

the utopianism of survival

bellamy's looking backward

and twain's

a connecticut yankee

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In 1889, the year *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* was published, Mark Twain wrote to Sylvester Baxter, of the *Boston Herald*, commenting on another important novel of the period. The novel, *Looking Backward*, published a year before *Yankee*, is called (by an enthusiastic Twain) "the latest and best of the Bibles," while the author, Edward Bellamy, is referred to as "the man who has made the accepted heaven paltry by inventing a better one on earth."¹

Although not sharing William Dean Howells' enthusiasm for Bellamy's socialist vision, Twain was, as Howells states in his 1910 work, *My Mark Twain*, "fascinated with *Looking Backward* and had Bellamy to visit him."²

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, events began to take place which made the society of the year 2000 depicted by Bellamy appear attractive to Twain and many other readers. The rise of industrial capitalism, with its accompanying consolidation of wealth in the hands of the few, dampened the hopes of many who had hoped for a re-birth of a democratic spirit after the bloody purge of the Civil War. The so-called "Gilded Age" of the 1870s brought one of the nation's worst depressions, the Panic of 1873, which labor historian Joseph G. Rayback attributes to:

Reckless speculation and wholesale stock watering practices which destroyed the widespread purchasing power needed to ensure prosperity, together with hard times in Europe which

forced European investors to withdraw their funds from the United States and which reduced the demand for American agricultural products.³

The industrial economy of the late nineteenth century was, as historian John F. Kasson puts it, comparable to “an erratic and dangerous machine, capable of great bursts of activity, then inexplicable slumps.”⁴ Such slumps, writes economist Charles Hoffman, “occurring about once a decade . . . usually ushered in a period of instability disrupting the everyday lives of most people.”⁵

Following the depression of 1873, for example, the plight of the American worker became desperate. While the cost of food dropped only five percent between 1873 and 1876, the average worker’s daily wage fell between 25 and 50 percent. Unemployed workers took to the nation’s roads in such large numbers—looking for work by day and sleeping on park benches by night—that by 1876 the tramp seemed to have become a permanent American institution.⁶ Workers, flooding the relief lines as well as the highways, became increasingly receptive to radical proposals for alleviating the crisis. As Howard H. Quint suggests, in summarizing the tumultuous decade of the 70s, “the outbreak of the vicious class warfare in the Pennsylvania coal fields between the desperate Molly Maguires and the obdurate mine operators, the violent eruption of the railroad strikes of 1877, and their suppression in some localities by federal troops provided socialist agitators with a golden opportunity to propagandize sullen and desperate workers.”⁷ “For the first time in its history,” writes labor historian Samuel Yellen, “the country had been swept by a general-strike movement, and workmen had challenged their employers not as discrete local groups, but as a nation-wide mass. The supporters of the existing structure became frightened at the sudden vision of violent strife.”⁸

By the first week in August, 1877, nearly all the strikes had been defeated. Due largely to pressure by William Vanderbilt, president of the New York Central Railroad, the government called out thousands of troops to crush the strikes. “The strikes have been put down by force,” wrote President Hayes in his diary on August 5, “but now for the real remedy. Can’t something be done by education of the strikers, by judicious control of the capitalists, by wise general policy to end or diminish the evil?”⁹ Such sentiments for a peaceful solution to the crisis, however, meant nothing to railroad magnates like Jay Gould—whom Twain characterized as “the mightiest disaster which has ever befallen this country”¹⁰—when he bluntly stated that labor organizations were fine as long as they didn’t concern themselves with matters as wages, hours or working conditions.¹¹ Faced with such powerful opponents as Gould, Vanderbilt and very often the U.S. government itself, labor began to talk seriously about the formation of its own party. Since the Railroad Strike of 1877—involving more persons than any other strike of the century—“convinced labor that govern-

ment was hostile to its aims,” political parties of labor began to appear in all industrial centers of the nation, occasionally with successful results. In the state of New York, for instance, the labor ticket polled nearly 20,000 votes and one representative to the Assembly was elected from Elmira.¹²

