

From Utopian Dream to Dystopian Nightmare: A Protopian Response to *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the idea of protopia as propounded in Kevin Kelly's *The Inevitable* (2016), which is anticipated in Mark Twain's novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). Contrarily, Hank Morgan, the protagonist, feigns to achieve utopia, to secure power and privilege, not to realize utopia itself. However, Kelly's suggestion of technology as the center of civilization takes us toward the state of protopia. Unfortunately, it is misused for mass extermination in the novel. Drawing critical insights from Fick, Hansen, Lieberman, Dobski, and Kleinerman, this article investigates the scope of protopian response through reader-response theory and attempts to highlight how Hank's technopolitics (pure) is in resonance with Twain's protopian vision. It further reveals how it is corrupted by practical politics (impure) for power and comfort, for which Twain criticizes Hank. This research provides a blueprint for thinking through and avoiding the abuses of technoscientific power that the novel so horrifically puts on display for future readers. It endeavors to unearth the protopian reading scope to re-read this dystopian novel as a narrative of progress. This paper argues that to achieve the quintessential goal of humanity, protopia appears to be an appropriate model since utopia is unachievable.

Keywords: Dystopia, electricity, post-political, protopia, techno-theodicy, utopia, violence

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INTRODUCTION

This research is an unprecedented attempt to introduce a new-fangled term of protopia in Mark Twain's novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), and extend the domain of utopian/dystopian studies by incorporating a protopian perspective. Indeed, a utopian society is a distant dream because neither people nor society is perfect.

Even though the utopian idea is easily conceivable, this paper highlights the futility of such a model as it could unleash immense violence in its execution if it does not resonate with people's desire for freedom and choice. The impossibility of utopia¹ understood as a perfect creation necessarily leads to dystopia.² If an attempt is made to establish it, that could result in possible aggression, violence, and bloodshed.

Apart from highlighting the persisting problem in the utopian project, this article deals with the conceptual paradigm of protopia, created by the futurist Kevin Kelly in *The Inevitable* (2016). He defines protopia as "a state of becoming, rather than a destination. It is a process. In the protopian mode, things are better today than yesterday, although only a little better. It is an incremental improvement or mild progress" (Kelly, 2016, p. 26). The 'pro' in protopia stands for progress and prosperity. However, "the idea of 'protopia' came from the word 'pronoia' (the opposite of 'paranoia'), an exuberant feeling that the entire world is rooting for you," not against you (Bielskyte, 2021, para. 24). In the protopian world, people are connected by a common consensus to decide and work toward what they think is crucial for the betterment of society.

The concept of protopia demonstrates the relevance of dreams in designing a better

future, which is always considered a political act where technology plays a decisive role. It is essential to examine the impact of technology on society since technological progress without humanitarianism would inevitably lead to a dystopian future. Moreover, protopia is a state or situation that deals with a realistic society, unlike utopia and dystopia, where humans are no longer in crisis for survival (dystopia) or accepting perfection (utopia). Humans are somewhere in a liminal space, in anticipation, to perpetually chase for betterment. Therefore, protopia is a more effective form of social dreaming that allows for less pernicious interventions into social reality.

This article re-reads Mark Twain's novel *Connecticut Yankee* with a protopian approach. It investigates the trajectory of how the "techno-utopian vision" of Hank Morgan, the protagonist, fails in the novel and turns into dystopia (Lieberman, 2010, p. 64). Furthermore, it reveals how Twain anticipates the protopian model from the novel's beginning (in contrast to Hank's utopian dream), since the utopian model is no longer achievable. When Hank's society is heading toward protopia, it resonates with Twain's desire to use technology for the betterment of society. However, when his political dream to live in a utopia surpasses technological progress, the situation worsens and eventually becomes dystopia. The reason for the disastrous ending is made ostensible by the pseudo-humanitarianism of Hank's personality. Indeed, this article argues that his desires to achieve utopia by vicious means lead to the

1 Merriam-Webster (n.d.-b) dictionary defines utopia as "a place of ideal perfection especially in laws, government, and social conditions."

2 Dystopia in the same source is defined as "an imagined world or society in which people lead wretched, dehumanized, fearful lives" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a).

abolition of utopia in its essence. Therefore, protopia, as Kevin Kelly defines it, as a slow and gradual movement toward improving the existing condition, should be understood as a better choice.

