp in a quarter of a minute [...]; at my will I can set in motion the works of a lady's watch or destroy a world" (229-30).

In "Sold to Satan", scientific discovery is portrayed as inevitably connected to financial and utilitarian concerns. Twain's persona seems motivated only by personal gain and has little regard both for his soul and Satan's hints regarding the dangers of radium. When first informed of the nature of Satan's body and of the potential value of radium, narrator-Twain immediately imagines a way to exploit this: "I gazed hungrily upon him,

saying to myself: 'What riches! what a mine! Nine hundred pounds at, say, \$3,500,000 pound [...]. Then a treacherous thought burst into my mind!'" (Twain 1984b, 227). However, the Devil perceives his thoughts and laughingly compliments him for his initiative and original ideas: "to kidnap Satan, and stock him, and incorporate him, and water the stock up to ten billions - just three times its actual value - and blanket the world with it!" (227). In general, the language used throughout the story satirically mimics that of the world of business and finance which is used even in reference to abstract concepts such the soul, and heaven:

I concluded to sell my soul to Satan. Steel was away down, so was St. Paul; it was the same with all the desirable stocks [...]. [...] I sent word to the local agent, Mr. Blank, with description and present condition of the property, and an interview with Satan was promptly arranged, on a basis of 2 ½ per cent, this commission payable only in case a trade should be consummated. (226)

The message of this modern-industrial variation on the folkloristic, devil's pact tale seems clear: progress, particularly in relation to material gain, is always a form of Faustian pact. With regard to the science-fictional aspect of the story, Twain seems to at least have some rudimentary notion of the radiophysics of the day and quotes Marie Curie's research, but perhaps for poetic necessity or simply ignorance, he bends the physics a little in order to make a point. In exchange for his soul the protagonist gains the rights to a large deposit of radium in a mountain crater in the Cordilleras; the origin of this deposit is the accumulation of the corpses of myriads of fireflies, who, it is said, contain a small quantity of radium in their bodies and have chosen this place as their "cemetery" (232) for over a million years. Twain seems to be referencing the biogenic hypothesis for the formation of fossil fuels such as coal and petroleum which were still fuelling the industrial revolution he had witnessed. The author may be subtly commenting upon the nature of progress by underlying how it is inevitably fed by some form of death. Similarly to what we had observed in "Eddypus", the author also briefly evokes the shadow of Slavery when explaining how radium can only be controlled and plied to human needs by using another element, "polonium", which "shall put the slave whip in your hand" (230). Twain's thermodynamic economic theory in "Sold to Satan" seems to state that the energy to fuel the machine of progress must inevitably come from somewhere, it is never self-generating, and the place it comes from is usually one of suffering and corruption.

## 6 Social Progress in “The Great Revolution in Pitcairn”

A text that represents the prototypical antecedent for *A Connecticut Yankee* and perhaps tells us something of how the theme of progress and civilization is to be understood in this novel is “The Great Revolution in Pitcairn” (1879), published a decade before in the *Atlantic Monthly*. In this short story the mutineers of the *Bounty* and their Tahitian wives have founded an idyllic (one could say utopian), secluded community on the small Pacific island of Pitcairn. The community is constituted as “an appanage of the British crown” (Twain 1982b, 273) but being so small, remote and devoutly Christian it does not attract the attention of either the Empire or missionaries (274-5); therefore it enjoys its own political and economic freedom and elects its own leaders according to a democratic elective system based on universal suffrage (men and women) from the age of seventeen. Pitcairn is described in unequivocal terms as an Edenic or pastoral utopia: “The sole occupations of the people were farming and fishing; their sole recreation, religious services. There has never been a shop in the island, nor any money. The habits and dress of the people have always been primitive, and their laws simple to puerility” (274). However, here too we find an external element that sows discord and chaos, in the form of “One stranger, an American” by the name of Butterworth Stavely who has “settled on the island” and is immediately characterized as “*a doubtful acquisition*” (275). If the ethicality of Hank Morgan’s agency can be considered ambiguous, here the Yankee bringer of progress is in no uncertain terms overambitious, driven by personal gain and ultimately misguided in his attempts to transform the tranquil community into an “empire” (279). Once he has manipulatively gained a reputation for being the most religiously zealous person on the island – using ostentation – he begins “to secretly sow the seeds of discontent among the people” with the “deliberate purpose, from the beginning, [of] subvert[ing] the government” (274). Once he gains power and “oozing reform from every pore” (277) he pushes the community to proclaim independence from an unobtrusive motherland using the rhetoric of the enlightened liberator, which Hank himself is prone to use, perhaps more justifiably. In response to the islanders claims that England has never bothered them he declares: “So slaves have felt and spoken in all ages! This speech shows how fallen you are, how base, how brutalized you have become under this grinding tyranny! What! has all manly pride forsaken you? Is liberty nothing? [...]. [...] rise up and take your rightful place in the august family of nations, great, free, enlightened, independent” (278). Once this meaningless or obsolete independence has been declared Butterworth then attempts to make an “empire” of the Pitcairn community by creating an army and a navy and when questioned about this – “Do we *need* an empire and an emperor?” – he answers “What you *need*, my friends, is unification. Look