The Great Railway Strike of 1877, although a failure in practical terms, was successful in generating a class consciousness in the American working class that showed itself dramatically in the following decade. The 1880s, unmistakably marked by an extensive acceleration of the factory and machine technique, was a period in which a wide differentiation emerged between the employer and employee, and “the dominant conception of the worker as an impersonal commodity became more sharply confirmed.”¹³ In self-defense, American workers began to turn in large numbers to the Knights of Labor which, formed in 1869, appeared as “an organization capable of wringing concessions from employers” and standing up to the likes of Vanderbilt and Gould. Membership in the organization grew from a mere 9,000 at the end of the 70s to over 700,000 in 1886.¹⁴ And the effective strikes against the Jay Gould railroad lines in 1885 made the Knights the undisputed leaders of the American labor movement. In response to the strike waves that swept the nation in 1884 and again at the end of 1885, led largely by the Knights, an intensive employer backlash developed, similar to that of the 70s. Strikebreakers, yellow-dog contracts, blacklists and Pinkertons became the dominant weapons of employers in their battles with the working class. The well-financed propaganda war against the labor movement was so successfully carried out by the industrialists that when the dynamite bomb went off in Chicago’s Haymarket Square, on the night of May 4, 1886, “the cry for vengeance was universal.”¹⁵ The “Haymarket Affair,” which Rayback contends represented the “end of an era” in American labor history, marked the end of the last important political movement of labor in the nineteenth century.¹⁶ The anarchistic International Working People’s Association, known as the Black International, fell victim to the Haymarket hysteria, dwindling in size to a few intellectuals.¹⁷ Even the decidedly anti-revolutionary Knights soon lost their foothold in the labor movement to the more conservative American Federation of Labor. Nevertheless, the “Haymarket Affair,” including the execution of four anarchists in 1887, “generated great interest in radical ideologies among American workers.”¹⁸

For American social observers of the period, the battle lines were usually clearly drawn. The most vocal proponents of industrial capitalism argued that the social catastrophes were merely the growing pains of a brave new technological society whose expansion could clearly be seen in the patent office figures and production records of the time. “Technology,” writes Kasson, “had been embraced as a principle of order and preserver of union, the harbinger of peace and the

guardian of prosperity.”¹⁹ Other voices, however, were being raised not in celebration of American technology but in warning or even condemnation. Works such as Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty* (1879) and Henry Demarest Lloyd’s *Wealth Against Commonwealth* (1894), for example, strongly criticized the unequal distribution of the fruits of American technology. Other writers, such as Twain and Bellamy, found the novel a useful mode for both criticizing contemporary society and offering possible solutions to the growing social problems. Particularly in the 1880s many American writers, greatly disturbed by the inequalities of the “Gilded Age,” began to formulate utopian solutions to bring about equality and democracy. In a 1972 *American Studies* article, Kenneth M. Roemer argues convincingly that these utopian writers had a greater influence among the late nineteenth-century American population than was previously believed.²⁰

In *The Obsolete Necessity*, an expansion of the *American Studies* article, Roemer points to the twelve-year period between 1888 and 1900 as “the heyday of American utopian novels and treatises,” during which at least 160 such works were published. Roemer wisely chooses not to omit from his study non-fiction utopian works, partially utopian writings or even “anti-utopian novels and treatises that often contained sophisticated criticisms of specific utopian ideas and implied alternative visions of ideality.”²¹ Thus, a work like *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, which is often considered not utopian at all, is discussed along with works almost always labeled utopian, such as *Looking Backward*.

If one accepts Frank E. Manuel’s position, in “Toward a Psychological History of Utopias,” that the utopia might well be “a sensitive indicator of where the sharpest anguish of an age lies,” both Bellamy’s and Twain’s novels can be quite historically instructive. The age which has just been described, the closing decades of the nineteenth century, was one of almost continuous turmoil, of economic, social and political disruption. As one moves from the sixteenth century of More’s *Utopia* to the nineteenth century of Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, one moves from what Manuel refers to as “utopias of calm felicity” to the “open-ended utopias,” containing numerous disturbing elements. Manuel enumerates some of these elements:

. . . a reorganization of industry, though picayune by our standards, in the eyes of contemporaries a revolutionary upheaval that posed unprecedented problems for urban life; a growing awareness among some of the misery of the new American working classes, generating a pathos as intense as More’s reaction to the first impact of the enclosure movement.