In the broad spectrum of reader-response theory, this research creates a paradigm for future readers to choose either Hank's destructive (utopian) or Twain's progressive (protopian) path by considering both consequences while designing their future society. However, Twain distances himself from Hank because of his sheer corrupted nature, who, as a utopian ruler, emanates a desire for power and comfort. It takes the narrative toward a catastrophic ending, and for this, Twain criticizes him. The key objective of this research is to demonstrate that Kelly's idea of protopia has been present in earlier utopian writings, which illustrates a much larger concern with determining whether policies and advancements should aim at revolutionary and systematic changes (like Hank) or take smaller 'baby steps' over a more extended period. Twain's protopian narrative anticipated this to achieve a better future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study creates a vast panorama of scholarly responses to Mark Twain's novel *Connecticut Yankee* to demonstrate how it is an unparalleled attempt to introduce protopia in his narrative. It shows how Twain anticipated the protopian reading of the novel before Kelly coined the term 'protopia' in *The Inevitable* (2016). Johnson

(1990), in his article, "Future as Past, Past as Future: Edward Bellamy, Mark Twain, and the Crisis of the 1880s," argues that Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* (1889) is a dystopian novel in contrast to Edward Bellamy's utopian *Looking Backward* (1888). Both novels deal with social and political reforms and display the urge to restructure values and practices that prevailed in the 1880s by going beyond the present reality. Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* sets in the past, and Bellamy's *Looking Backward* looks forward to the future to demonstrate what is lacking in the present. In contrast, O'Neill (2007), in her article, "Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and U.S. Imperialism," presents the novel as a critique of American imperialism in Hawaii. She also traces Twain's journey from pro-imperialist to becoming anti-imperialist, evident in his lectures and letters to denounce the motives behind the colonization of Hawaii. Moreover, Fick (1988), in his article, "Mark Twain's Machine Politics: Unmetaphoring in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*," dwells on Twain's employment of technology and politics to achieve his desired society. He highlights how Hank's 'technopolitics' (pure) at the beginning is better than the later 'practical politics' (impure) of nineteenth-century America. By calling the Catholic church a 'political machine,' Twain consolidates the relation between a practical politician and Catholicism to demonstrate the corrupt nature of both. Fick argues that Hank acknowledges the limit of his vision based on technology, while Twain has not lost faith in the potential of the same.

Dobski and Kleinerman (2007), in their article, “‘We Should See Certain Things Yet, Let Us Hope and Believe’: Technology, Sex, and Politics in Mark Twain’s ‘*Connecticut Yankee*,’” explicate Hank’s attempts to find the physical permanence through technology (merely provide earthly comfort) first, which he accomplished afterward through his daughter. Hank initially focuses on the body and ignores the soul. In contrast, Arthurians are vice versa in their behavior. Abstinence from bodily desire fails to satisfy their soul since they ignore the bodily urge. Yankee ultimately achieves his soul’s desire for physical permanence through his daughter, which clergies cannot achieve, because it promises by sex. Hansen (1973), in her article, “The Once and Future Boss: Mark Twain’s *Yankee*,” argues that Twain’s *Connecticut Yankee* is an episodic narrative of Hank’s domination by fraud, fear, and force. He is a humanitarian on the surface of his personality, but he is selfish. All his acts are driven by self-centeredness from whom Twain distances himself to criticizing him. Lieberman (2010), in her article, “Hank Morgan’s Power Play: Electrical Network in *King Arthur’s Court*,” demonstrates Hank’s misuse of electricity to achieve comfort and power, which has been invented for the welfare of society. Hank’s electrified revolution reveals his sadist personality, apparently killing thousands of people in a few minutes.

Rohman (2009), in his article, “Mark Twain’s ‘*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*’: Serio-Comic and Carnival Prospects Unfulfilled,” shows Yankee as a

seriocomic persona (like Twain) satirizes socio-political condition with a touch of humor. However, Twain differentiates himself by acting as a frame narrator. The scope of carnivalesque reading stems from Twain’s serio-comic intentions. In contrast, Yankee fails to turn his circus sentiments into required serious actions since his utopian project is infected by self-interest. Therefore, the novel eventually results in a failed carnival. Kaplan (2022), in her article, “Realism and Power in Mark Twain’s: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*,” explicates the novel as a re-enactment of Robinson Crusoe’s story. Hank’s constructions of social reality through objective language and scientific realism are more an attempt to dominate than to reform medieval society.

From the literature review, different scholars have employed different approaches to studying Mark Twain’s novel *Connecticut Yankee*. However, the novel has never been analyzed from a protopian perspective, which remains the focal interest of this research. Drawing critical insights from Fick, Hansen, Lieberman, Dobski, and Kleinerman, this article unfolds the scope of protopian reading. It highlights how Hank’s techno-politics (pure), in resonance with Twain’s protopian vision, is corrupted by his practical politics (impure) for power and comfort, for which Twain criticizes him. The idea of ‘techno-theodicy’ and ‘post-political’ can also be seen as an extension of protopian ideals since it denounces those selfish acts of Hank, which are based on the sacrifices of humanity performed in the name of politics

by misusing technology. Kelly (2016) in *The Inevitable* suggests that technology will help us to achieve a protopian society, but Hank (a practical politician) uses it for mass extermination in the novel. By doing

so, Hank departs from Twain’s anticipated protopian narrative to a dystopian ending because of his insistence on living in a utopia for power and comfort.