at Germany; look at Italy. They are unified. It makes living dear. **That constitutes progress** [bold added]. We must have a standing army and a navy. Taxes follow as a matter of course. All these things summed up make grandeur" (279). Although initially the population is enthusiastic about these reforms, the usual evils of privilege start to seep in, economic chaos ensues after the introduction of money and the expense of keeping a standing army threatens their survival as there is nobody to "till the fields" (280). This situation quickly erodes the newly founded "empire", Butterworth is deposed and there is a return to the initial harmony. Butterworth repeatedly urges his followers to look to Germany and Italy as examples of states that have taken the road of unification and aspire to a grandeur on par with that of their neighbouring empires, even though, it is heavily implied, they do not have the resources to do so (280). Twain's satire is directed towards, but not limited to, the economic problems that followed the recent unification of these two states and the interference of religion in political affairs the world over. What are also being critiqued, however, are hierarchical, linear or totalizing ideas of historical progress whereby all states and all peoples must follow certain predetermined and ascendant stages: it is clear that Pitcairn, as we initially see it, represents an example of perfect pastoral or primitivistic equilibrium that requires no interference and the terms "unification" or "empire", to which Butterworth repeatedly appeals, may as well stand for "Civilization" within the context of this short story. After he is deposed and "very much depressed" he seems offended as he states: "I freed you from a grinding tyranny; I lifted you up out of your degradation, and made you a nation among nations; I gave you a strong, compact, centralized government; and, more than all, I gave you the blessing of blessings - unification" (281).

## 7 Civilized Savages on the Railroad

The brief sketch, "Cannibalism in the Cars", published in 1968 in *The Broadway Annual*, represents perhaps one of the earliest examples of Twain's treatment on the subject of progress and civilization, however, these themes remain part of the subtext of the sketch rather than its main and broadest focus. "Cannibalism in the Cars" is the account of a former congressman who is the supposed survivor of an incident in which a train is caught in a snow drift for various days; the twenty-four passengers resort to cannibalism to survive but adopt the most civil of decision making processes - which mimics and satirizes governmental procedure - in order to choose whom to eat. The sketch well represents the humoristic style that characterized Twain's early career as a journalist and correspondent, and there is a nod to the lurid yellow journalism which he often parodied in his Western hoaxes. As in many of his early sketches, violence, in this



case very understated and civilized violence, is also paradoxically exaggerated to the point that it is rendered satirically grotesque. Beyond the more obvious surface level of political satire, the mock congressional debates to decide who shall be eaten belie a critique of the concept of civilization itself, as a train car of highly civilized gentlemen and ladies is reduced to a group of “bloodthirsty cannibal[s]” (Twain 2000, 69) by a week-long breakdown of transport. The process is somewhat gradual: it is only on the fifth day that we see signs of “a savage hunger look[ing] out at every eye” (62) and on the seventh that “RICHARD H. GASTON, of Minnesota” takes the metaphorical podium and declares “Gentlemen, - It cannot be delayed longer! The time is at hand! We must determine which of us shall die to furnish food for the rest!” (62). However, from a question of mere survival, the situation degenerates into a grotesque and surreal farce; during the debating procedure, a “Gentleman from Oregon” is initially discarded as a candidate due to the fact that he is “old, and furthermore is bulky only in bone - not in flesh. I ask the gentleman Virginia if it is soup we want instead of solid sustenance?” (65). After their first meal the passengers acquire a taste for human flesh and become both greedy and fussy (our narrating congressman in particular) about what, or better whom, they eat in a horrific juxtaposition of high refinement and anthropophagism:

After breakfast we elected a man by the name of Walker, from Detroit, for supper. He was very good. I wrote his wife so afterward. He was worthy of all praise. I shall always remember Walker. He was a little rare, but very good. And then the next morning we had Morgan of Alabama for breakfast. He was one of the finest men I ever sat down to - handsome, educated, refined, spoke several languages fluently - a perfect gentleman - he was a perfect gentleman, and singularly juicy. (67)

