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A Chicago Architect in King Arthur's Court: Mark Twain, Daniel Burnham and the Imperialism of Gilded Age Modernity

TIMOTHY A. HICKMAN

Novelist Mark Twain and Chicago architect Daniel Burnham held very different views of the post-1898 US annexation of Spain's former colonies. Twain was among the country's most outspoken critics of expansion, while Burnham accepted an appointment as chief designer of the "new" Manila, under US occupation. This article argues that these contrasting positions were embedded in differing constructions of modernity, and, further, that they can be excavated in earlier projects by both figures. The different iterations of modernity on display in Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) and Burnham's design for the World's Columbian Exposition (1893) help us to understand these very different attitudes toward empire in 1898 and beyond.

I sat down by my fire and examined my treasure. The first part of it – the great bulk of it – was parchment, and yellow with age. I scanned a leaf particularly and saw that it was a palimpsest. Under the old dim writing of the Yankee historian appeared traces of a penmanship which was older and dimmer still – Latin words and sentences: fragments from old monkish legends, evidently. I turned to the place indicated by my stranger and began to read – as follows.

Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, 1889

INTRODUCTION

These words appear near the beginning of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), making clear that the novel's central

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occupation is to be an act of reading, not of time travel.¹ They are uttered by a fictional American tourist called “M. T.,” who had been given the text by a stranger after a day’s outing to England’s Warwick Castle. This device helped to establish the novel’s realism by setting it in the Warwick Arms, an unremarkable British hotel, at about the same time as its 1889 publication date. The palimpsest, which is entitled “The Tale of the Lost Land,” contains the account of the Yankee’s adventures in Arthurian England and M.T.’s reading of it takes up most of the book. Readers may be forgiven if they mistake that story for the novel’s principal concern. The most fundamental operation of *Connecticut Yankee* was to establish the confrontation of a realistic present by a fantastic past based upon a highly skeptical reading of a suspicious text, but this prickly relationship is not simply a temporal encounter. It is also spatial. That is, *Connecticut Yankee*’s production of its nineteenth-century present as a break from the past – its production of the present as *modern* – was not defined simply against a far-distant time but also against a faraway place. In *Connecticut Yankee*, modernity is American and antiquity is English.

This sort of time/space juxtaposition, used as a means to emphasize the novelty of the present by linking it to a faraway past, was not unique to *Connecticut Yankee*. Only four years later, Frederick Jackson Turner based his frontier thesis on a reading of the 1890 census, arguing that the American past, signified by the presence of an allegedly open frontier, was now closed. Turner, like Twain, established the distinctiveness of the present by describing it as a definitive breaking away from the past. As was the case in *Connecticut Yankee*, Turner underscored this sense of difference not simply by describing the past as a temporal category, but also by placing it on a map. For Turner, that location was an ever-shifting frontier in the American West. In his own words, “four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.”²

Others described late nineteenth century America as the most recent and advanced example of a still-continuing historical process, iterated first in Europe and then in America. Henry Van Brunt was a prominent Boston and Kansas City architect who designed the Electricity Building at Chicago’s 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. Writing in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Van Brunt argued that civilization had leaped forward at particular moments in the past,

¹ Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, Norton critical Editions, ed. Allison R. Ensor (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982; first published 1889), 10. Subsequent references to the novel will appear parenthetically within the text.

² Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), 38.

and he described them as “evolutions out of the dark into the light.” He then gave a series of examples, suggesting that “in the age of Pericles, in the Italian Cinquecento, in the defection of Luther, in the court of Queen Elizabeth, may be found four of these points of departure.” Van Brunt invoked these venerable European examples because he believed that they underlay and underwrote the present moment, where he located his latest and therefore most evolved instance of cultural transformation: “In the Columbian Exposition we are probably destined to see a fifth, which . . . may perhaps be more definite and recognizable than any of the others.”³ As such, he described the fair – especially its claim to be modern – as a palimpsest. It was the latest inscription of a cultural process that had been written and rewritten throughout the history of the Western world.

Van Brunt was one of only five members of the Columbian Exposition’s Board of Consulting Architects. It is therefore unsurprising that the man who appointed him – Daniel Burnham, the fair’s chief of construction and director of works – held a similar view. The design of the fair and its buildings, which emerged under Burnham’s leadership, and many of the exhibitions served to produce a profound sense of modernity by comparing the present to a past that was both temporally and spatially distant, showing further that this strategy was not limited to written discourse. As with the written examples above, the Columbian Exposition’s visual production of the late nineteenth-century present as modern relied on a juxtaposition of all that was new to a version of the past as antiquated. The exposition likewise shared the written texts’ construction of the past as a spatial category, as another place. All of these cultural productions, therefore, written or visual, relied on a shared technique. They projected an image of the past out of themselves in order to break with it and thus to assert and to emphasize the novelty of the present. In doing so, they created a profound sense of the here and now as radically new – that is, of the present as *modern*.

Most importantly, this temporal and spatial relationship was not one of mere difference. The distinction was hierarchical. While imagining the present as superior to the past in temporal terms, or envisioning the present as progress, is not surprising, the implications of its spatial representation – the depiction of the past as an inferior *place* – are more troubling. This essay will examine two contrasting examples of this culture of hierarchized times and places, particularly in terms of their implications for late nineteenth-century US imperialism. After the 1898 annexation of the Philippines, Mark Twain became a prominent member of the Anti-Imperialist League, while

³ Henry Van Brunt, “The Columbian Exposition, and American Civilization,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 71, 427 (May 1893), 577.

Daniel Burnham moved in the opposite direction, accepting a government appointment as the chief designer of the “new” Manila. The different iterations of modernity on display in Twain’s *Connecticut Yankee* (1889) and Burnham’s design for the Columbian Exposition (1893) help us to understand these very different attitudes toward empire in 1898 and beyond.

MODERNITY AS CULTURAL CRISIS IN *CONNECTICUT YANKEE*

Connecticut Yankee produces a powerfully critical sense of the modern by projecting a vision of the past out of itself in order to break with it. That vision is contained in the palimpsest that M. T. reads in the Warwick Arms, which was given to him by a stranger who claimed to be Hank Morgan, the story’s protagonist. The volume explains that Hank, a foreman in a Connecticut arms factory, received a blow to the head in a dispute with an employee and awakened to find himself in the court of the mythical King Arthur. Realizing his predicament – and his opportunity – he immediately set out to modernize the Britons. It is obvious that Twain had only limited interest in the historical veracity of his description of sixth-century England.⁴ The tale’s deployment of the medieval is a narrative device that enabled a critical engagement with a set of laws and customs that the palimpsest situates within the imagined space of the temporally and geographically distant “Lost Land.”

After M. T. spends the night reading that tale, he goes in search of the stranger and finds his room with the door ajar. The man mutters and thrashes, apparently near death. As M. T. leans closer, the stranger speaks:

I seemed to be a creature out of a remote, unborn age, centuries hence, and even that was as real as the rest! Yes, I seemed to have flown back out of that age into this of ours, and then forward to it again, and was set down, a stranger and forlorn, in that strange England, with an abyss of thirteen centuries yawning between me and you! Between me and my home and my friends! Between me and all that is dear to me, all that could make life worth the living! (257)

This experience of the present as a break from the past is one of loss and dislocation. It is generated by a rapid oscillation back and forth across a temporal boundary, here described as an abyss, into domains that are not only distinct, but ostensibly closed to one another. This sense was consequent upon a textually mediated confrontation between past and present – that is, through the experience of reading. This is precisely the structure of *Connecticut Yankee* itself, which, via an act of reading, moves from the present to the past and back again. The effect of that motion upon the stranger, and perhaps upon Twain’s more sensitive readers, was to heighten the perception of the present as

⁴ For a discussion of Twain’s historical sources see James D. Williams, “The Use of History in Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee*,” *PMLA*, 80 (1965), 102–10.

temporally discrete and to further produce a feeling of profound disorientation – a sense of displacement across an undifferentiated expanse of time.