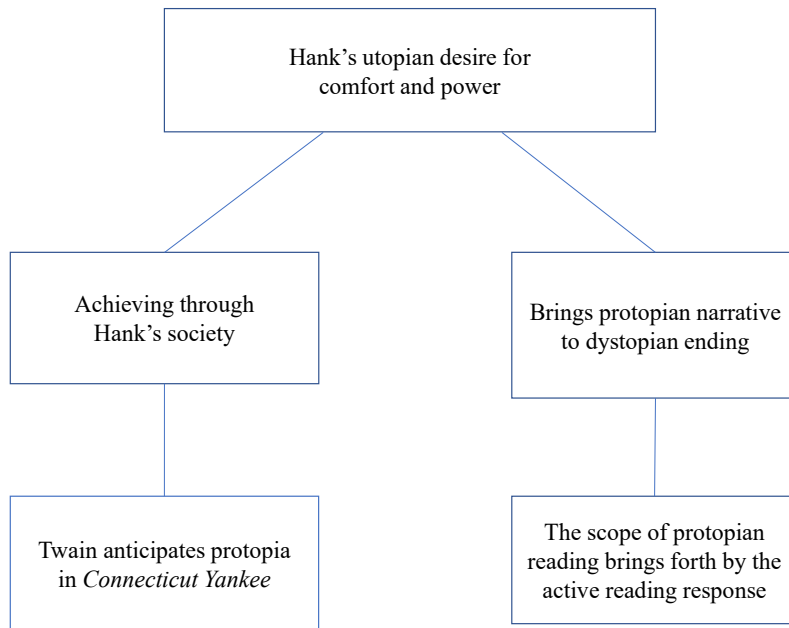


Figure 1. Conceptual framework showing how Twain’s anticipated protopia turned into a dystopia

METHODOLOGY

Referring to his contemporaries, Moore (1551) describes the term ‘utopia’ in his book *Utopia* as “Nowhere,” which means a place that does not exist (p. 8). Feminist utopians introduce ambivalent elements into their utopia, denying perfection as something to strive for. Moreover, Ernst Bloch (1954/1995), the German philosopher, insists on the feasibility of daydreams, thus, excluding the possibility of the realization of perfect towers in the air. Therefore, the idea of utopia is impossible to realize, and attempts to achieve it shall lead to the

destruction of society. Hence, the need to fill the utopian void has arisen with a protopia since utopias are unachievable. Protopia is not just a new term, but indeed a new perspective, or even it has the potential to become a new genre that has already existed in utopian/dystopian studies since the possibility of its fulfillment/defeat is based on the choices made by the people.

By doing a protopian reading of Twain’s novel, this article creates a paradigm for future readers to unearth the scope of protopian reading in utopian/dystopian narratives by looking at the choices that

lead to the failure of the desired narrative. Indeed, “the future is decided on the choices [people] continually make; it is also decided on the choices [they] do not make” (Google Design, 2019, 13:45). The choices made by Hank bring tremendous violence to Camelot.

Honestly, the decisions made are of utmost importance in determining whether policies and developments have taken smaller ‘baby steps’ over a longer period, as Twain predicted in the narrative, or have been intended to bring about radical and systematic changes (like Hank). At the novel’s beginning, Hank’s society is an appropriate example of a protopian society since technology and society co-exist within it, which Twain expects to evolve for a better future. However, Hank’s desire to live in a utopia for bodily comfort and power digresses the protopian narrative toward a dystopian ending.

In the broad spectrum of reader-response theory, the present study attempts to employ the paradigm of protopia for re-reading Twain’s *Connecticut Yankee* as the narrative of progress since passive reading has concluded the novel as a narrative of failure for more than a century. Furthermore, this article explores the possible desirable avenues that Twain anticipates but are barred by Hank’s arbitrary choices, thus, failing the protopian narrative. Future readers can use this study as a reference to evaluate and avoid the abuses of technoscientific power that Twain’s novel so horrifyingly exposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Techno-Theodicy After Liberalism: A Trajectory in *Connecticut Yankee*

Twain’s *Connecticut Yankee* is about a nineteenth-century American, Hank Morgan, who returns to sixth-century medieval England in reverie. In Camelot, he intends to implement the “techno-political vision” of nineteenth-century America, but it fails and turns into a dystopia because of his personality traits (Lieberman, 2010, p. 64). Kelly (2016) articulates that “every utopian scenario contains self-corrupting flaws. My aversion to utopias goes even deeper. I have not met a utopia I would want to live in” (p. 18). The ‘self-corrupting’ nature of the utopian model is conspicuous in the character of the utopian ruler (Hank), who deviates from the protopian narrative scope to become a dystopian tyrant to achieve power and comfort. This results in violence on an enormous scale because Hank wants to live in the utopia he has created, in contrast to the protopia anticipated by Twain. Indeed, utopia is not an appropriate model to follow as it cannot be achieved. Instead, protopia should aspire. The novel shows the journey of Hank from desiring to live in a utopia to becoming a dystopian tyrant in the end. In contrast, the protopian model aims toward progress rather than to aspire toward something ideal that ultimately culminates in dystopia.

