

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, by Mark Twain, satirizes the arrogance of the upper caste through the eyes of a 19th Century American living in 6th Century England. The narrator travels backward thirteen centuries where a knight captures him. To save his life, the narrator says he will block out the sun knowing that an eclipse occurs at a specific time. The eclipse happens and the narrator convinces King Arthur to make him The Boss, the king's chief executive. As the Boss, the narrator applies 19th century inventions to civilize the nation. Twain's novel analyzes the arrogance of British nobility by utilizing the narrator's own intellectual vanity. Through the various castes and narrator's views on the their perceived subordinates and unquestionable birthrights, Mark Twain shows how privilege is in the eye of the beholder.

To begin, the Boss sees himself above the British nobility while the nobility condescend on the lower caste while the slaves exist at the bottom. Furthermore, the Catholic Church sits at the top of social status. The Boss examines the various aspects of the time-period, overall looking down on the sixth century culture and how superior he is to them.

Here I was, a giant among pygmies, a man among children, a master intelligence among intellectual moles; by all rational measurements the one and only actually great man in that whole British world...(66)

The Boss believes that in this time of kings and lords, he is the only great man. King Arthur earns his greatness by being born as part of the royal bloodline. Many other aspects of the culture make the Boss look down on the people. Blind followings of religion, superstition, and blatant lies irritate him. For example, the Boss's first observance of the nobles believing the knight's ludicrous lies astonishes him.

And plainly, too, they were a childlike and innocent lot; telling lies of the stateliest pattern with a most gentle and winning naïveté, and ready and willing to listen to anybody else's lie, and believe it, too (19).

After seeing how the population believes almost everything told to them including magicians seeing the future and that God ordained the king to rule, the Boss realizes he can rule over the nation. "I would boss the whole country inside of three months; for I judged I would have the start of the best-educated in the kingdom by a matter of thirteen hundred years and upward" (16). The Boss believes because of his future birth, he is superior to sixth century British nobility, clergy, and poverty. The nobility and clergy see their status differently.

Due to the culture of the time, none appreciate the Boss as they do the king because the Boss is not of noble blood. The Boss must accept his perceived subordinate status. "And [the king] and [the nobility] liked me, and respected my office; but as an animal, without birth or sham title, they looked down upon me – and were not particularly private about it, either" (67). In the eyes of the clergy and nobility, the Boss lives as an inferior. The nobility disregard the Boss's ideas and suggestions when they differ from the already established culture. For instance, the Boss suggests Arthur start a military council. Arthur employs only nobility to interview recruits instead of the Boss's trained generals. The nobility refuse to allow anyone not of noble birth to be an officer even if the pauper is qualified.

"Condition?"

"Weaver."

"Weaver! – God keep us!"

The king was staggered, from his summit to his foundations; one clerk fainted, and the others came near it. The chairman pulled himself together and said indignantly:

It is sufficient. Get you hence."

But I appealed to the king. I begged that my candidate might be examined. The king was willing, but the Board, who were all well-born folk, impored the king to spare them the indignity of examining the weaver's son. I knew they didn't know enough to

examine him anyway, so I joined my prayers to theirs and the king turned the duty over to my professors. I had had a blackboard prepared, and it was put up now, and the circus began. It was beautiful to hear the lad lay out the science of war, and wallow in details...and not a solitary word of it all could these catfish make head or tail of...I judged that the cake was ours, and by a large majority. (239-240).

Even with spectacular military knowledge, the council rejects the plebian candidate and accepts a man with four-generations of noble heritage, disregarding whether the noble has any military training whatsoever. The restriction of four-generations of noble heritage comes from the Church who cannot canonize a Saint until four generations after their death. This represents the control the Church possesses even on the aristocracy. To this effect, the Boss only gains acceptance from the aristocracy because he appears to have awesome, magical powers and, as part of the superstition of the time, people fear him as they do Merlin and God. The Boss uses the superstitions to gain his status. Without the population believing he possesses magic powers, i.e. the ability to block out the sun and call lightning bolts to destroy stone towers, the Boss would have been left in the dungeons or handed. This shows the Boss's status is only flattery from the aristocracy. The Boss's arrogance allows his to accept this while the nobility's arrogance causes them to act in this manner.

