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# Paradigm Shift and Thought Imposition: As Demonstrated in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court and Alice in Wonderland

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Paradigm Shift and Thought Imposition:  
As Demonstrated in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and *Alice in Wonderland*

Those who study history note how human beings conquer other nations and force their cultural beliefs upon them. The victors impose their ideals like religion onto the defeated, abolish their ways of thinking to be replaced by those of the conquerors. Human nature proves thus: humans wish to live in an environment which holds beliefs and mindsets similar to our own. If not, they begin to feel uncomfortable for fear of displacement. The two books *Alice in Wonderland* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* explore this desire to alter one's surroundings. In *Alice*, Alice is thrust into a world of madness and confusion, which is the polar opposite of everything she knows from Victorian England. Similarly, in *A Connecticut Yankee*, Hank Morgan finds Arthurian England a land of fools and lackwits, far behind his own age of industrialization, and seeks to implement what he sees as correct on Camelot; he seeks to appear all powerful through the use of technology. Both Hank and Alice find that the worlds they are in appear to be very different from their own. Each one attempts to impose the cultural biases that has been ingrained into them onto the new worlds, with each noticing their new environment's refusal to cooperate with their ideals, often it makes them anxious and uneasy.

Hank Morgan's desire to change Arthurian England to a place in the image of his home country stems from his initial disdain for the people of the time, their way of thinking, and their intelligence in general. When he first hears the knights at the Round Table boasting about their feats of valor and quests, each trying to outdo the other, Morgan comments that he "had always imagined until now, that that sort of thing belonged to children only, and was a sign and mark of childhood; but here were these big boobies sticking to it and taking pride in it clear up into full age and beyond" (Twain 17). He continues to call them "simplehearted" (17) and that "there did

not seem to be brains enough” (17). Hank compares the knights to foolish and dim-witted children. This opinion is what allows him the audacity to begin his process of remodeling his country. In Hank’s hometown of industrialized Connecticut, the country is filled with thinkers, innovators, and inventors. However, he sees Camelot as a country filled with fools who cannot even function properly to rule a country. Therefore, Hank decides to change Camelot, and remake it in the image of his hometown.

Hank uses his advanced technological knowledge to assert his power among the people, and uses it to model Camelot similarly to Nineteenth-Century America. One of Hank’s main obstacles in becoming the boss is Merlin. The people fear Merlin, and Hank notices this when speaking to Clarence about reasons he should not escape:

He hesitated, pulled one way by desire [...] he stole to the door and peeped out [...] crept close [...] and told me his fearful news in a whisper, and with all the cowering apprehension of one who was venturing upon awful ground and speaking of things whose very mention might be freighted with death” (27).

Being very observant, Hank picks up on Clarence’s behavior, he notices that the people are superstitious, a fact he uses to his advantage: “If everybody about here was so [...] afraid of Merlin’s pretended magic as Clarence was, certainly a superior man like me ought to [...] contrive some way to take advantage [...] of such things”(27). Hank uses the eclipse on the day of his execution to make himself appear a sorcerer, and explodes Merlin’s tower with black powder and Nineteenth-Century explosives to solidify this ruse, using his knowledge of technology to appear greater than the people of Arthurian England.

After Hank gains his power among the people, he begins to change the country to adapt to what he believes is the right way of running it. Hank has now solidified his power, and he is

well aware of it: “Enormous authority is a fine thing; but to have the onlooking world consent to it is a finer. The tower episode solidified my power, and made it impregnable” (43). Hank now begins his quest to change the country. He starts to gather “together the brightest young minds I could find, and I kept agents out raking the country for more” (55) He establishes a Sunday School with a freedom of religion policy that reflects the ideals of his time: “Everybody could be any kind of a Christian he wanted to” (56). He establishes branch schools around the kingdom, one of the most secret ones the West Point military academy and the naval academy. Hank Morgan has effectively begun the process of industrialization centuries too early, but he is still impeded by the church, the only power that is “a trifle stronger than both of us put together [Hank and the King]” (44). The Church is the most powerful organization in the kingdom, and they are not happy with what Hank is doing with the country, and so he takes careful measures to hide what he does from them.