The novel is about the collision of “the vernacular cultural tradition of progress,” which represents the nineteenth-century American culture brought by Hank Morgan in England, and the “reactionary counter

impulse of medievalism,” which represents the sixth-century medieval culture of England (Fermanis, 2007, p. 94). The impulse of culture and counterculture is inherent in Merlin, the magician, who represents superstition and the Old World, while Hank represents the magic of science and civilization in England. Therefore, there ensues a rivalry between them. Twain sets the novel in medieval England to display the superstition of the Old World, representing the rural America of his time. It also demonstrates how communities still run, as they do under British rule, also reflected in other nineteenth-century American writers like Washington Irving and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Twain juxtaposes medieval England and nineteenth-century America to deride Americans’ belief in magic and superstitions of his time, which is evident in presenting Jim as a conjuror who predicts Huck’s future through ‘hairball.’ However, Twain is the greatest conjuror of his time, forging the nation’s cultural memory by setting the novel in pre-Civil War society. He creates future remembrance of the past through past misremembrance to achieve a better future for black people in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). In *Connecticut Yankee*, Hank first intends to bring the ‘techno-political vision’ of nineteenth-century America into sixth-century England by introducing electricity, telephone, patent office, mail service, newspaper, typewriter, telegram, and man-factories, in which people need “to be brought up by education to ‘revolution grade’” to support his desired society (qtd. in Strout, 2012, p. 338).

Secondly, Hank creates his society, which is more rational, based on scientific temperament and logic, “Reflect: we are well equipped, well-fortified, we are fifty-four. Fifty-four what? No, minds—the capablest [sic] in the world” (Twain, 1889, p. 260). In his society, no one is beyond seventeen and less than fourteen. He has chosen them because their mind is free from the church’s influence. In contrast, the other people of Camelot have not been given a chance to understand Hank’s project. However, the monks in the fountain restoring scene have comprehended the working mechanism of the pump. It contradicts Hank’s belief that Camelot’s people are dull-headed under the church’s influence. If monks can understand the whole mechanism of who is the propagator of church beliefs, then why not others? Thus, it validates that Hank has been very biased and selective in his approach. His utopian ideals are apparent in the following statement when he announces his whole plan:

First, a modified monarchy till Arthur’s days were done, then the destruction of the throne, nobility abolished, every member of it bound out to some useful trade, universal suffrage instituted, and the whole government placed in the hands of the men and women of the nation there to remain. Yes, there was no occasion to give up my dream, yet awhile. (Twain, 1889, p. 181)

Hank wants to substitute the monarchy of England with the liberal democratic apparatus of nineteenth-century America, evident in his desire to propose universal suffrage.

Indeed, the abolition of the monarchy and the introduction of universal suffrage and democracy have historically not resulted from peaceful and gradual (protopian) change but from the revolution that falls in the line of utopia. Twain has a strong distaste for anti-democratic forms of government (whether monarchy, slaveocracy, or empire). However, he is critical of Hank's republican and the killing of thousands of people to achieve the desired state. Moreover, Twain has shown the possibility of social reform if Hank's decisions are taken by giving precedence to social concerns over selfish desires. After becoming a 'Boss,' Hank utters, "My power was colossal . . . yes, in power I was equal to the king . . . there was another power that was a trifle stronger than both of us put together. That was the church" (Twain, 1889, pp. 37–38). He corroborates the church as the biggest hindrance in fulfilling his dream to achieve a republican state. Therefore, Hank's "investment in technology marks the divergence from God" (Evans, 2021, p. xv). It could be seen as an attempt to substitute the established religion with "techno-theodicy" to achieve a better world (p. 159). At the 'Valley of Holiness,' he manipulates the people of Camelot since he "is also reinforcing their belief in the church. Nor does he mind using his power to reinforce the monarchy" (Hansen, 1973, p. 65). He portrays monarchy and the church as his biggest obstacle in fulfilling his project; however, he has no personal animosity with either. Indeed, he is diplomatic in maintaining his humanitarian self to obscure his selfish desires. Hank's

pseudo-humanitarianism to civilize Camelot divulges his double personality, "I would boss the whole country inside of three months; for I judged, I would have the start of the best-educated man in the kingdom" (Twain, 1889, p. 11).