And by the third and final stage of utopian development—what Manuel calls the “Contemporary Eupychios” of the twentieth century—“the experience of two world wars, a mass slaughter of in-

nocents, and the horrendous aberrations of new social systems in the making” had nearly eliminated utopian ardor.²²

The “mass slaughter” and “horrendous aberrations” of the twentieth century resulted in a growing body of sociological and psychological literature dealing with the issue of survival in an age of chaos. Bruno Bettelheim, for example, has written extensively about Jewish survivors of Nazi concentration camps. Such camps, Bettelheim contends, are emblematic of a brutal machine age in which “savior and destroyer are no longer clothed in the image of man.”²³ And Robert Jay Lifton, in his 1970 book, *Boundaries: Psychological Man in Revolution*, discusses how our twentieth-century “legacy of holocausts and dislocations” has left modern man “confused about limits, no longer certain about where anything begins or ends.”²⁴ In his latest book, *The Life of the Self: Toward a New Psychology*, Lifton refines further some of the ideas of his earlier works in which he deals with survivors—of the Hiroshima holocaust and the Viet Nam war—as Bettelheim did with the survivors of the concentration camps. In *Self*, however, as Robert Lynn Satow points out in his *Contemporary Sociology* review of the book, Lifton “generalizes his understanding of survivor psychology to a general psychology” because he believes that not only literal holocausts but rapid social change “makes survivors of us all.”²⁵ While writing largely in the Freudian tradition, Lifton attempts to present a new model for psychiatric explanation which “shifts the emphasis from unconscious sexual motivations to an emphasis upon death, the drive for continuity with life and the person’s capacity for symbolic self-renewal.”²⁶

It is Lifton’s attempts to provide a conceptual alternative to psychoanalytic theory that earned *Self* its most negative critical reception. His arguments in this broad arena are widely criticized as being “not sufficiently detailed,”²⁷ unjust in their exaggeration of the “mechanistic side of Freud,”²⁸ loosely structured and, in general, not truly indicative of a genuine “new psychology.”²⁹ For the purpose of this paper, however, I am less concerned with the validity of Lifton’s alternative psychological paradigm than with his literary and psychohistorical remarks on the “survivor’s ethos,” which he argues the various holocausts of the twentieth century have helped create, “imposing upon all of us a series of immersions into death which mark our existence.”³⁰ Indeed, most of the reviewers critical of Lifton’s neo-Freudian revisionism warmly regard Lifton as “a man of conscience” who “has written sensitively about the survivors of Hiroshima and the Viet Nam war”³¹ and whose paradigm “has worked very convincingly with the extreme situations he has studied.”³² It is such “extreme situations” with which this paper shall be concerned in reassessing the late nineteenth-century utopian novels by Bellamy and Twain.

In the last chapters of *Self*, Lifton presents a rich commentary on the survivor as creator. In seeking to formulate a methodology that successfully connects the individual life with the historical superstructure, Lifton turns naturally to his own life experiences. As the son of Jewish immigrants, Lifton was imbued, he writes, “with a strong sense of the possibilities for individual and social transformation. But the other side of the message was the fragility of everything, especially for Jews.” Furthermore, much of Lifton’s Hiroshima work, a friend suggested to him, “was my path, as a Jew, to the death-camp experience” (87). Although his discussion of Camus, Vonnegut, Grass and other contemporary novelists is certainly engaging as well as persuasive, his exclusive concern with twentieth-century writers, particularly those writing after the bombing of Hiroshima, overlooks the possibility that the “literature of survival” might date back earlier, at least to the end of the nineteenth century. Perhaps the social and political “holocausts” discussed earlier—industrial conflicts, class battles, the great business crisis of 1873—created a “literature of survival” in the 1880s. In addition to these historical events, one might also include the explosive ideas of Darwin and Marx as contributors to this earlier survival ethos. After the publication of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* in 1859, with its emphasis on the “struggle for life,” writes Frank Manuel, “bloody images intruded into the dreams of the utopians.”³³ In an unpublished essay, “Was the World Made for Man,” Twain ironically assesses humanity’s evolution—one might more accurately say descent—from the trilobite on down, ridiculing the idea that it took “a hundred million years to prepare the world” for man.³⁴ The human being is certainly no god, Twain implies in *Yankee*, but merely a survivor in life’s struggle. Likewise, in the “dynamic socialist and other historically determinist utopias which span the greater part of the nineteenth century”³⁵—human beings are, at most, survivors of blind economic forces over which one has little control. After the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 and the move of Marx’s International Workingmen’s Association (“First International”) to New York in 1872, to escape control by Russian anarchists, Marxist ideas began to appear in utopian literature.³⁶ While Bellamy, for example, rejected the necessity of a class struggle for bringing about a new order, he shared Marx’s assumption “that capitalism had led to an ever-increasing concentration of capital and to the formation of giant enterprises, and in this way had prepared the way for the new stage—that of the whole economy being a superenterprise directed by the state and its state-appointed managers.”³⁷