During his remodeling of Cameolt, Hank finally recognizes that the Arthurian Englanders are not as foolish and vain as they appear at first glance. During Hank’s travels across England with King Arthur, they come across a woman stricken with smallpox, and Arthur refuses to leave without aiding her. When he arrives at the peasants’ house, the woman inside opens a window and Hank notes: “As she gripped it [...] the shutter came open and a strong light flooded her face. Smallpox! ‘Out of the door on the instant, sire! The woman is dying of that disease that wasted the skirts of Camelot two years ago.’ He did not budge” (199). The king refuses to leave in the sight of his dying subjects, and proceeds to aid them. He carries the ailing girl and Hank tells the reader: “It was the king [...] he was bearing [...] a slender girl of fifteen. She was but half conscious; she was dying of smallpox. Here was heroism at its [...] loftiest possibility, its utmost summit [...] no admiring world in silks [...] to gaze and applaud [...] he was great, now; sublimely

great” (200). Hank Morgan finally realizes that Camelot is not what he takes it for at first, and that its king is at heart a kind man with a gentle heart for those in need. However, by the time Hank realizes this, it is too late.

Hank’s improvements to the country succeed until the church sees fit to end his reign as the boss. Hank finally reveals all of his projects around the country after killing many knights in a duel, and talks about his improvements: the “hidden schools, my mines, and my vast system of clandestine factories and workshops to an astonished world. That is to say, I exposed the nineteenth century to the inspection of the sixth” (277). The Church finally decides that Hank has gone too far, and bribes doctors to advise Hank to go for an overseas holiday, effectively removing him from the country so that they can set their schemes into motion. When Hank arrives, he finds that almost all of his institutions have been destroyed, and all of England has deserted him but for fifty strong boys: his agents. Hank says: “I selected all the men [...] whose faithfulness [...] I could swear to [...] there were fifty-two of them” (295-296). Hank holds a last stand in his fortress, as all of the Church’s forces throw themselves and die at its gates to the hands of Hank’s guns and machinery. In the end, Hank ultimately fails, as the wall of corpses he creates with his machinery manifests an illness that began killing his boys, and Merlin has his revenge when he casts a spell on Hank, leaving him sleeping for centuries until he would wake up once more.

Similarly to Hank, when Alice arrives in Wonderland, she finds herself in a land full of peculiar practices and ideas that differ from her own. Unlike Hank, when Alice is thrust into a new world, instead of changing it, she can only look on helplessly as she sees things taking place that are nothing like her home country of Victorian England. Alice’s first instance of helplessness comes during her constant growing and shrinking at the beginning of the novel:

Just at this moment her head struck against the roof of the hall: in fact she was now rather more than nine feet high, and she at once took up the little golden key and hurried off to the garden door. Poor Alice [...] to get through was more hopeless than ever: she sat down and began to cry (16-17).

As a typical young girl, Alice has only been taught to think in the uptight and orderly Victorian ideals, and when she is confronted with these challenges she is not used to, she can not compute them, and essentially her way of overloading is to cry.