Hank's dream to bring nineteenth-century civilization to Camelot corresponds to his selfish desire to bring order because the people of the same society are seen as animals, "there were people, too; brawny men, with long, coarse, uncombed hair that hung down over their faces and made them look like animals" (Twain, 1889, p. 8). Even those he has been fighting for are named "human muck" (p. 256). Throughout the novel, the people of Arthur's England are called "animals, children, savages or white Indians" (Hansen, 1973, p. 68). Hansen (1973) accentuates Hank's biased personality by stating that "Yankee a humanitarian... is very much on the surface of his personality. But at the bottom he enjoys the spectacle of acres of people" (p. 64). Thus, Hank's image of being a vanguard of civilization is a sham because his idea of civilization is not wholly kindled for the well-being of people but to fulfill his latent hope to live a comfortable life.

Hank's interest in technology arises from bodily comforts, "it is little conveniences that make the real comfort of life" (Twain, 1889, p. 32). For these comforts, he must "invent, contrive, create, reorganize things; set brain and hand to work, and keep them busy" (p. 33). He becomes blind to such an extent that he "ignores what is good for his soul" (qtd. in Dobski & Kleinerman, 2007,

p. 607). His fascination with electric power reflected in “the potential for networks to foster social progress is of lesser central to the novel than the allure of using power (electrical and otherwise) for personal gain” (Lieberman, 2010, p. 67). Hank describes his vitality when he discovers telephone lines at the Valley of Holiness, “I was breathing the breath of life again after long suffocation. I realized, then, what a creepy, dull, inanimate horror this land had been to me all these years” (Twain, 1889, p. 136). Lieberman (2010) demonstrates Hank’s love for power by stating that “The Yankee’s technological vision is federalist, not socialist... because it simultaneously distributes and centralizes power, incrementally improving social relations for many while allowing him... to remain in control at the center” (p. 64).

Hank demolishes his power network and civilization because he knows its potential danger, which can turn against its inventor when he says, “They will turn our science against us” (Twain, 1889, p. 250). However, the problem is not in the technology but in manipulating it by the people to fulfill their yearning. Future dreaming is not only a political act; using technology to achieve the same comes under the political category. Hank bestows the benefits of technology whenever he wishes, but when people confront him, he demonstrates the destructive nature of the same. Twain (1889) describes the horridness of an electrocution incident:

He was near enough, now, for us to see him put out a hand, find an upper wire, then bend and step under it and over the lower one. Now he arrived at the first knight—and started slightly when he discovered him. He stood a moment—no doubt wondering why the other one didn’t move on; then he said, in a low voice, “Why dreamest [sic] thou here, good Sir Mar—” then he laid his hand on the corpse’s shoulder—and just uttered a little soft moan and sunk down dead. Killed by a dead man, you see—Killed by a dead friend, in fact. There was something awful about it. (p. 262)

The invention of electricity has become deadly because it has been misused. Although killing people with the current is not very cost-effective, Clarence delineates:

You don’t want any ground connection except the one through the negative brush. The other end of every wire must be brought back into the cave and fastened independently and without any ground connection. Now, then, observe the economy of it . . . You are using no power; you are spending no money, for there is only one ground connection till those horses come against the wire. (Twain, 1889, p. 252)

By using technology contrary to its objective, Hank has shown how political technology can become; and how by creating havoc, it has deviated from the path of humanitarianism, for which it is invented.

The relation between politics and technology becomes crucial because Hank initially sees politics as a veil to achieve technological progress and comfort. Later, his political dreams (as a practical politician) to live in a utopia surpass technological progress, and the situation worsens and eventually culminates in dystopia. In the battle of Sand-belt, Hank has been compared to Hitler; his “personality prefigures the careers and the personalities of twentieth-century dictators” (Hansen, 1973, p. 67). Like Hitler, he has been performing his selfish acts in the name of the people, wherein “The motto of Hitler’s Germany—*Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer*—it was the people who came first . . . as the Yankee is inclined to do, and yet respond to actual persons with contempt, and hatred, and a distrust” (p. 67). The problem is not in the dream of having a Republican state but in misusing technology to achieve it. He does not realize that his path to fulfill his dream is destructive. In Hank’s case, violence at an enormous scale is made possible by “a new adversary that appeared—the modern mind” using electricity for mass extermination (Evans, 2021, p. 63). It shows something fundamentally modern about the violence wielded by a person who has been more dominant over thousands of people. He does not even think that people as humans constitute humanity; ironically, he has been sacrificing the same humanity for the welfare of humanity itself. In the battle of Sand-belt, “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” (Twain, 1889, p. 264). The mass incarceration of the people was performed to achieve a noble cause so that a certain kind of life could thrive in medieval England.