In *Yankee* and *Looking Backward*, the protagonists, Hank Morgan and Julian West, are, in many ways, as much survivors as Camus’ Dr. Rieux or Vonnegut’s Billy Pilgrim. All four characters have come in contact with death, experienced holocausts of one kind or another and survived to present some kind of observation about

the experience. Both novels, to use Lifton's terms, envision both the image of holocaust (anti-utopian) and a form of possible revitalization (utopian).

Lifton's *Self* provides a language that can be useful in analyzing such problematical, late nineteenth-century works as *Yankee* and *Looking Backward* without banishing *Yankee* from the realm of utopianism entirely as many critics are willing to do. In discussing these two novels as examples of a utopianism of survival, I will devote more space to *Yankee* than *Looking Backward*, not merely because of its richer narration or its fuller character development, but, more importantly, because of its frequent exclusion from the roster of utopianism. By using Lifton's "survivor" paradigm, I hope to illustrate that Twain's novel is as defensible as utopian literature as Bellamy's. In beginning his discussion of the literature of survival, Lifton enumerates five psychological patterns which characterize the survivor: the "death imprint," death guilt, psychic numbing, morbid contamination and the struggle toward inner form. Although he first used these terms in relation to the survivors of the Hiroshima holocaust, the "death imprint" Lifton talks about is real "not only for those exposed to holocausts, or to the death of a parent or lover or friend, but also for those who have permitted themselves to experience fully the 'end of an era', personal or historical" (115). The era which was ending, for both Bellamy and Twain, was the era of geographic expansion, of the Jeffersonian dream that ended, according to Frederick Jackson Turner, with the closing of the geographic frontier in 1890 and its replacement by a man-made technological world. "I am living," wrote Twain in the spirit of Henry Adams, "in the noonday glory of the Great Civilization, a witness of its gracious and beautiful youth, witness of its middle time of giant power, sordid splendor and men ambitious, and witness also of its declining vigor and the first stages of its hopeless retreat before the resistless forces which itself had created and which were to destroy it."³⁸

In *Yankee*, both the holocaust which comes at the end of the novel and the "end of an era" phenomenon are important to the characterization of Hank Morgan as a survivor. The "death imprint," which Lifton identifies as a combination of "the survivor's indelible death image and death anxiety," and which "often includes a loss of a sense of invulnerability" seems to emerge, in one form or another, throughout the novel (114). Hank Morgan, the "Connecticut Yankee," is the head superintendent at a Colt firearm factory in Connecticut. In a dispute with one of his workers, he is hit on the head with a crowbar and awakens in sixth-century England. When he is captured and taken to King Arthur's court, Hank is sentenced to be burned at the stake. He not only escapes by using his Yankee ingenuity but gains the reputation as a magician whose powers far overshadow those of the magician Merlin and secures the position of powerful administrator.

The novel relates the experiences of Hank in the sixth century, trying to bring the democracy and industry of nineteenth-century America to medieval England. Before the narrative unfolds, however, Twain opens the novel by telling of his tour of an English castle where he meets a man who seems to know a good deal about medieval life. The man, who is actually Hank Morgan, gives the author a manuscript to read that is a first-person account of the story which follows. As early as this opening "Word of Explanation" chapter, the death image appears when Morgan—dubbed "the Boss" early in the novel—points out to the author a bullet hole in a suit of armor. Having been spirited back to the nineteenth century by Merlin, the Boss explains the bullet hole in a sixth-century suit of armor, on exhibit in Warwick castle, by telling his astonished host, "I did it myself."³⁹ From the early chapters of the narrative, when he is almost burned at the stake, until the final holocaust and his return to the nineteenth century to die, Hank Morgan confronts the image of death. In the castle of Morgan le Fay, the king's treacherous sister, for example, Hank is horrified to witness the stabbing of a young page who dared to trip in this wicked woman's presence. In his presentation of equally grotesque scenes throughout the novel—a smallpox infected woman rejoicing in the death of her husband and daughters, a young mother hanged for stealing cloth, slaves brutally chained together on the way to the market—Twain is depicting a history of decay where humanity, even after thirteen centuries, is still deceived and exploited. The human animal is a fragile being, and Hank Morgan merely a vulnerable survivor of generations of cruelty and ignorance.