This sense of dislocation, the perception of the present as a profound rupture in an otherwise linear and coherent narrative of historical descent, was common in the culture of late nineteenth-century America. Henry Adams, for instance, famously found himself metaphorically paralyzed, “lying in the Gallery of Machines at the [Paris] Exposition of 1900, with his historical neck broken by the sudden irruption of forces totally new.”⁵ Adams felt that “man had translated himself into a new universe which had no common scale of measurement with the old.”⁶ Likewise, the novelist Owen Wister lamented the historical change that Frederick Jackson Turner identified in his frontier thesis. In the preface to his 1902 novel *The Virginian, a Horseman of the Plains*, Wister explained that “the horseman with his pasturing thousands . . . will never come again. He rides in his historic yesterday. You will no more see him gallop out of the unchanging silence than you will see Columbus on the unchanging sea come sailing from Palos with his caravels.”⁷ In 1895, Elizabeth Cady Stanton argued that the period was one of fundamental transformation for women:

machinery has taken the labours of woman as well as man on its tireless shoulders; the loom and the spinning wheel are but dreams of the past; the pen, the brush, the easel, the chisel, have taken their places, while the hopes and ambitions of women are essentially changed.⁸

For steel baron Andrew Carnegie, “the conditions of human life have not only been changed, but revolutionized within the past few hundred years . . . The contrast between the palace of the millionaire and the cottage of the laborer with us today measures the change which has come with civilization.”⁹ Finally, W. E. B. Du Bois also understood the late nineteenth century as a period of demarcation, a time of borders redrawn, but also of new lines to cross: “Three centuries’ thought has been the raising and unveiling of [the African American] and now behold a century new for the duty and the deed. The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.”¹⁰

⁵ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, Riverside Editions, ed. Ernest Samuels (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973; first published 1918), 382.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁷ Owen Wister, *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains*, Oxford World’s Classics, ed. Robert Shulman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; first published 1902), 6–7.

⁸ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “The Solitude of Self,” in David Hollinger and Charles Capper, eds., *The American Intellectual Tradition*, Volume II, *1865 to the Present*, 3rd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 48–53, 52.

⁹ Andrew Carnegie, “Wealth,” *North American Review* 148, 391 (June 1889), 653.

¹⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Norton Critical Editions, ed. Henry Louis Gates (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999; first published 1905), 33.

This representative sample is deliberately drawn from a group of writers and from a set of texts that had little in common. It is not likely that these people agreed on more than a very few of the political, social or cultural issues that defined their period, and they most certainly interpreted their historical insights differently. Their texts come from a variety of genres. It is, therefore, all the more striking that all of them advanced their arguments in a similar manner. By juxtaposing the present with a version of the past as closed they all insisted on the essential novelty of the period in which they lived, on the present's radical difference from what had gone before. They experienced the present not as incremental or merely temporal change, but rather as a moment of profound transformation, as a departure from the past. Taken together, these texts form a discourse. They epitomize what a variety of historians have identified as the cultural crisis of modernity.¹¹

In order to understand this designation, however, we need to think critically about the meaning of the term "modernity." The crucial first step is to rid ourselves of the word's most common and reductive usage, wherein modernity signifies the presence of a set of empirical prerequisites – usually free-market capitalism; secular democracy; and a highly bureaucratized, interventionist state. The normative dimension of this designation should be apparent. It suggests that being modern is a measure of a culture or society's adoption of liberal Western democracy, which in turn becomes the very embodiment of modernity. The concept supplies interested parties – rival governments, research organizations and popular media – with a measurement tool that offers praise and blame, but cloaks those judgments in an air of objectivity drawn from the term's association with an allegedly temporal and therefore value-neutral "reality." It presupposes a teleology wherein the ultimate goal is

¹¹ Hofstadter seems to be the first to use the phrase "cultural crisis" in his discussion of the Spanish–American War. See Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964), 148. See also Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912–1917* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959); T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981); Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of American Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); James Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); and Clive Bush, *Halfway to Revolution: Investigation and Crisis in the Work of Henry Adams, William James, and Gertrude Stein* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). For further applications of the crisis model particularly in terms of race, class and gender difference see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: Southern Segregation, 1890–1940* (New York: Random House, 1999); and Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999). On the limitations of the crisis model, see especially Bederman, 11.

to be like the West. In its common usage, therefore, being modern is not the description of "reality." It is a cultural judgment that is inescapably political.¹²

Literary critic Matei Calinescu developed a more useful understanding of the concept in his 1987 book *Five Faces of Modernity*.¹³ He showed that the notion took clear form in the fourth century AD with the coinage of the late Latin *modernus*, a word that helped to enunciate the Christian eschatological sense of the linear passage of time. Differing from older pagan and classical notions of time as a permanent cycle of old and new, this emergent temporality made possible the ever-changing prediction of Jesus' second coming. The general sense of time as linear and progressive became central to Western intellectual and aesthetic culture, offering a means to assert the novelty of the present by comparing it to a closed past while keeping an eye on the future to come. Renaissance, Enlightenment, Romanticism, historicism, modernity and postmodernity are all names that have emerged to describe a particular "now" as a time of intense cultural transformation. From this perspective, modernity is a persistent historical condition that nonetheless takes a distinctive form at its various times of appearance. This formulation of the concept offers an analytical framework that can describe the differing strategies and techniques that people have employed in a variety of historical periods to produce and make evident the *sense* of modernity – the sense of a historically distinctive *now* – for themselves and their contemporaries.

THE TALE OF THE LOST LAND

This sense of modernity, not as an empirical condition but rather as a repetitive mode of historical consciousness, adds an intriguing dimension to our understanding of *Connecticut Yankee's* palimpsest. Hank Morgan's encounter with a distant historical past was certainly distinctive in itself; it was a singular adventure, it was novel. At the same time, the encounter of present and past had been rewritten many times and faint traces of that

¹² My critique is influenced by Frederick Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 1992).

¹³ Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 1–92. See also Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988); Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); and David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). My sense of modernity is strongly indebted to Jean-François Lyotard's description of postmodernity as the latest instance of the modern. See Jean-François Lyotard, "Answer to the Question: What Is Postmodernism?", in Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 71–82.

confrontation remained. They literally underwrote the Tale of the Lost Land, showing it to be an older story's latest iteration. As M. T. put it, "under the old dim writing of the Yankee historian appeared traces of a penmanship which was older and dimmer still" (10). Like the concept of modernity itself, Hank's story took a form that we might call the recurrent unique – a deliberate oxymoron that captures the paradoxical sense of modernity as a perception that is historically ubiquitous, yet singular at its moment of enunciation.

Hank voices such a paradox soon after meeting his future wife, Sandy. In a moment of frustration, he declares,

Everybody around her believed in enchantments; nobody had any doubts; to doubt that a castle could be turned into a sty, and its occupants into hogs, would have been the same as my doubting, among Connecticut people, the actuality of the telephone and its wonders – and in both cases would be absolute proof of a diseased mind, an unsettled reason. Yes, Sandy was sane; that must be admitted. If I also would be sane – to Sandy – I must keep my superstitions about unenchanted and unmiraculous locomotives, balloons, and telephones to myself. (105)

Hank realizes that his belief in the promises of modern technology – which serve throughout the book as the chief marker of difference between past and present – was just as absolute and superstitious as Sandy's faith in her own culture's technology, which Hank would later call the magic of *fol-de-rol*. This ironic perception of cultural and historical relativism, which is repeated throughout the book, threatens to undermine Hank's argument for the superiority of late nineteenth-century American culture, even though his prodigious self-confidence limits the insight's impact on his subsequent actions. It does, however, suggest that readers might think critically about overenthusiastic declarations of progress, particularly as measured against cultures that differ from their own. This observation finds its greatest power when we recall that the modernity of *Connecticut Yankee* is not constructed simply against the past, or "the other time." It is also constructed against the other place, or, put another way, the place of the other.