The utopian dream has set Hank on a civilizing mission for which he sacrifices the life of thousands of people. It would be wrong to compare Mark Twain with Hank Morgan since Twain has been criticizing him for his selfish decisions, leading the text to a dystopian ending, anticipated as a protopian narrative. Twain writes to Dan Beard, “this Yankee of mine . . . can build a locomotive or a Colt’s revolver, he can put up and run a telegraph line, but he’s an ignoramus nevertheless” (qtd. in Hansen, 1973, p. 69). Like a satirist, Twain “[channels] his indignation into an appropriate literary form . . . distancing himself from the object of critique, one of those objects being Hank Morgan” (Sanchez, 2007, p. 23). Hansen (1973) states that Twain has “separated himself from Hank Morgan by employing a narrative frame, the western humorist’s favorite device for separating his own personality from that of his vernacular character” (p. 69). Thus, Twain establishes enough distance to condemn him for his reckless acts.

Indeed, “to understand violence, one must first understand its sacred claims” (Evans, 2021, p. 18). By doing so, Hank shows the loftiness of his project and the relevance of people’s sacrifice, “Yankee is continually inviting us to weep over the

victims of medieval brutality—that earn him a reputation for humanitarianism” (Hansen, 1973, p. 70). He has been compared to Hitler, and the mass incarceration in the battle of Sand-belt “is reminiscent of a fascist regime where sacrifices of people are about the disposability of human populations, those countless, nameless, and faceless victims, who experience violence” (Evans & Lennard, 2018, p. 21). Like Hitler, Hank has killed people for an idea; he has no personal animosity toward them, nor is he troubled by the aristocracy. Therefore, it is crucial to ponder over the self-corrupted nature of the utopian model apparent in Kateb’s (1963) statement:

Give up the vision of utopianism, though it may be a worthy vision because there is no way to go from the real world to utopia; or if there is a way, it could be none other than the way of violence; and that is either too costly or too unreliable. (p. 18)

Hank’s declaration of his utopian project before the battle of Sand-belt is to defend his pseudo-humanitarian facade so that he is not seen as someone awaiting the war and his victory. Hank’s utopian ideals are based on the assimilation and exploitation of others; if they disagree with his vision, their complete annihilation would also contribute to it. Indeed, Hank does not want to realize utopia; his goal is to secure power and privileges and not utopia itself. He is very shrewd in his behavior and knows how to manipulate these people, whom he sees as an ignoramus, “these animals didn’t reason,” while Hank had

no reason (Hansen, 1973, p. 69). He looks at the future before his eyes because the future is always now. Although he knows what happened in America, he has not learned anything from the past, a future in medieval England. Eventually, Hank defeats his enemy, but his failure lies in the failed social experiment of his civilization and the pervading “stench of their dead bodies” (qtd. in Andersen, 1969, p. 21). Even though they have wiped out the whole church army, in a postscript chapter, Clarence acknowledges that “we had conquered; in turn, we were conquered” (Twain, 1889, p. 265). Thus, Hank’s utopian project has turned into a dystopian nightmare.

(Un)making of Protopia in *Connecticut Yankee*

The battle of Sand-belt has shown that it is impossible to impose utopia on people, but it could have been envisioned and pursued with indomitable zeal. However, it subsequently lost track in the process of being achieved concretely. Utopia is a layout of a perfect society, where imperfect humans strive for perfectibility but fail. Fredrick Polak argues that “the image of the future affects the actual future” because, keeping in mind a blueprint of a perfect society, a society cannot prosper (qtd. in Sargent, 1982, p. 574). Further, a series of questions arise, like what should people do to improve society? What strategies should be employed? If the utopian model is no longer possible, then what? This research proposes a conceptual paradigm of protopia, designed by Kevin Kelly in *The Inevitable*,

to fill the void created by unachievable utopia. Furthermore, a question arises why protopia is better than utopia. Indeed, because it precludes the possibility of failing like a utopian model; therefore, it is worth aspiring for. Kelly suggests that technology will take us toward the state of protopia, but its treatment in the novel under scrutiny is destructive. It leads to the dystopian ending of the novel, initially anticipated as a protopian narrative.