In *Looking Backward*, the "death imprint," along with both personal and historical holocaust, play as important a role for Julian West, the main character, as they do for Hank Morgan in *Yankee*. West, a young Bostonian, awakens in the year 2000 A.D. from a hypnotically induced sleep begun in 1887. In his introduction to this new society by a Dr. Leete and his daughter Edith, Julian West soon learns that the cut-throat capitalism of his nineteenth century has been replaced in the twentieth century by cooperation and communal harmony. This new state, which West learns had evolved out of capitalism without violence, has taken the wealth out of the hands of a few individuals and placed it into the hands of the nation, the people as a whole. By its ever-increasing tendency toward consolidation, capitalism had sown the seeds of its own destruction. The personal experience of holocaust comes early in the novel for Julian when, after being brought out of his hundred-year sleep, he is told by Dr. Leete that "a layer of ashes and charcoal on top of the vault showed that the house above had perished by fire."⁴⁰ In the broader, more historical sense, Julian experiences what Mr. Barton refers to in his sermon, near the end of the novel, as "the last, greatest, and most bloodless of revolutions," where "men laid aside the social traditions and practices of

barbarism" (190). The structure of the novel itself, as Tom H. Towers points out in his essay, "The Insomnia of Julian West," is at least superficially based on a "typically Romantic pattern of life and rebirth" in which "West's hundred year trance is ostensibly a symbolic death from which the hero awakens into the spiritually more congenial America of the year 2000."⁴¹ This new birth, however, is not possible until West has passed through the holocausts of his own age and has experienced fully the end of an era—the era of nineteenth-century capitalist culture.

In the first two chapters of the novel, before he begins his sleep, West experiences and contemplates those very elements of the late nineteenth century which have been previously mentioned. In looking back upon America's recent past, Julian West, who has reached his thirtieth birthday in the year 1887, reflects upon an age of chaos. Following the great business crisis of 1873, he recalls, "strikes had become so common . . . that people had ceased to inquire into their particular grounds" and "the relationship between the workingman and the employer, between labor and capital, appeared in some unaccountable manner to have become dislocated." As West reaches the end of the nineteenth century, then, he comes to see that "the idea of indefinite progress in a right line was a chimera of the imagination, with no analogue in nature" (30,31). The "death imprint" for Julian West is, in part, the painful recognition of humanity's invulnerability. Human history, West muses, is comparable to the parabola of a comet, in which "the race attained the perihelion of civilization only to plunge downward once more to its nether goal in the regions of chaos" (31).

The second psychological pattern which Lifton discusses is that of "death guilt" which means simply that the survivor feels guilty about having survived while others have perished. This quality is much more difficult to locate in *Yankee* than the more general quality of the "death imprint." As William F. May points out in his essay, "The Sacral Power of Death in Contemporary Experience": "As Americans (given philosophically to pragmatism and culturally to technology) we are used to tackling problems in terms of . . . what we are going to do about it [death]."⁴² Hank Morgan, ultimately concerned with what is to be done next in his effort to bring modern society to the medieval world, has little time for guilt—at least not overt guilt.

Nevertheless, guilt plays a significant, if somewhat submerged, role in *Yankee*. It can be examined most clearly as an extension of the third psychological pattern which Lifton discusses—that of "psychic numbing." This quality, according to Lifton, represents a "constricting of the self and diminished capacity for experience." The numbing, often triggered by a serious loss, leads to a feeling that something within the self has died (43). For Hank, the "psychic numbing" manifests itself as an increased disinterest in the deaths of other

human beings. While early in the novel he is appalled by the murder of a single young page in Morgan Le Fay's castle, later on he becomes desensitized to death. For example, when he is challenged to a joust by his enemy Sir Sagamore, Morgan the Boss becomes Morgan the cowboy, lassoing knights from their horses and, when Merlin steals his lasso, picking them off with his pistols:

Bang! One saddle empty. Bang! Another one. Bang-bang, and I bagged two. Well, it was nip and tuck with me, and I knew it. If I spent the eleventh shot without convincing these people, the twelfth man would kill me, sure. And so I never felt so happy as I did when my ninth downed its man and I detected the wavering in the crowd which is premonitory of panic . . . the day was mine. Knight-errantry was a doomed institution. The march of civilization was begun.(315-316)