Moreover, after the ranks begin to thin, the previously mentioned “Oregon patriarch” is once again reconsidered for “election” and it is confirmed that:

he was a fraud, there is no question about it - old, scraggy, tough [...]. I finally said, gentlemen, you can do as you like, but I will wait for another election. And Grimes of Illinois said, ‘Gentlemen, I will wait also. When you elect a man that has something to recommend him, I shall be glad to join you again.’ It soon became evident that there was general dissatisfaction with Davis of Oregon, and so, to preserve the good will that had prevailed so pleasantly since we had had Harris, an election was called, and the result of it was that Baker of Georgia was chosen. He was splendid! (67-8)

Apart from the obvious political satire, Twain is anticipating, albeit in an understated manner, the more developed critique of the concept of civili-

zation we have observed in his later works: a critique of a society that has “invented a thousand useless luxuries, and turned them into necessities; it has created a thousand vicious appetites and satisfies none of them” (Twain in DeVoto 2004, 99). In “Cannibalism in the Cars” the situation is reversed as it is “necessity” that becomes “luxury” and “vicious appetites” are definitely satisfied, however, it is in this reversal that this story finds its satirical and grotesque force: within the space of a few pages we move from civilization and technology (the train) to savagery and from savagery to refinement or civilization, exposing the fine line, or absence of a line, that truly exists between supposed binary opposites. It is a parable that elucidates the predatory aspects of human nature and perhaps of the history of the frontier (or of America in general) given the dynamics – from necessity and survival to greed and opulence – and the setting. The fact that this story of regression occurs within a train car is of extreme interest, regardless of Twain’s intentions to use the railway as a metaphor of civilization or not, due to the fact that the railway has become, and already was at the time, the quintessential symbol of the march of progress,<sup>3</sup> the emblem of the “obscure kinship between [...] Machine power and the progressive forces of history” (Marx 2000, 214).

## 8 Conclusion

“Cannibalism in the Cars” demonstrates that as early as 1868, well before the Paige typesetter fiasco and the subsequent financial crisis, Twain is reflecting upon the idea of progress and the profound contradictions of civilization and the other texts we have analyzed so far prove in no uncertain manner how he returns to these themes repeatedly throughout his career. Moreover, a certain continuity in Twain’s treatment of these topics can be observed, and in comparing “The Great Revolution in Pitcairn” and *A Connecticut Yankee* in particular, we may concur that this short story does offer various analogous premises and developments that assist us in characterizing the critique of Civilization and imperialism as it appears in *A Connecticut Yankee*. Considering our initial theoretical premises regarding authorial agency, there does not even seem to be the need to implicate any “different implied authors” in the discussion of these varied texts as there are no great or “surprising difference[s] in ideological or ethical positions” (Phelan 2011, 135). On the other hand, Pitcairn does not necessarily equal Camelot nor does Butterworth Stavely equal Hank Morgan and the fact that the latter can be perceived as partially naïve and well-intentioned

3 Both Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden* and Ronald Takaki in *Iron Cages* give countless examples that attest to the fact that the steam locomotive had become “the voice of the civility of the Nineteenth century” (Emerson as quoted in Marx 2000, 17) as early

in contrast with the self-serving Butterworth is just one example of how these texts vary in their scope, intent, rhetorical strategies and dialogic properties. Nevertheless, "The Great Revolution in Pitcairn" and the other texts we have analyzed, render the characterization of Twain as a chauvinistic or anglophobic propagandist obsolete and they attenuate the idea of a supposed sudden loss of faith in progress. These texts become fundamental in defusing the notion that *A Connecticut Yankee* serves only as a simplistic contrast between America/Britain, Civilization/Savagery, Present/Past or Progress/Pastoral in limiting terms of Positive/Negative respectively, or vice versa. The idea that this novel represents a mere contraposition of a completely justifiable Yankee protagonist and the barbaric Arthurian aristocracy – which is at the basis of many "hard" (Carter 1982, 434) analyses of the novel – cannot subsist if we work inter-textually.

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as the 1840s (Marx 2000, 15; Takaki 1990, 150-1). The concept of the steam engine as a literal locomotive of progress had, in this period, already been eroticized (Takaki 1990, 149-51) and even satirized by Hawthorne (Marx 2000, 27) in *The Celestial Railroad* (1843). Closer to the publication of Twain's short sketch, although after, we find John Gast's widely circulated painting *American Progress* (1872) which famously shows a divine female figure in the center of the scene, advancing West and laying down telegraph lines as she does so while a locomotive follows immediately in her wake.

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