The violence resulting in achieving a utopian model in the battle of Sand-belt shows that liberalism is dead. From the devastating ashes of liberalism, a new order of 'techno-theodicy' has arisen. It means that technology has emerged as a new religion that proved to be the only salvation for social progress, and what is being sacrificed in that process of achieving salvation is humanity itself. Hank demonstrates himself as a benign tyrant who uses technology for "its methods and its new antireligious worldview, to create vast killing machines that can remain wholly blind to their moral evils precisely because they promise such tremendous moral goods" (Dobski & Kleinerman, 2007, p. 613). Hank is also blind to the evil side of his utopian project, apparent in the destruction it unleashed in the battle of Sand-belt. He controls the utopian fantasy and thus controls the future. The people of his society are just puppets in his hands who kill their people to endorse Hank's project. His idea of humanity is "meant to be realized through the wars fought to prove its very existence" (Evans, 2021, p. xi). However, there is a

need to understand that "for individuals to be humane, they must aspire to humanity," unlike Hank, who pursues his dream without giving any thought to killing a thousand people (Evans, 2021, p. xiii). Indeed, for the welfare of society, the people of Camelot do not need a technology-driven experience ruler (like Hank) but someone who knows how to use it for social welfare.

Why has Hank kept his civilization hidden from the eyes of common people; is it not for their benefit? Instead of proclaiming, he should have shown what progress, like electricity, schools, factories, and newspapers, can bring for the betterment of society, as anticipated by Twain's protopian narrative. Had he shown them the benefits of his civilization and what else it could bring, it might have been possible to accept his techno-political project. It could have brought modernity and civilization to medieval England, but he did not care because his selfish desires preceded social welfare. Everyone to whom he has shown the benefits of technology and civilization accepts it. Like the monks for whom he restores the holy fountain well, "To those monks that pump was a good deal of miracle itself" (Twain, 1889, p. 131). They understand the working mechanisms when he "taught them the mystery of pump" (p. 131). Later, other monks are also astonished to see the newspaper, which they have never seen before.

In the beginning, Hank's society is an appropriate example of desired protopian society, which Twain expects to evolve by incorporating all because they believe

in technology and society to co-exist to achieve a better world. However, Hank does not expand that circle. Therefore, a question arises, why does he not illuminate the dark land of England when he is just a step behind, “I stood with my hand on the cock, so to speak, ready to turn it on and flood the midnight world with light at any moment” (Twain, 1889, p. 48). Instead of doing that, he first wants to “have had the Established Roman Catholic Church” on his back (p. 48). It shows that Hank’s ideals are utopian; had they been protopian, he would have used electricity to enlighten Camelot instead of retreating from that opportunity. If electricity has been invented for the masses, why does not he reveal his project to the church and stop Camelot from descending into hell by killing a thousand people?

Hank does not even try to convince the church because he believes that “no people in the world ever did achieve their freedom by goody-goody talk and moral suasion: it being immutable law that all revolutions that will succeed, must begin in blood” (Twain, 1889, p. 103). Without a second thought, he says, “I would take fifty assistants and stand up against the massed chivalry of the whole earth and destroy it” (p. 237). Therefore, the idea of ‘liberalism’ is dead in the novel since his true intentions have been revealed to secure power and privileges, not utopia itself. Had Hank been thinking about the welfare of society, he would have tried to convince the church about his project. Although he tries to persuade the nobility about the petty soap, “If the lords and ladies were afraid of it, get them to try it on a

dog... that could convince the nobility that soap was harmless”, he is actually trying to convince them about it and not about the nobility of his project (p. 79). He is making his stand stronger to have the upper hand in the impending war.

The people of Hank’s society are reluctant to kill their people, evident in their words, “Do not ask us to destroy our nation” (Twain, 1889, p. 257). Hank is teaching them the moral lesson of duty by showing the nobility of his project and the irrelevance of people’s sacrifice, “None but the nobles and gentry are knights... we shall have to fight nobody but these thirty thousand knights” (p. 257). He makes them believe that the “future can be enriched by sacrifices in the present” (Evans, 2021, p. 42). His act of “violence is not an act of spontaneous rage, but a controlled, reasoned, and calculated” step toward the fulfillment of his dream (Evans, 2021, p. 138). However, a series of questions arise; are the nobility and the gentry classes not a part of the nation? Why have they been seen as a scapegoat to achieve a desirable state? Is there no alternative to achieving a better future than sacrificing humanity? Protopia is an appropriate way to achieve a better society, which Twain anticipates from the novel’s beginning. However, Hank debunks it because it does not resonate with his desire to live in a utopian world. Thus, he becomes the object of Twain’s indictment and a corrupt dystopian tyrant himself.

Hank fears that the people of Camelot “will turn our own science against us” (Twain, 1889, p. 250). Therefore, he

demolishes his whole civilization to save himself. However, a question arises, how can these people use civilization against him, who are not even aware of how it works, and for what purpose it has been created? If Hank had established that civilization for people, he would not have demolished it quickly. What is the point of achieving a republican state that makes him mindless to such an extent that killing thousands of people does not ache his heart? The republican state (Twain's desired protopian) could have been achieved by taking adequate actions to bring reform since King Arthur had already died. Instead of choosing war, a step must have been taken to create a progressive nation that Protopia always aims at. Thus, Hank's liberalist utopia fails and turns into dystopia since it is not heading from worse to better but worse to worse. It is contingent, apparent in his decisions to achieve his utopian ideals. It corroborates that the "future is decided on the choices [people] continually make, it is also decided on the choices [they] do not make" (Google Design, 2019, 13:45). The novel brings tremendous violence at the end because of Hank's choices.