But three years later, the medieval world strikes back against Hank Morgan's single-handed technological and cultural revolution. The Boss, whose megalomania has reached mammoth proportions, renews his challenge to knight-errantry, letting it be known that, with fifty assistants, he would "stand up against the massed chivalry of the whole earth and destroy it" (316). The Catholic church, in response to the challenge, issues an Interdict and rallies 30,000 knights against the forces of the Boss. At the Battle of the Sand-belt, where Hank and a handful of boys take their stand against the entire might of the medieval world, the extent of Hank's "psychic numbing" becomes frighteningly evident as the Boss happily pulls the switch on the electric fence he has set up, killing thousands of knights. "Of course we could not count the dead," says Hank, desensitized by the destructive capacity of his technology, "because they did not exist as individuals, but merely as homogeneous protoplasm with alloys of iron and but-tons" (347).

It is not until he walks off the battlefield and confronts the dead directly and individually that Hank is able to experience the true horror of, and guilt regarding, the holocaust he has created. While examining the armored corpses at the end of the battle, Hank feels pity for the "poor fellow, dead as a doornail" who had reached for the hot wire only to be cooked in his own suit of armor. Likewise, he feels horror as he watches a knight in armor sneak across the battlefield to help a companion. Not realizing his comrade is already dead, he reaches to touch his motionless shoulder, and is himself electrocuted. "There was something awful about it," Hank exclaims (353). Finally, in the last chapter of the novel, Hank is stabbed by a knight named Sir Meliagraunce as he goes into the battlefield to look after the wounded. "The wound he receives from an injured enemy," John F. Kasson suggests, "is the product and symbol of his residual guilt."⁴³

When the Boss has returned to the nineteenth century to die, his

delirious final words—comprising the final chapter of the novel—seem to illustrate the closest Hank ever comes to overt death guilt. With his dying breath, Morgan calls out to his sixth-century wife, Alisande (Sandy), and their child, Hello-Central. Begging Sandy to stay with him, he looks back upon the holocaust of the Battle of the Sand-Belt as a “fantastic frenzy.” In words that come very close to guilt, the Boss cries,

“Ah, watch by me, Sandy—stay by me every moment—don’t let me go out of my mind again; death is nothing, let it come, but not with those dreams—I can’t endure that again.”
(360)

This final speech is perhaps the most obvious time that Morgan shows vulnerability in the novel. Furthermore, the final chapter depicts Morgan, once the prime mover of the technological revolution in the sixth century, showing signs of depression and despair, essential characteristics of psychic numbing. Hank’s guilt makes him appear a contemporary of the survivor—characters of more current fiction. As Raymond Olderman says in *Beyond the Wasteland*, his book about novels of the 60s,

The old theme of the American Adam aspiring to move ever forward in time and space unencumbered by memory of guilt or reflection on human limitation is certainly unavailable to the guilt-ridden psyche of modern man.⁴⁴

Julian West, like Hank Morgan and most other American fictional characters before the 1960s, was not plagued with a “guilt-ridden psyche.” Nevertheless, in the last chapter, when he dreams he has returned to the nineteenth century, Julian suffers a “death guilt” or “survivor’s guilt” far surpassing anything Hank experiences. In this dream, while walking through “this horrible babel of shameless self-assertion and mutual depreciation” (207) that was nineteenth-century Boston, Julian feels self-reproach and pity as he sees the ghostly faces:

I was moved with contrition as with a strong agony, for I had been one of those who had endured that these things should be. I had been one of those who, well knowing that they were, had not desired to hear it or been compelled to think much of them, but had gone on as if they were not, seeking my own pleasure and profit. Therefore now I found upon my garment the blood of this great multitude of strangled souls of my brothers. (214)

After realizing his return to the earlier century had been merely a dream, he is pierced by a “pang of shame, remorse, and wondering self-reproach.” In anguish, Julian West wonders “what had I done to help on the deliverance whereat I now presumed to rejoice? I who had

lived in these cruel, insensate days, what had I done to bring them to an end?" (214).