In *Connecticut Yankee*, that place is sixth-century England and the fictional Britons who live there are the others against whom readers must assess Hank's claims to, and for, the modernity of late nineteenth-century America. This imagined Britain, the palimpsest's "Lost Land," is a complex amalgam of both temporal and spatial elements that conspire to establish the 1889 America of the novel's production as the height of modernity. We must be particularly attentive, therefore, to Hank's well-known assessment of his situation: "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 by a matter of thirteen hundred years and upwards. I'm not a man to waste time" (17). A variety of literary scholars, most notably John Carlos Rowe, have identified

the clearly imperialistic tone of Hank's wish.¹⁴ That same tone is evident in his repeated description of the sixth-century Britons as "the quaintest and simplest and trustiest race" and also as "rabbits" (41). He explains that "measured by modern standards, they were merely modified savages" (64). Hank puts his strongest judgments in familiar terms for his 1889 audience, describing the Arthurian lords and ladies as "just a sort of polished-up court of Comanches" (74) and, notoriously, as "white Indians" (19). Comparing himself to Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés (29) and Robinson Crusoe (36), Hank places himself within a lineage of invaders both historical and literary. Even his proper name, Henry Morgan, is shared with the most infamous pirate of the Spanish Main – a privateer who ended his career as a wealthy Jamaican landlord. This combination of fragments foregrounds Hank's status as conquistador, but what matters most for this essay are the ways that he justifies his dominance. Hank claims to "have a start on the best-educated man in the kingdom by thirteen hundred years and upwards" and thus that the Arthurians' inferiority appears when "measured by modern standards." In other words, Hank's repeated assertions of cultural superiority are temporal. They are based on his standing as a modern. His boast that he "is not a man to waste time" means, conventionally, that he likes to move quickly, but it also voices Hank's determination not to squander his temporal advantage. By the same token, the modernity that underwrites Hank's authority is also spatial. It only has meaning through comparison with a distant, lost land and those who live there.

As such, readers might easily mistake the book for a celebration of late nineteenth-century America at the expense of medieval, or even modern, Britain. On 13 January 1890, for instance, a *Daily Telegraph* reviewer in London wrote that "a book that . . . tries to deface our moral and literary currency by bruising and soiling the image of King Arthur, as left to us by legend and consecrated by poetry, is a very unworthy production of the great humourist's pen."¹⁵ The celebratory tone that so upset the *Telegraph* reviewer is further amplified by Hank's overt support for a set of goals that many 1889

¹⁴ John Carlos Rowe, "How the Boss Played the Game: Twain's Critique of Imperialism in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*," in Forrest G. Robinson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 175–92. See also Steven Wandler, "Hogs, Not Maidens: The Ambivalent Imperialism of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*," *Arizona Quarterly*, 66, 4 (Winter 2010), 33–52; and Jennifer A. O'Neill, "Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and U. S. Imperialism," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 9, 3 (2007), available at <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol9/iss3/3>.

¹⁵ "King Arthur or Jay Gould?", London *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Jan. 1890. Reproduced in Twain, 328. The Norton edition contains several further examples of reviewers who understood the novel as an attack on English institutions.

readers might have shared in the United States and Britain alike. Hank introduces the Arthurians to electricity, telephones, telegraphs, printing presses, steamboats, sewing machines and bicycles. He also abolishes slavery and introduces legal and tax equality as he attempts to bring the island up to date. This combination of modern technology and liberal democratic meritocracy – commonsense benefits of the present over the past – sometimes overwhelms the book’s critical tone, making it easy to read as a celebration of modernity in the United States. More problematically, readers could interpret the story as an endorsement of the invaders over the invaded.

That temptation is reduced when we note that Hank’s description of events is thoroughly unreliable. This is most obvious in his aesthetic judgment. When entertained by Sir Dinadan the Humorist, Hank remarks that “it seemed peculiarly sad to sit here, thirteen hundred years before I was born and listen again to poor, flat, worm-eaten jokes that had given me the dry gripes when I was a boy thirteen hundred years afterwards.” He concludes that “there isn’t any such thing as a new joke possible” (25). It never occurs to Hank that he might actually be hearing new jokes, making Sir Dinadan the originator of gags that, thirteen hundred years later, had become “flat and worm-eaten.” Nonetheless, “everybody laughed at these antiquities” (25), which Hank notes as a further illustration of the Arthurians’ backwardness. His criticism takes on a much darker tone when, at the apogee of his power, he decides to suppress Sir Dinadan’s book of jokes, and “hang the author” (228).

Hank’s art criticism is no better. He declares that the “God-Bless-Our-Home” insurance chromos on the walls of his Hartford, Connecticut home were superior to the tapestries that adorned his chamber in Arthur’s castle. He explains that “even Raphael himself couldn’t have botched them more formidably, after all his practice on those nightmares they call his ‘celebrated Hampton Court cartoons’” (36). Hank’s reference is to a set of images created by the Italian Renaissance artist Raphael Urbino in 1515, which had become famous after going on public display in London in the early nineteenth century. By the 1889 publication of *Connecticut Yankee*, the cartoons were well known and widely “celebrated” as being among the finest examples of Western art.¹⁶ Hank’s easy dismissal of them in favor of a set of insurance chromos suggests that his judgment is not quite as sound as he thinks it is.

¹⁶ Pope Leo X commissioned the images and had them shipped to Belgium, where they were used as models to weave a series of tapestries for the ground floor of the Sistine Chapel. The British royal family bought the cartoons in 1623 and in 1865 Queen Victoria loaned them to London’s South Kensington Museum, which is where they remain. The museum was renamed the Victoria and Albert in 1899. See “The Rafael Cartoons: History of the Cartoons” at www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/raphael-cartoons-history-of-the-cartoons.

By directing attention to Hank's flawed aesthetic sense, I mean to point out the way that the text undermines the rest of Hank's judgment, particularly that of the native Britons and of the past's relation to the present. Hank's simple acceptance of the sense of modernity as progress, his self-certainty, his unflinching belief in the superiority of his own historical time and geographical place, underwrite his frankly imperialistic attempt to dominate the island. It puts him on a path that leads to the slaughter that concludes the Tale of the Lost Land. Though Hank is able to recognize the formal structures of belief that he shares with the Arthurians – particularly the difficulty of seeing beyond the “truths” supplied by one's own historical/cultural moment – he is nonetheless sure that the *content* of his beliefs is superior to that of the islanders. He explained that

inherited ideas are a curious thing, and interesting to observe and examine. I had mine, the king and his people had theirs. In both cases they flowed in ruts worn deep by time and habit, and the man who should have proposed to divert them by reason and argument would have had a long contract on his hands. (42)

In other words, persuasive reason was of little value in a confrontation with ideas generated by “time and habit,” and, as he had already declared, Hank was not a man to waste time. This leaves few options other than the violence with which the story ends. It is the outcome of Hank's original resolution to “boss the whole country,” based on his belief that he was modern, and the islanders were not. His futile attempt to bring the islanders up to date – to remake them in his own image – thus figured a doomed effort to recover the antiquated past in favor of the modern present. Hank set out to close temporal gaps and, consequently, to eliminate cultural difference. His failure left him stranded in the present, abandoned, alone and dying in the Warwick Arms with only a battered palimpsest to remind him of the past's familiar comforts. His fate exposes the modernity of *Connecticut Yankee* as a tragedy of the highest order.