After Alice's initial discomfort, she begins to explore and attempts to apply her thoughts on the rules of society to Wonderland — with abysmal results. When Alice goes to the Mad Hatter's tea party, she finds that they do everything incorrectly, at least in her mind. Her Victorian side revolts at how rude the Hatter, Dormouse, and March Hare are. At the tea party Alice observes that: "There was a table [...] a Dormouse was sitting [...] fast asleep, and the other two were using it as a cushion, resting their elbows on it" (95) The three have no sense of table manners or etiquette, and they are constantly breaking every rule Alice has been taught. They try to prevent Alice from sitting, shouting "No room! No room!" (93) They are rude to her: "'Then you shouldn't talk,' said the Hatter" (110); and yawn out loud; and make a mess of the way Alice is used to having tea time. She tries to apply her way of thought by being polite when asking the Dormouse about his story. Carrol writes: "Alice did not wish to offend the Dormouse [...] she began very cautiously" (108). In Victorian England, many rules to society are set in place. There are certain ways to sit, converse, to drink tea, and how to hold oneself properly and speak politely. Alice has been used to this society being culturally imposed onto her, and when she is confronted with the tea-party, the display of discourtesy and impoliteness "was more than Alice could bear" (110), so she feels forced to leave.

Another instance when Alice's Victorian views conflict with what she experiences occurs during the croquet game. In Victorian England, croquet is a gentleman's game, filled with good sport, and intelligent conversations coupled with the tapping of balls through arches. However, when Alice plays the Queen's croquet game, she "thought she had never seen such a curious croquet-ground in her life" (121). The balls for croquet are live hedgehogs, "the mallets live flamingoes, and the soldiers had to double themselves up and stand on their hands and feet, to make the arches" (121). Alice's rules are challenged again when she experiences this contradictory croquet game. She tries to play it, but then she begins to feel uneasy. Alice's way of thought gets challenged everywhere in Wonderland, and it begins to make her anxious.

The Queen of Hearts herself happens to be another example similar to the croquet game when Alice's views are challenged is the Queen of Hearts herself. The Queen is a fat and ugly queen, always cruel to her subjects and constantly shouting: "Off with her head! Off with his head! Off with their heads!" She is only interested in complete dominance over her subjects, including the King. Alice feels frightened of her: "Alice was too much frightened to say a word" (136) and does not see her as somebody to look up to. The Queen stands in opposition to Alice's views, because in Victorian England, the Queen is a beautiful woman, pious, wise, and looked up to as the leader of the country, someone who cares for and loves her subjects. In Wonderland, the queen is fat, ugly, and cruel, and it is this that makes Alice dislike and fear her. In her new experiences Alice cannot adapt and conform to the virtues and rules that Wonderland has set, as she views them to be polar to her own. She fails to undergo a shift in viewpoint, and it is what makes her unsuccessful during her time in Wonderland.

Both of the protagonists, conditioned as they are, cannot change how they behave in their situations. Both of them, when confronted with a different mindset, attempts to apply their own

beliefs to it, and both ultimately fail in this effort. Neither of them can change their actions, because of either who he or she is or their attitude and personality. Alice is a young girl, and had been taught all of her life to abide by her Victorian values. When brought to Wonderland, she cannot understand why everyone is doing what they do: being very young, she cannot change her way of thought as easily as an older person; who could think of how another's ideas could be better than one's own. On the other hand, Hank Morgan is a can-do nineteenth century innovator and entrepreneur, and so when he realizes how "inferior" Camelot is, his way of thought makes him wish to modify everything.

Both Alice and Hank arrive in new lands which differ greatly from their own. They each attempt to impose what had been culturally ingrained into them and what they believed correct upon the new worlds, and their attempts come to naught. However, being human, it would have been very difficult for them to do otherwise without consciously recognizing their actions. Imposing ideals is what humans have been doing for centuries, from the Crusaders putting those who did not accept Christianity to death, to the British bringing their traditions and customs to every country that they conquered. The conquerors could not feel like conquerors if the defeated were allowed to remain unassimilated in their culture and beliefs. The only empire in history to allow unassimilation was the old Islamic empire, one out of many. Both Hank and Alice had the urge to force their views on others, as many before them have done. Perhaps there is a primordial force that coerces people to do this. This force drives people to model each other like clay, into the shape that suits them the best, for they wish to belong in a world where everyone's ideas are the same as Their own—but it is a vain thought, for such a world is a utopian dream, one that shall never manifest itself, for such a notion is unachievable.