West, in many ways, is a much more vulnerable character than Hank and, consequently, much more susceptible to psychic numbing. In his "old" nineteenth-century life, West is plagued by insomnia over the radical dislocations of contemporary society.⁴⁵ In his "new" twentieth-century life, he experiences a temporary state of psychic numbing when "the emotional crisis which had awaited the full realization of [his] actual position and all that it entailed," was upon him (66). This crisis, which comprises most of Chapter 8, is miraculously terminated when the tender compassion of Dr. Leete's daughter, Edith, rescues West from losing his mental balance.

The fourth psychological pattern of the survivor derives from "the death taint" associated with "morbid contamination." The result of this pattern, according to Lifton, "includes mutual suspicion and distrust which survivors often experience toward each other, and social discrimination to which they are subjected in relation to others" (114). In the context of Hank Morgan, the contamination exists in the heart of all mankind, in the perversity of human nature itself. It is the recognition of this perversity—or vulnerability—that leads Hank to the realization, as Vernon Louis Parrington puts it, that "the human animal cannot lift himself to heaven by his own bootstraps, and heaven will not stoop to lift him."⁴⁶ Suspicion of "counterfeit nurturance," which Lifton claims is central to the "death taint," leads Hank to reject sentimentality about humanity and adopt a survival ethos. If one is to overcome psychic numbing, Lifton writes, "one must break out of the illusions supporting that numbing and begin, in Martin Buber's words, 'to imagine the real'" (130). Only then can the survivor bring new forms of revitalization to future generations. As Hank slips back and forth between two worlds, he realizes, as Parrington says, that "all alike are sham, all have issued from the conquest of man's native intelligence by his superstitions that are too useful to his masters to be dissipated."⁴⁸ Ironically, it is Hank's realization that the "contamination" is universal, emerging from inherent human weaknesses not merely Old World superstitions, that enables him to transcend the modernist's blind faith in progress and technology and to escape the "psychic numbing" of the technological holocaust. It is through two incidents in particular that Hank Morgan gains insight into the truth that humankind itself, not just the sixth century, is vulnerable to the rule of passion over reason.

The first incident appears in Chapter 20 where the Boss, accompanied by Sandy, rides to what he thinks is to be an ogre's castle where several noble ladies are being held captive; but it turns out to be merely a pigpen filled with pigs. To Sandy, however, the pigs are enchanted princesses and she proceeds to "fling herself upon these hogs, with tears of joy running down her cheeks, and strain them to her

heart, and kiss them and caress them . . .” Morgan’s comment on this grotesque sight is: “I was ashamed of her, ashamed of the human race” (140).

In the following chapter, the Boss and Sandy join a group of pilgrims who are on their way to the Holy Fountain shrine in the Valley of Holiness. When the pilgrims are greeted in Chapter 22 by one of the Boss’s agents who informs them that the fountain is dry, the pilgrims do not “do as horses or cats or angle-worms would probably have done—turn back and get at something profitable” but instead continue their journey to see the spot where the fountain used to be. “There is no accounting for human beings,” says the Boss bitterly (155).

Through incidents such as these, coupled with the betrayal of the Boss in the final chapters, when all but a handful of faithfuls join with the Church against him, Twain is making a pessimistic judgment about human nature. In the years following the publication of *Yankee*, Twain’s pessimism continues. In his *Letters from the Earth*, for example, written between 1900 and 1909, Twain writes bitterly,

Man is the Cruel Animal . . . the higher animals engage in individual fights, but never in organized masses. Man is the only animal that deals in the atrocity of atrocities, WAR. He is the only one that gathers brethren about him and goes forth in cold blood and with calm pulse to exterminate his kind . . . Man is the only animal that robs his helpless fellow of his country—takes possession of it and drives him out of it or destroys him.⁴⁹

Twain continues with this harangue on the human race’s cruelty for several pages, and concludes it by stating that the defect responsible for all this cruelty is the moral sense. “The Moral Sense,” writes Twain, “enables a man to do wrong;”⁵⁰ it plagues or contaminates all of humanity.

The language of *Yankee*, no less than the language of the later work, provides ample evidence of Twain’s pessimistic view of humanity. Not many readers today would accept the opinion of Kenneth Andrews who, writing in 1950, called the novel “a triumphant celebration of nineteenth century democracy.”⁵¹ Andrews, like many of Twain’s contemporaries, interpreted the book as an affirmation of progressive ideas. “But subsequent history,” says Leo Marx, writing in the 1960s, “has compelled us to take the ironic implications of the fable more seriously; for a while, it is true, the Yankee’s program for industrializing Arthurian England seems to be successful; but then a reaction against his regime sets in, and the end of the experiment in accelerated progress is gruesome.”⁵²

In *Looking Backward*, the “death taint” or “morbid contamination” is as much a reality for Julian West as it is for Hank Morgan. In

his early interactions with the Leete family, Julian experiences the ambivalence Lifton sees as basic to this pattern: "the combination of feeling in need of help while resenting that help which is offered, since it confirms an inner sense of weakness" (*Self*, 114).