DANIEL H. BURNHAM ON “THE USES OF EXPOSITIONS” (1895)

Less than four years after the 1889 publication of *Connecticut Yankee*, the World's Columbian Exposition opened to the public and more than 27 million people had visited by the time it closed five months later. The fair commemorated the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the Americas and its spectacular, monumental structures and exhibits were at least partly intended to show that the United States was ready to assume an equal place among the world's most influential nations. Daniel H. Burnham was a prominent Chicago architect and the fair's chief of construction and director of works. On 15 April 1895, just eighteen months after the fair's closing, he used terms similar to Hank's when he described

the challenges he had faced in mounting the exposition. In an important but little-known speech on “The Uses of Expositions,” Burnham told the Chicago Literary Club that “we can’t perfect the race because . . . barbarous peoples do not respond to argument. These semi-civilized people are not intellectually capable, they are rude, willful children.”¹⁷ Burnham went on to explain that his reference was to those “barbarians” who inhabited working-class slums – he used Chicago’s Town of Lake and London’s Whitechapel as examples – and also to those who lived in what he called “the jungle.”¹⁸ Like Hank, he believed that such people did not respond to logical argument, but he suggested instead that

if you can’t reach them through mental reasoning, try them with lawful physical loveliness and see if they will not be quiet, receptive and happy, as they were in ‘93, where they were brought into contact with order and system, which constitute the real soul of beauty.¹⁹

Here Burnham used “order and system,” “lawful physical loveliness” and “the real soul of beauty” as interchangeable phrases that held enormous instrumental value. They stood for qualities with the power to subdue and convert barbarians, both foreign and domestic.

Burnham believed that this pedagogical challenge was among his greatest responsibilities and the stakes could scarcely have been any higher. In his 1895 speech he explained that “the progress of the world has been kept back by the lagging of whole races. Object lessons like the [Columbian] exposition must leave a deep impression on the individual barbarian or savage, and through him, afterwards, on his tribe.”²⁰ For Burnham, the term “barbarian” signified membership in a clan that hindered progress and slowed the world’s advance toward a more perfect, though unspecified, future. Barbarism was thus a temporal affliction, but also one that could be located on a map, both in working-class slums and also in what Burnham called “the jungle.” These backward places were contemporaneous with more advanced spaces – they existed within and alongside them – but they trailed behind and held back

¹⁷ Daniel H. Burnham, “The Uses of Expositions” (1895), Manuscript Box 58, Folder 58.13, Daniel H. Burnham Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, the Art Institute of Chicago, 45–46. The comprehensive source on Burnham’s life and career is Thomas S. Hines, *Burnham of Chicago: Architect and Planner* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979). Burnham’s most significant piece of written work, with many plans and drawings included, is Daniel H. Burnham and Edward H. Bennett, *Plan of Chicago*, ed. Charles Moore (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993; first published 1909).

¹⁸ Burnham, “The Uses of Expositions,” 46. The Town of Lake was a working-class and immigrant district that lay near Chicago’s Union Stockyards. Formally annexed by the city in 1896, it would become much better known as the setting for Upton Sinclair’s 1906 novel *The Jungle*. Whitechapel is the east-end borough that in 1888 became infamous as the location of London’s Jack the Ripper murders. ¹⁹ *Ibid.* ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

progress. On the other hand, Burnham thought that a world's exposition could help bring the barbarian up to speed. Summing up this element of his talk and giving a concrete location to "the jungle," Burnham asked, "what does it all mean, this stirring-up of the man from Senegambia, from the South Sea Islands, and from the Town of Lake?" He answered his own question: "If you can shake the lowest barbarian – the brute man – loose from the most debasing fetishes of the human race, you have done your best for advancement of the whole, you 'washed the feet, that the whole body may be clean.'"²¹

The technique that Burnham most conspicuously employed to "advance the whole" at the Columbian Exposition is one that should be familiar to readers of this essay. Much like what we saw in *Connecticut Yankee*, the exposition created the sense of the present as "modern" by juxtaposing it to an image of the past as superseded, or, in his terms, "barbarian." The point of this strategy was less to present an accurate representation of the past than it was to assert the novelty of the here and now. Burnham called "the exposition wherein we study the new and review the old . . . a most potent lever." He understood the comparison in instrumental terms – as a device that might help to achieve the pedagogical goals that he outlined above. He explained further that the exhibition of past and present was "not for pleasure or pastime, purely or mostly," but was rather "the first and only assemblage instituted on a grand scale for the whole human race, aimed solely at their rational, peaceful and permanent instruction and advancement."²² Bearing in mind that Burnham, like the fictional Hank, believed that rational persuasion was of no use with "barbarians," we might understand Burnham's conception of the fair as a peaceful alternative to the violence that ends *Connecticut Yankee*. A world's fair's greatest use, according to the Columbian Exposition's director of works, was to persuade and to convert the antiquated other, to bring him up to date and thus to foster the world's progress. Burnham explained that "we have tried missionaries for several generations, but the dense wilds do not yet yield many civilized men."²³ A well-designed world's fair, on the other hand, ensured that "those who come are taught with a rapidity and accuracy out of all proportion to their usual advancement from year to year in the ordinary course of life."²⁴ In other words, a good fair might speed up the work of time. As Burnham put it, "some keep more closely to the facts than others, but all need to have our watches set from time to time."²⁵ The success of a world's fair was thus to be measured by its ability to correct the time.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²² *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

²³ *Ibid.*, 45.

THE COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION'S MODERNITY AS TRIUMPH

The actual design by which Burnham hoped to achieve his goals is well known to historians of Gilded Age culture.²⁶ The Columbian Exposition's central "Court of Honor" (Figure 1) was composed of harmoniously arranged, temporary structures constructed of wood and steel and covered with a uniform coating of white staff – a mixture of plaster, cement and straw – which produced an artificial, travertine-like appearance and was the source of the fair's designation as the "White City." Electric lighting enhanced the ethereal effect of the white buildings and made the fair's boulevards and avenues viable by night. Electricity was also important in *Connecticut Yankee*, but it illuminated a much different scene. Trapped in his last fortress and mired in the battle that concludes the palimpsest, Hank threw the switch on "50 electric suns" to light the "breastwork of corpses" that surrounded him and his remaining fifty-four followers (254). Those lights shone on 25,000 bodies – knights caught in the electric fences who were slaughtered by a force that was inconceivable in the novel's imaginary medieval setting. Electricity thus helped to underscore the magnitude of the historical change registered by the novel and it did similar work at the fair. Yet the luminescent White City produced a version of modernity very different from that which overwhelmed Hank's forces at the Battle of the Sand Belt. The Columbian Exposition's generators powered many of its exhibits and Henry Van Brunt's Electricity Building on the Court of Honor celebrated the promises of the new technology for an emergent modern world. In a private letter, Burnham told Van Brunt that his building was "the one place where we should give way to fancy and make it sparkle, day or night."²⁷ The modernity of *Connecticut Yankee* was indeed tragic, but the Columbian Exposition offered an equally strong sense of modernity as triumph, particularly at the level of design.

Though a different architect was responsible for each of the exhibition's major buildings, their plans were overseen and approved by Burnham, who imposed a uniform neoclassicism upon the central structures. This choice, combined with their shared cornice line and identical whiteness, produced a tremendous sense of unvarying monumentality for the structures in the Court of Honor. The surrounding area further enhanced the center's uniformity by deviating from it. Several of the exposition's large, thematic buildings,

²⁶ In addition to those works cited below, see Rodney Reid Badger, *The Great American Fair: The World's Columbian Exposition and American Culture* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1979); Neill Harris, Wim de Wit, James Gilbert and Robert W. Rydell, *Grand Illusions: Chicago's World's Fair of 1893* (Chicago: Sewall Co., 1993); and Robert Muccigrosso, *Celebrating the New World: Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition of 1893* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993).

²⁷ Burnham to Messrs. Van Brunt and Howe, 10 Feb. 1891. Quoted in Hines, *Burnham of Chicago*, 94.