From the beginning of the text, it has been projected as a protopian novel, evident in Hank's declaration of his dream of a republican state and the plan he charts out to achieve the same. However, his progressive society and the technology invented for humanitarian evolution have not been used appropriately to achieve desired objectives. Therefore, by highlighting the flaws in Hank's narrative, it has already been pointed

out what wrong decisions he has made and how the narrative has deviated from the expected protopian ending to a dystopian one. This study reinforces the belief that choices matter; it is not about what people are capable of but what people do with what they are capable of. It is also evident in what Hank has done and what he could have done to achieve the protopian state. The future cannot be predicted, but it can be created. Although what Hank has created is not something commendable.

Protopia aims to decenter the dominance of a privileged worldview (like Hank) to establish an egalitarian society as Twain has planned out. However, Hank's selfish motives hinder realizing the desired world. Protopia resonates with the idea of "post-political," in which politics ceases to exist when technology surpasses politics by engineering (Evans, 2021, p. 157). However, this study is not denying the political aspect of technology in general but criticizes Hank's practical politics (impure form) since techno-politics (pure form) could have achieved the protopian society. It seems within reach when Hank initially focuses on technological progress; his society is heading toward protopia. Nevertheless, the situation worsens when his political dreams of living in a utopia surpass technological progress. The idea of 'techno-theodicy' and 'post-political' can also be seen as an extension of protopian ideals since both transcend practical politics and support Twain's techno-politics to achieve a better future. In the name of politics, Hank is perpetrating cruelty with little justification

or regret. Hence, a question arises, what legacy would the protopian model leave behind for future generations? It would certainly create a more peaceful society based not on humanitarian sacrificial principles but on technology as the center of its existence to use for social welfare. As a corrupt politician and sadist, Hank practices cruelty and considers it a part of humanity. The future would have been productive if Hank's dream resonated with Twain's objective to achieve a protopian world without aspiring toward something ideal.

Protopia aims to solve problems and imagine future problems based on people's engagement with past issues. Thus, the cycle goes on since it is a never-ending process. Protopia is an appropriate model to follow, but it does not mean that technology is flawless, which is exquisitely articulated by Kelly (2016), "Yesterday's technological successes caused today's problems, and the technological solutions to today's problems will cause tomorrow's problems. This circular expansion of problems and solutions hides a steady accumulation of small net benefits over time" (p. 26). However, it depends on technology's usage, whether it is a boon or a bane. Although modernity has undoubtedly brought terrible violence, people probably live in the most peaceful world compared to the long history of violence. The world will never be as precise as humans want, but it does not mean they cannot improve it, collectively and individually.

CONCLUSION

The research concludes that Hank pretends to achieve the utopia dream, to secure power and privileges which come with the entitlement of the 'Boss,' not to realize utopia itself. His selfish acts digress the anticipated protopian narrative scope to a dystopian ending, for which Twain criticizes him. The article, thus, suggests that while imagining future goals, utopian and social reformers (like Hank) should tie these goals to the welfare of society first. The eventual reality's scope depends on the initial dream's scope. Therefore, they do not lose sight of this throughout the lengthy process of executing plans in the hope of accomplishing utopian goals. Unlike Hank, they must give precedence to social concerns over selfish desires. However, Hank fails to meet Twain's expectations, ostensibly in his desire to live in a self-sustained utopian society for bodily comfort and power. Indeed, to achieve the quintessential goal of humanity, protopia appears to be an appropriate model to follow since utopia is unachievable.

Protopia is not just a novel term but a novel perspective and method, and it even has the potential to become a new genre. The research indicates that Kelly's concept of protopia has been present in previous utopian works, highlighting a bigger issue of deciding whether policies and advancements should aim for radical changes (like Hank) or take 'baby steps' every day to improve society. It divulges the scope to re-read the

novel with a protopian perspective, which the body of the text has embodied and left open-ended for future readers. Indeed, protopia is an appropriation of both utopia and dystopia since it deals with the real world where technology has not become a means of destruction, as shown in the novel. However, a medium of progress is constantly striving to create a better future for people. It creates a world where society and technology flourish side by side, as imagined by Kevin Kelly in *The Inevitable*. Thus, by reading this novel with a protopian approach, the present study has lent a new perspective to Twain's novel and created a paradigm for other readers to follow the footprint of this article to re-read the dystopian novels as a narrative of progress.

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