In Julian's dream at the end of the novel, when he believes he has returned to the nineteenth century, he watches the masses on the street, "perceived that they were all quite dead" (215) and, believing he is now one of them, stares in perverse fascination:

As I looked horrorstruck, from one death's head to another, I was affected by a singular hallucination. Like a wavering translucent spirit face superimposed upon each of these brutish masks I saw the ideal, the possible face that would have been. The actual if mind and soul had lived. (214)

Later, at the luxurious home of his betrothed, he proclaims to an astonished and angry gathering of wealthy guests: "I have been in Golgotha . . . I have seen Humanity hanging on a cross" (215). Like Hank Morgan among the medieval peasants and princes, Julian West is a kind of Christ figure, bringing the Good News to the backward multitudes.

This leads to Lifton's final psychological pattern of the survivor—the one most closely associated with the conventional view of utopianism: "the struggle toward inner form or formulation." In Lifton's paradigm, this includes "the quest for significance in one's death encounter and remaining life experience" (115). In applying this to *Yankee*, the question arises: What does Hank Morgan, survivor of the holocaust, bring back to the nineteenth century? How can he provide a vision for renewal when, as David Noble points out in *The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden*, "Twain's final vision of the American future is a holocaust created by an engineer-dictator who destroys his nation and himself with the finest product of its science and technology—the ultimate weapon."⁵³ But the formulation Hank Morgan has to give to the nineteenth century exists in his tale of the holocaust: that is, that technology will not provide the way to human salvation.

Only because Morgan survived the holocaust is he able to bring the message of warning to his native century. "Participation in a holocaust," writes Lifton, "renders the survivor vulnerable to deformations, dislocations and imaginative impediments. The hard-won 'knowledge' of death . . . takes shape from the struggle to grasp the death encounter and render it significant" (115). The significance of Hank Morgan's encounter, then, takes the form of the message to the nineteenth century (and future centuries) that not only will technology not provide a utopia of prosperity and freedom, it may well lead to suicide for the human race.

Bellamy, on the other hand, depicts a society where technology and reason are humanely combined. The society of *Looking Back-*

ward is able to satisfy everyone's economic needs not so much because of the technical inventions, but because of rational social planning. And rather than reflecting the frontier spirit of individualism Twain so often relishes, the society of the year 2000 is collective, with all the means of production as well as all public services controlled by the state. To combat the money-hunger both Twain and Bellamy despise, everyone in this society receives the same amount of money, regardless of the amount or the quality of the work he or she does.

Although the utopian vision of *Looking Backward* is certainly more positive and concrete than that of *Yankee*, both books have equally genuine messages to pass on to future generations. Both visions, while pointing humanity down opposite paths, grow out of personal and historical holocausts that prepare the main characters, Hank Morgan and Julian West, to offer a survivor's credo to their society.

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notes

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5. Charles Hoffman, *The Depression of the Nineties: An Economic History* (Westport, Connecticut, 1970), 9.
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7. Howard H. Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism* (Indianapolis, 1953), 14.
8. Samuel Yellen, *American Labor Struggles: 1877-1934* (New York, 1974), 83-84.
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12. Rayback, 136, 137.
13. David, 6.
14. Rayback, 148, 162.
15. David, 208.
16. Rayback, 173.
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18. David, 531.
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28. Review by Jean Bethke Elshtain in *Commonweal*, CIV, No. 6 (March 18, 1977), 189.
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31. Elshtain, 188.
32. Browning, 412.
33. Manuel, 86.
34. *Twain-Howells Letters*, 777.
35. Manuel, 71.
36. Bruce, 227.
37. Fromm's "Forward," *Looking Backward*, xv.
38. Quoted by David Noble and Peter Carroll in *The Free and the Unfree: A New History of the United States* (New York, 1977), 241-2.
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42. Arien Mack, ed., *Death in American Experience* (New York, 1973), 121.
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