Figure 1. The Columbian Exposition's "Court of Honor" with the Frederick MacMonnies "Columbian Fountain" in the foreground (1893). Goodyear collection, Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Louis Sullivan's Transportation Building and Charles B. Atwood's Palace of Fine Arts, for instance, were located in this periphery, as were a variety of structures produced by individual states and foreign countries. A "Midway Plaisance" (Figure 2), comprising rides, games and ethnographic exhibitions that were meant partly for education but primarily for amusement, extended in a narrow, mile-long strip outward from the northwest corner of the exhibition's main grounds. These peripheral areas of the fair, particularly the Midway, were stylistically eclectic, but, as Burnham explained in a private 1908 interview, "there was no consideration given anything except the Italian renaissance"²⁸ for the Court of Honor. Decades later, Burnham's choice of

²⁸ Notes of an interview between Daniel H. Burnham, Charles Moore and E. H. Bennett, "Burnham's Reminiscences of Fair and Developments in Chicago since the Fair: With Pencil



Figure 2. The western entrance to the Midway Plaisance (1893), in *The Dream City: A Portfolio of Photographic Views of the World's Columbian Exposition*, with an introduction by Halsey C. Ives (St. Louis, MO: published weekly by N. D. Thompson Publishing Co.), 1893–94.

style provoked fellow Chicago architect Louis Sullivan's famous declaration that the fair had put American architecture back by at least fifty years.²⁹

Sullivan felt that an exposition whose goal was to showcase modern America surely ought to emphasize its recent architectural production – especially the regionalism of the Chicago school and the tall, steel-framed skyscrapers that were transforming the nation's urban skyline. From Sullivan's perspective, the profoundly *deregionalized* selection of an ostensibly antiquated European aesthetic seemed narrowly reactionary. Nevertheless, Burnham's choice gathers interest if we consider it within the logics of time and space established in this essay. In temporal terms, we have seen that Van Brunt described the exhibition as a historical point of departure, an "evolution

Sketch of Plan by DHB," Manuscript Box 58, Folder 58.15, Daniel H. Burnham Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, the Art Institute of Chicago, 5–6.

²⁹ Louis H. Sullivan, *Autobiography of an Idea* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1956; first published 1924). Quoted in Alan Trachtenberg, "The White City," in *The Incorporation of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 225.

from the dark into the light” that shared much with earlier moments of cultural and historical transformation, most notably “the cinquecento,” or the Italian Renaissance. This sense of renaissance, or rebirth, was a commonplace among the fair’s designers. The sculptor Augustus St. Gaudens, for instance, was effusive when he greeted Burnham at an early planning meeting: “Look here, old fellow, do you realize that this is the greatest meeting of artists since the 15th Century?”³⁰ Many of the designers of the Columbian Exposition, a fair that very consciously engaged and produced a particular relationship of the present to the past, thus imagined that association as a renaissance, as a rebirth.

I have already described this repetitive sense of modernity as palimpsestic, as the reinscription of a recurrent sense of the novelty of the present. The exposition’s construction of its own contemporaneity followed this pattern, but the fair’s designers contained the threat of rupture by imagining the novelty of the here and now as a rebirth of the classical. As such, modernity once again appeared in a much different guise than it did in *Connecticut Yankee*. It emerged as the imminent fulfillment of a repetitive historical process. Neoclassicism served a recuperative role in this schema and helped to generate much of the fair’s triumphalist tone. By shrouding the steel frames, electrical cables and technological exhibits of the buildings on the Court of Honor in classically modeled, artificial limestone, Burnham’s design choice served quite literally to contain the potentially disruptive forces of modernity within the restorative, reassuring cladding of European neoclassicism.³¹

On the other hand, Sullivan’s objection to neoclassicism was not simply that it was out of date. He also believed that a fundamentally European design imperative was out of *place* at an exposition held in the American Mid-west. As was the case, however, with the temporal aspect of Sullivan’s complaint, the decision to adopt neoclassicism for the Court of Honor played an important role in the generation of meaning within the broader setting of the fair. As a number of historians have noted, the spatial organization of the Columbian Exposition was hierarchical. Alan Trachtenberg, for instance, argues that the various areas of the exposition were valued according to the hardening class antagonisms of the rapidly incorporating American political economy of the 1880s and 1890s.³² The Court of Honor, marked by its educational emphasis and its exhibitions of technology and culture, stood at the top of the ladder, while the varied state and national exhibitions located in its penumbra occupied the middle rungs. The midway’s chaotic and sensational layout

³⁰ Burnham, 1908 interview, 7.

³¹ My use of “containment” is influenced by Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

³² Alan Trachtenberg, “The White City,” in, Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 208–34.

mirrored and enhanced the heterogeneity of its cultural offerings, placing it at the bottom of the fair's visual hierarchy, where it served as a negative referent to the triumphalist uniformity of the Court of Honor.

Other historians, particularly Robert Rydell, have noted that race and ethnicity played important roles in the spatial order of the Columbian Exposition.³³ Once again the Midway's ethnographic jumble – a Cairo street, villages from Africa and Lapland, an Algerian theater, Javanese singers, a Hawaiian volcano and a variety of distinctly old-fashioned European crafts and hamlets – created a clear contrast with the grandly harmonious White City. This mostly clichéd presentation of exoticized world cultures is particularly poignant when we remember that, for instance, the African American community was denied a venue to display its own achievements, despite strong protests of a variety of prominent Black leaders.

For the purposes of this essay, however, we need to remember Burnham's belief that the jungles of Senegambia and the South Sea Islands, just like the working-class districts of Chicago and London, "lagged behind" and hindered the world's progress. As his 1895 speech made clear, Burnham thought that these places were quite literally behind the times. Their visible presence in the ethnographic displays and popular entertainments of the Midway therefore offered a place in the fair's geography for the "barbarism" of the "brute man," who, according to Burnham, lived in real places beyond the fair's gates. Burnham's choice of European neoclassicism likewise suggested a geographical placement for the "real soul of beauty" in Europe, grounding its "high culture" in a version of Rome, the paradigmatic imperial city imagined by the artists and writers of the cinquecento and reimagined by a group of American architects in nineteenth-century Chicago. The Court of Honor's definition of technological change and elite culture as "progress," over and against the temporally backward "barbarism" of the Midway, produced modernity at the Columbian Exposition in terms of both space and time. It empowered the exposition's triumphalist celebration of the modern as radically new, while also marking it as emphatically Euro-American. As such, modernity emerged at the Columbian Exposition in a manner that both reflected and helped to produce a sense of the United States as superior; that is, as a nascent imperialist power.

³³ Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984). See also "Contend, Contend!", editor's introduction to Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass et al., *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*, ed. Robert W. Rydell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Christopher Gair, "Whose America? White City and the Shaping of National Identity, 1883–1905," available at <http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/citysites>. For an analysis of the way that gender was an integral component of the construction of race and "civilization" at the fair see Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.

“THE WORST BOAT AT THE WORLD’S FAIR”

To invoke a term like “imperialist” is to imply some means of cultural contact or interaction between disparate peoples. At its most fundamental, it presumes a medium of contact, or perhaps a mode of transportation by which one group might actually encounter the other. Before the invention and further development of air travel, the only way that Americans might reach faraway places like Senagambia and the South Pacific, not to mention Europe and Asia, was by sea. Ships and shipping were of central importance to any nation’s global status, and maritime imagery offered a powerful vocabulary, both metaphorical and literal, of international aspiration. Daniel Burnham drew upon that language in “The Uses of Expositions,” declaring that, “like a well-appointed ship, the world has long hung idly in her chains, anchored deep in the primitive mire. She must be loosened from barbarisms before she can make her way to the longed-for but unseen shores.”³⁴ The substantive content of Burnham’s statement is consonant with the rest of his speech, but his choice of maritime metaphor to describe this process directs our attention to a relatively neglected element of the Columbian Exposition: its display of boats.

Maritime imagery was bound to play an important role at a lakeside fair that celebrated Columbus’s 1492 landing, and many countries sent ships and boats as part of their exhibitions. Most notably, the Spanish government commissioned a reconstruction of Columbus’s fleet, the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*, which crossed the Atlantic to the Caribbean – though only the *Santa Maria* had the seaworthiness to do so under her own power. The ships were towed up the St. Lawrence River to the Great Lakes in time for the opening of the exposition. On 9 September 1893, the fair’s Transportation Day began with a spectacular boat parade that included entries from all over the world. According to an 1893 souvenir photographic volume entitled *The Dream City*, the boat parade was “a novel and varying entertainment, which, long as it might be, was too soon brought to a finish.”³⁵ The display of ships and shipping offers a useful example of the time–space nexus that animated the fair’s construction of modernity because boats inherently invoke both elements of that classification. On the one hand, the Columbian Exposition was particularly interested in the display of changing transportation technology as a key indicator of the novelty of the present. As a part of that display, changes in shipping technology helped to demonstrate the newness that the fair celebrated. On the other hand, the very presence of a boat

³⁴ Burnham, “The Uses of Expositions,” 45.