Moreover, the aristocracy views the lower class as unimportant and ignorable. When King Arthur and the Boss pretend to be paupers and mingle with the lower caste culture, the King finds himself walking on the road in the way of a procession of nobility. The King continues walking, and the nobility almost trample over him. The custom is for the pauper to leap out of the nobility's way, but the king remains on his course forgetting he is not seen as a king when dressed in his manner.

He supposed they would just turn aside. Turn aside to avoid trampling peasant dirt under foot? When had he ever turned aside himself – or ever had the chance to do it, if a

peasant saw him or any other noble knight in time to judiciously save him the trouble? The knights paid no attention to the king at all; it was his place to look out himself and if he hadn't skipped he would have been placidly ridden down, and laughed at besides (271-272).

Without the clothing to signify he is the King, the procession takes no notice of him, expecting their path to be free of trivial beings, specifically all members of the lower caste. The viewed worthlessness of the lower class continues as the Boss learns of the laws exclusive to the lower class.

Some of those laws were too bad, altogether too bad. A master might kill his slave for nothing: for mere spite, malice, or to pass the time – just as we have seen that the crowned head could do it with his slave, that it to say, anybody. A gentleman could kill a free commoner, and pay for him – cash or garden-truck. A noble could kill a noble without expense, as far as the law was concerned, but reprisals in kind were to be expected. Anybody could kill somebody, except the commoner and the slave; these had no privileges. If they killed, it was murder, and the law wouldn't stand murder (151-152).

In sixth century Britain, the aristocracy does not follow the same laws as the commoners. A noble can murder, lie, cheat, or steal from any pauper so slave, yet no commoner can break any law without the severe consequences of death and/or for the Lord or Lady of the land to gain ownership of all that commoner's possessions. Morgan Le Fay, King Arthur's sister, owns a dungeon that she fills with paupers from her lands. She tortures them until they admit to some crime so that she can confiscate all of their property and assets. Le Fay stands as an example of how the aristocracy places themselves above the other classes.

In addition, after the noble born Sandy refuses to eat with the poor, the Boss describes how the British nation views the impoverished majority, condescending on the arrogant culture.

My lady put up her scornful lip and withdrew to one side; she said in their hearing that she would as soon think of eating with the other cattle – a remark which embarrassed these poor devils merely because it referred to them, and not because it insulted or offended them, for it didn't. And yet they were not slaves, not chattels. By a sarcasm of law and phrase they were freemen. Seven-tenths of the free population of the country were of just their class and degree: small "independent" farmers, artisans, etc.; which is to say, they were the nation, the actual Nation; they were about all of it that was useful, or worth saving, or really respectable, and to subtract them would have been to subtract the Nation and leave behind some dregs, some refuse, in the shape of a king, nobility, and gentry, idle, unproductive, acquainted mainly with the arts of wasting and destroying, and of no sort of use or value in any rationally constructed world. And yet, by ingenious contrivance, this gilded minority, instead of being in the tail of the procession where it belonged, was marching head up and banners flying, at the other end of it; had elected itself to be the? Nation, and these innumerable clams had permitted it so long that they had come at last to accept it as a truth, and not only that, but to believe it right and as it should be (102-103).

The poor, with only slaves below them in social status, live as the foundation for the aristocracy: keeping the oligarchy in a power only because of a birthright. Overall, the aristocracy looks at the lower class as the Boss looks at sixth century Britain. Each views themselves as the highest social body even when compared to the other. Because of the incredible arrogance in the Boss and the nobility, neither accepts humility beneath the other, unwilling to consider themselves inferior to another.

To conclude, Mark Twain shows the arrogance of the Boss and the nobility as a social commentary of how different people and classes views themselves as superior in comparison to another regardless of how the other feels. Both the nobility and the Boss condescend on the lower caste while also condescending on each other. The nobility see the Boss as inferior because he is not of noble blood. The Boss sees the nobility as inferior because of their ignorance, superstitions, blind following of God, and subjugation of the lower caste. He plans to rule the nation in a short while. The nobility, in the end, retain control as the church forces the Boss's inventions out of the society and overpower

him through religious propaganda. Superiority and privilege, as shown in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, resides in the eye of the beholder.