³⁵ Halsey C. Ives, ed., *The Dream City: A Portfolio of Photographic Views of the World’s Columbian Exposition* (St. Louis, MO: N. D. Thompson Co., 1893–94). Available online at <http://columbus.iit.edu>.

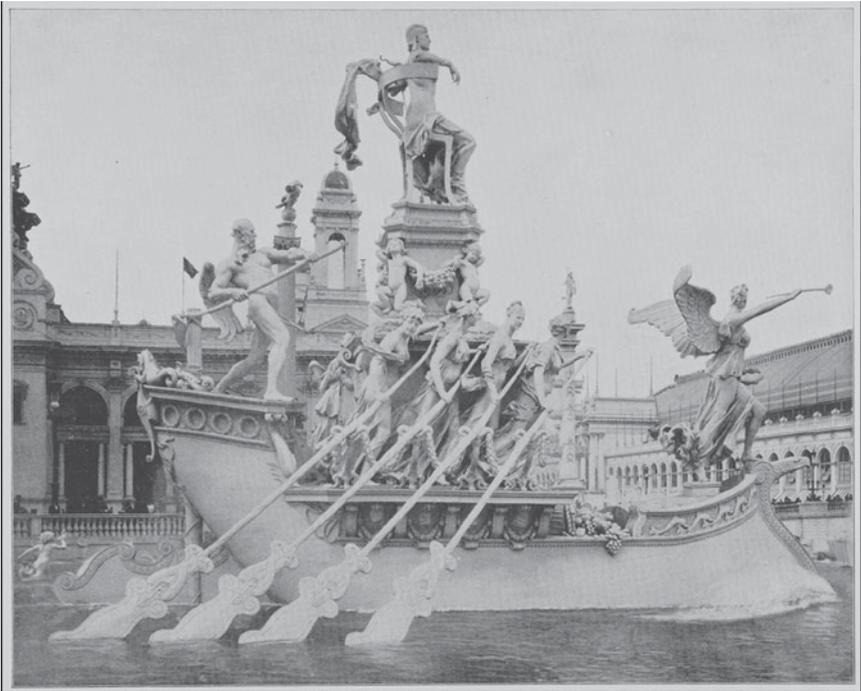


Figure 3. The Columbian Fountain, Frederick MacMonnies, 1893, in *The Dream City*.

immediately implies a relationship with another place. Ever liminal, a ship suggests movement, transition, a passage from one place to another. The three examples that follow bring together the logics of time and space at issue in this essay and further clarify the imperial associations of the particular construction of modernity that emerged at the exposition.

Of all the boats at the fair, Frederick MacMonnies' *Barge of State* (Figure 3) was probably the most prominent. It was the centerpiece of the massive Columbian Fountain, which stood directly in front of the Administration Building at the west end of the Court of Honor's long reflecting pool. At night, electric fountains on either side of the ship illuminated it in rainbow colors and during the day it was bathed in the spray generated by a host of spouting dolphins, sea horses and water jets. The sculpture was loosely modeled on Columbus's ship and, like everything else in the Court of Honor, it was painted white. Its name drew upon Plato's coinage of the "ship of state" metaphor in *The Republic*, where Socrates described the talents required to direct affairs of state as navigational skills.³⁶ In the case of the *Barge of State*,

³⁶ Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, Book VI, trans. Francis Macdonald Cornford (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), 195.

the common visual personification of time as an old man with a long, white beard suggesting wisdom or experience steered the ship by lashing his customary scythe to the helm. He is both winged and surprisingly muscular, implying a virility that is confirmed by the gamboling nymphs who tend the putti that lie in the ship's wake. Those babies were perhaps the offspring of Father Time and the nude Columbia who sat regally atop the ship as its sole passenger. Eight female rowers, representing the arts on one side and industry on the other and roughly corresponding with the buildings on the Court of Honor, crewed the ship, driving it toward a fertile, productive future.

A further figure stood at the *Barge of State's* bow. Identified by the fair's various guide and souvenir books as "Fame," she pointed the way and urged the ship forward. This winged female figure, with a long trumpet and laurel wreath, met the conventional visual representation of Clio, the muse of history, whose Greek name translates to the English word "fame." Writing in the first century BCE, the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus explained that Clio was so named because the songs she inspired bestowed great glory, or fame, upon their subjects.³⁷ About a hundred years later, the Latin poet Valerius Flaccus wrote that Clio had "the power to know the hearts of the gods and the ways by which things come to be."³⁸ These descriptions of the powers held by the *Barge's* coxswain suggest that a powerful alliance between History at the bow and Time at the helm had conspired to ferry Columbia towards a glory whose path was hidden from mortals, but willed by the gods. The fountain might therefore be seen as a transcription of the older visual rhetoric of westward expansion as "manifest destiny" in, for instance, well-known images like John Gast's 1872 chromolithograph *American Progress*. MacMonnies' *Barge* translated that language into a new argot for a new time, suggesting that, having expanded across the continent, America's destiny now lay somewhere across the sea. As with the rest of the Court of Honor, the *Barge of State's* neoclassicism helped to reassure visitors that the potentially disruptive energies of the present might be contained by the familiar past, yet refocussed toward a glorious future understood in both temporal and spatial terms.

It would be hard to imagine a boat more different from the *Barge of State* than the "Bimba, or Canoe, from Banguella, Africa," which lay in the northeast corner of the Transportation Building (Figure 4). According to *The Dream City*, the bimba, a crude, open-topped boat made of logs and a bit of

³⁷ Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, Book 4, trans. C. H. Oldfather (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1935, available online at http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diodorus_Siculus/4A*.html#2).

³⁸ Valerius Flaccus, *Argonotica*, Book 3, trans. J. H. Mozley (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1934), available online at www.theoi.com/Text/ValeriusFlaccus3.html.

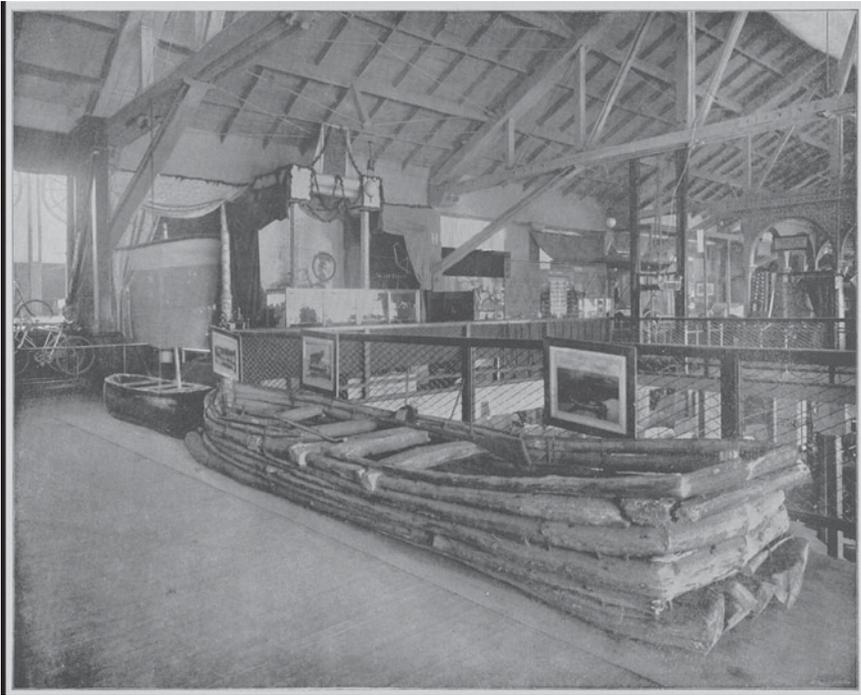


Figure 4. An African bimba, in *The Dream City*.

caulking, “was constantly surrounded by visitors, who could only with difficulty believe that it had been used as a canoe in an African river,” even though the boat was accompanied by a “large crayon picture of a naked African propelling his bimba on a broad stream of water.”³⁹ The public’s skepticism arose because the bimba did not look seaworthy. Indeed, the boat served as a negative referent to the technological progress on display elsewhere in the Transportation Building and in the fair more generally. The bimba helped to establish the modernity of the fair’s other displays by constructing technological change as progress, but also by locating the past in a geographical region. This boat seemed to be from another time as much as it was from another place.

The Dream City tried to explain the boat’s inferiority by speculating about the African conditions that allegedly spawned it:

It is well held by the philosophers that where man sleeps under a banana tree, to be awakened for his dinner by the fall of a banana into his lap, he lets it go at that, and invents no helio-telephone to speak across space with the sun’s ray, builds no

³⁹ Ives.

Campania steamship to lash the ocean into a storm, nor girdles the earth in forty seconds with his telegraph.⁴⁰

The bimba's crudeness was thus the product of an easy life lived close to nature, which held back the technological progress that marked a society as modern. The bimba very clearly helped to construct modernity in terms of both space and time, but the writer went still further, speculating about supposed racial characteristics that contributed to the bimba's awkwardness. He explained that, despite the alleged conditions of life in Africa, the reason that "these negroes should build a log canoe when they might use a wool-skin or dug-out does not appear, either." He concluded that "amid kyaks of Labrador, caiques of the Dardanelles, gondolas of Venice, bragazzas of the Adriatic, phoenix-boats of Japan, bateaus of French pioneers, dug-outs, wool-skins and what-not, this bimba seemed to be the worst boat at the World's Fair."⁴¹

Though some visitors may indeed have thought that the bimba was the worst boat at the fair, at least it could float. This was not the case for MacMonnies's fanciful *Barge of State*, nor for my third example, the battleship *Illinois*, which lay "docked" at a pier in Lake Michigan very near the US government building (Figure 5). The *Illinois* was a full-sized battleship, 348 feet long, sixty-nine feet wide and with a conning tower that stood seventy-six feet above the surface of the lake. Though it appeared to float, it was made of brick and concrete and was built upon wooden pilings that were fixed to the bottom of the lake.⁴² In a souvenir volume called the *Book of the Fair* (1893), the historian Hubert Howe Bancroft explained that during the exposition, "the *Illinois* will be virtually in commission, with officers and seamen, marines, and mechanics, subject to the strictest of naval discipline."⁴³ Though the largest guns on deck were made of wood, the ship was surprisingly well armed. *The Dream City* claimed that "there were enough machines on board which were genuine to destroy almost anything of ordinary resisting power that might be within a distance of three miles."⁴⁴ The *Illinois* was aggressively up to date. It was emphatically "a ship of war modeled on the latest patterns adopted by the Navy Department."⁴⁵

Those Navy Department patterns were emblematic of what military historians have called the "American naval revolution" of the 1880s and 1890s. This period followed a "naval dark age," which had begun at the close of the

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² This was necessary because placing a real battleship on Lake Michigan would have violated the Rush-Bagot treaty with Great Britain and Canada, which demilitarized the Great Lakes after the War of 1812.

⁴³ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair* (San Francisco: The Bancroft Company, 1893), 62.

⁴⁴ *Ives.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

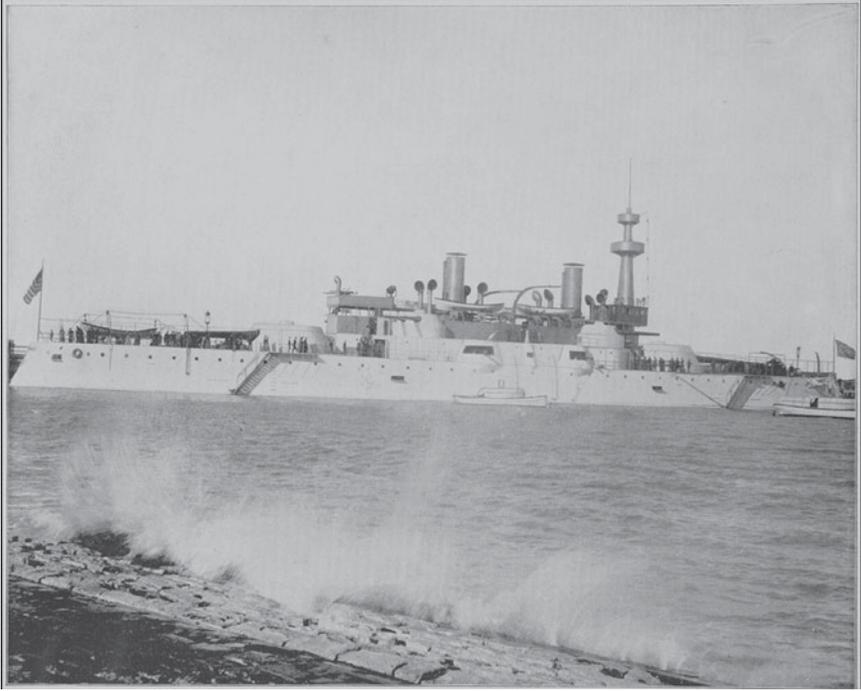


Figure 5. The battleship *Illinois*, in *The Dream City*.

Civil War when the United States possessed a strong coastal defense force that was dismantled or left to decay soon after the fighting stopped. Naval historian Timothy Wolters points out that “the first tangible step toward modernization took place in 1883, when Congress provided funds to construct four warships made of domestically manufactured steel.”⁴⁶ This beginning of the “new steel navy” was central to expansionist visions of the United States as a global power. Even though naval expansion was tangled in partisan politics, Wolters notes that “by the late 1880s there existed a political consensus regarding the value and importance of a modern American navy.”⁴⁷ Consequently, “beginning around 1890, Congress and the executive branch pursued an aggressive shipbuilding policy focused on capital ship construction.”⁴⁸ 1890 also saw the publication of the definitive statement of ideas that came to be called “American navalism.” Alfred T. Mahan’s *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* was the central articulation of “the identification of a strong navy with a strong state and of the particular

⁴⁶ Timothy S. Wolters, “Recapitalizing the Fleet: A Material Analysis of Late Nineteenth-Century U. S. Naval Power,” *Technology and Culture*, 52 (Jan. 2011), 103–26, 104.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

character of U. S. empire,” according to Christopher L. Connery, who further notes that Mahan’s was among the most widely circulated and translated books of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ Mahan’s central argument was that a land-based military was obsolete and that the future belonged to nations with technologically advanced navies, constructed primarily of ocean-going battleships and cruisers. The result, according to Connery, was that “a navy became, for new nations, the visible symbol of modernization.”⁵⁰

The Columbian Exposition was perhaps more concerned with “visible symbols of modernization” than it was with anything else, and the battleship *Illinois* – the material manifestation of American navalism – was among its strongest examples. The ship modeled the new generation of steel-hulled naval vessels – the so-called Indiana class – that was authorized by Congress in 1890 and was in construction at the time of the fair. It showcased some of the advanced technology that typified the Indiana class, particularly the use of electricity. The *Illinois* had its own electrical generator, which ran two high-powered searchlights, a full set of running lights, and the bulbs that illuminated the ship at night. It also boasted two Sturtevant blowers – draft fans that had, beginning in 1886, increased boiler efficiency to a point where sails were no longer needed for long ocean journeys. The Battleship *Illinois* thus epitomized much of the construction of modernity at the Columbian Exposition. On the one hand, it used technological change to mark the present as fundamentally different from the past, showing that an age of steel, steam and electricity had eclipsed the earlier age of wood and canvas. On the other, its very essence as a ship suggested a relationship not simply with another time, but also with another place.

In 1895 that suggestion was confirmed with the commissioning of the USS *Indiana*, the original upon which the *Illinois* was based. In 1898 the *Indiana* became part of the fleet that would help to establish the US as a global power by defeating the Spanish in only 113 days and at the same time claiming Hawaii, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Philippines as parts of an American insular empire. Though by 1896 the Columbian Exposition’s *Illinois* was broken up by lake ice and sold as scrap, the Navy laid down a real battleship *Illinois* in 1897. Commissioned in 1901, the USS *Illinois* missed the Spanish–American War but was a part of the Great White Fleet, which toured the world in a demonstration of American naval might between 1907 and 1909. Connery argues that the fleet’s tour was “the originary moment of the projection of US military might through spectacle, world domination through visible presence” on a global stage.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Christopher L. Connery, “Ideologies of Land and Sea: Alfred Thayer Mahan, Carl Schmitt, and the Shaping of Global Myth Elements,” *boundary 2*, 28, 2 (2001), 173–201, 183.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

The version of the *Illinois* on display at the fair, which was no less a work of art than the *Barge of State*, was perhaps the most brutally direct expression of the imperial implications behind the Columbian Exposition's celebration of modernity as triumph. If Clio, standing in the bow of the *Barge of State*, truly did "know the ways by which things come to be," then perhaps she knew that it would be the *Illinois* that would have the decisive word in establishing a relationship between the aspirational *Barge* and the "backward" bimba. Because of the fair's constant association of the outmoded with "barbarian" cultures, its recovery of a glorious past via the neoclassicism of the Court of Honor also suggested the modernization of those backward cultures. The cost of that fundamentally imperialistic process was to be counted in corpses, not the fictional ones at the conclusion of *Connecticut Yankee*, but rather the real ones, both Filipino and American, which were the consequence of the Philippine–American War of 1899–1902. By 1907 the White City had finally cut its chains and taken to the seas as the Great White Fleet, and the imperial fantasy of the Columbian Exposition had become part of a new global reality.

CONCLUSION

The popularity of the Columbian Exposition contributed to the lasting influence of its neoclassicism on urban design well into the twentieth century. Burnham became a central figure in City Beautiful – a Progressive Era design movement that was based upon the belief that American society might be bettered if its cities adopted neoclassical design principles like those so abundantly on display at the Columbian Exposition. "Malls, alongside civic centres . . . came to define what American urban design was about," according to historian Ian Morely, who further explains that "processional sequences of spaces and buildings arranged as orderly units [were] modeled on the theories and practices of Daniel Burnham." Those ideas dominated urban design from 1893 until the outbreak of the First World War.⁵²

Most importantly for this essay, Burnham accepted an unpaid government appointment to supervise the redesign of Manila in 1904 and also to plan Baguio City as a new capital for the Philippines under American occupation. As Morely has shown, Burnham's attitude toward the American annexation of Spain's former colonies fell closely into line with those of Presidents McKinley, Roosevelt, Taft and others, who justified American imperialism as "benevolent uplift" of the Filipinos, who were allegedly not yet ready to govern

⁵² Ian Morely, "The Cultural Expansion of America: Imperialism, Civic Design and the Philippines in the early 1900s," *European Journal of American Culture*, 29, 3 (2010), 229–51, 237. Among Burnham's most prominent plans were the redesigns for Washington, DC (1901–2), Cleveland (1903), San Francisco (1905) and the Chicago lakefront (1909).

themselves. Among the goals of Burnham's design was to teach the Filipinos that the "American way" was superior to the "corrupt political system, superstition and ignorance" that Philippine commissioner Taft believed had predominated before American occupation.⁵³ As Burnham had argued in his 1895 speech, good design had the power to bring "barbarians" up to date and the experience of "lawful physical loveliness" might make them "quiet, receptive and happy, as they were in '93." In his 1909 *Plan of Chicago*, he stated the idea somewhat differently, declaring that "good citizenship is the prime object of good city planning."⁵⁴ Those sentiments animated Burnham's urban design principles. He applied them at home and, more contentiously, they underwrote his work in the Philippines.

Mark Twain also considered the imperial consequences of the Spanish-American War, but his response was very different to Burnham's. Though scholars have long debated the chronology of Twain's shifting attitudes, he famously became a very public opponent of the US seizure of Spain's former colonies. In popular pieces like "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (1901) and also via his role as a vice president of the Anti-imperialist League – an organization formed in 1898 to protest American annexation of former Spanish colonies – Twain became "the country's most outspoken opponent of the Philippine-American war" according to historian Jim Zwick, who has shown that Twain remained a committed anti-imperialist until his death in 1910.⁵⁵ Twain's critique of US expansion satirized the altruistic claims of those who, like Taft and Burnham, justified imperialism as uplift rather than the naked self-interest that Twain and other anti-imperialists thought it to be. As we have seen, this strand of Twain's thought was evident in earlier works like *Connecticut Yankee*. Such insights have led John Carlos Rowe to argue that "anticolonial and anti-imperialist attitudes inflect virtually all of Twain's writings."⁵⁶

While this essay has added further analysis and new content to the excellent work on turn-of-the-century US imperialism offered by scholars like Morely and Rowe, its chief contribution has been its comparison of projects by two well-known historical figures whose modes of expression and whose politics had, at first glance, little in common. Reading them together brings new insight. It forces into view a shared conceptual framework, a *discourse of modernity* that imbued the novel and the exposition with a sense of the present

⁵³ Morely, 239. See also Thomas S. Hines, "The Imperial Façade: Daniel H. Burnham and American Architectural Planning in the Philippines," *Pacific Historical Review* 41 (1972), 33–53.

⁵⁴ Burnham and Bennett, *Plan of Chicago*, 123, quoted in Morely, 237.

⁵⁵ Jim Zwick, *Confronting Imperialism: Essays on Mark Twain and the Imperialist League* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity, 2007), 110.

⁵⁶ Rowe, "How the Boss Played the Game," 176.

as a radical departure from the past – a discourse shown here to be as much about space as it was about time.

We have seen that Twain and Burnham employed similar formal strategies to produce the *sense* of modernity in their respective projects. Their works created meaning by projecting versions of the past out of themselves in order to break with them and thereby to establish the present as fundamentally novel. Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* emphasized the distinctiveness of late nineteenth-century America through juxtaposition with a fanciful, medieval Britain, while the Columbian Exposition's Midway Plaisance, and various other ethnographic exhibitions at the fair, gave visible presence to what Burnham described as the backwardness of the brute man. These confirmed the superiority of the Court of Honor in its uniform, monumental whiteness. In both the novel and the fair, modernity – the sense of temporal superiority – was asserted through invidious comparisons to past times and distant places. Likewise, the sense of spatial superiority, which is essential to the logic of imperialism, was justified by claims to modernity; that is, by the assertion of temporal superiority. The logics of modernity and imperialism thus turned back on one another, each confirming the other in a circular, self-referential tangle of meaning.

This shared, circular logic, however, is where their similarity ended. *Connecticut Yankee* imagined the relationship of past and present as one of incommensurability, as a fundamentally irreparable rupture. Hank's futile attempt to recover the past by bringing the Britons up to date ends in personal bereavement and genocide. This fundamentally tragic production of modernity served as a warning and suggested that readers ought to think critically about their own time and place, rather than asserting their superiority over others. This attitude would become central to Twain's post-1898 anti-imperialism. Burnham's work, on the other hand, displayed no such critical self-consciousness. His choice of neoclassicism for the Court of Honor suggested that the past might indeed be recovered. Purged of "barbarism," it might be harnessed by the present and put to work in the construction of modernity as triumph, as the fulfillment of historical destiny. In the wake of the Spanish–American War, the popularity and the imperial consequences of this latter iteration of modernity would become spectacularly apparent in the Philippines and beyond.