

# Mark Twain and The Innocents Abroad: illuminating the tourist gaze on death

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## **Purpose**

In 1867 the author Samuel Langhorne Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, undertook a great pleasure excursion across Europe. Visiting a range of sites, from those associated with the Christian Cult of Death to the notable cultural heritage attractions of the time, Twain published his experiences in what would later become one of the world's best-selling travelogues; *The Innocents Abroad or the New Pilgrims' Progress*. This essay offers a rereading of Twain's encounters, proposing examination of Twain's encounters as timely and useful in addressing what Seaton (2009a) identifies as a gap in data on thanatourism consumption.

## **Methodology**

The essay draws on contemporary thanatourism theoretical frameworks, including Seaton's (1996) 'Continuum of Intensity' and (2009a) 'Thanatourism Developmental Sketch', Sharpley's (2009) 'Matrix of Dark Tourism Supply and Demand' and Stone and Sharpley's (2008) 'Dark Tourism Consumption Framework', among others, to explore Twain's encounters.

## **Findings**

Supplemented by a review of recent theoretical thanatourism research, the essay proposes three findings. Finding one illustrates that Twain's encounters, although not always pre-motivated or purposefully supplied, were emotionally charged and deeply affective experiences which had the potential to provoke ontological insecurity. Finding two highlights the potential of the geography of death to stimulate emotional reactions and configure individual and societal interactions with death. Finding three argues a need for new methodological approaches to understanding the thanatourism experience; approaches which are empathetically sensitive to the potentially powerful impact of the thanatourism experience.

## **Originality**

The essay draws on a classic travelogue to help address the imbalance in knowledge of the thanatourism experience. The essay argues that thanatourism is a layered and complex phenomenon, highly personal and often a potentially powerful and emotionally affective experience.

## **KEYWORDS**

Thanatourism, dark tourism, tourist gaze, thanagazing, Mark Twain

### **1.1 Introduction**

In 1867 the American author Samuel Langhorne Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, undertook a great pleasure excursion to Europe and the Holy Land, a route which mixed some of the classic aristocratic, 'Grand Tour' and Western pilgrimage travel routes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Twain documented his travels, first publishing them as a series of letters in a San Francisco newspaper, *The Daily Alta California*, and two years later as a full travel book; *The Innocents Abroad or The New Pilgrims' Progress*, hereon referred to in short form as *The Innocents*. The book would quickly become one of the best-selling accounts of Old-World travel (Amazon, 2012).

Somewhat surprisingly, *The Innocents* has not been systematically studied as thanatourism experiential case material. Many of the sites visited by Twain and his companions, hereon referred to as the 'pilgrims', were inherently dark attractions, highly valued as important places to visit in Europe, but featuring death notable in scale, method or celebrity, illustrated in Table 1. Using a selection of Twain's encounters, this essay will offer a rereading of *The Innocents*, focussing on the complex relationship between tourist and deathscape. The paper proposes that the complexities of the production and consumption of the geography of death requires new methodological innovation to better understand the thanatourism phenomenon.

**INSERT TABLE 1 HERE**

### **1.2 Literature Review**

#### *1.2.1 Thanatourism: A Contested Field*

The terms thanatourism (Seaton, 1996) and dark tourism (Foley and Lennon, 1996) were coined for a special edition of *The International Journal of Heritage Studies*. Broadly referring to the same phenomenon, thanatourism and dark tourism theorise travel to sites motivated by a desire to

encounter death or disaster, a practice viewed as an increasingly pervasive feature of the contemporary tourism landscape (Stone, 2006) but having much older origins (Seaton, 1996). Although the definitions are contested (Seaton, 2009a) and theoretically fragile (Stone & Sharpley, 2008), there is no doubt that the commodification and consumption of death has captured the imagination of academics and the media alike (Stone, 2012a, BBC, 2012),.

Thanatourism research generally explores three avenues; building conceptual models which theorise the phenomenon through production or consumption lenses (or both) (for examples see Seaton, 2009a, Sharpley, 2009, Stone, 2006 & 2012b, Stone & Sharpley, 2008), empirical supply side research which explores site characteristics (e.g. Keil, 2005, Macdonald, 2006, Strange & Kempa, 2003) and tourist experience research focused on motivations or actual encounters with death (for example Biran *et al*, 2011, Dunkley *et al*, 2011, Hyde and Harman, 2011, Iles, 2008).

Various theoretical lenses and perspectives have been suggested to conceptualise thanatourism, including; postmodernism (for examples see Lennon and Foley, 2000, Muzaini *et al*, 2007, Rojek, 1993, Tarlow, 2005), Orientalism, but as abstracted from its post-colonial interpretation (Seaton, 2009b), secularisation, sequestration and a resulting quest for new moral spaces (Stone and Sharpley, 2009), as existing in congruence with wider societal interest in death (Seaton, 2009a) and most recently, application of Foucault's heterotopia thesis (Stone, 2013). These conceptualisations have helped to strengthen the theoretical framework used to understand the commodification and consumption of death, as both a tourism phenomenon and broader human activity.

However, such models and theories are not without their critics. Authors have generally been careful to position thanatourism as sharing characteristics with postmodernism, for example, but without deeply examining the development of tourist deathscapes within the philosophical paradigms of postmodernism itself. This has attracted criticism, with Casbeard and Booth (2012), for example, disputing the temporal situation of thanatourism as postmodern; arguing that thanatological travel in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe on its own offers enough historical evidence to render the postmodern perspective redundant. Other discontents to recently emerge concern the appropriateness of the application of the subjective label 'dark' to tourist behaviour. Recent papers from Biran *et al* (2011) and Bowman and Pezzullo (2010) argue that although a *site* may be 'dark', the sought or actual experience of the tourist may be a socially 'bright' one. Poria & Biran (2012) further hint that dark tourism is neither a new form of tourism, or appropriate tourism classification at all, and it is instead simply a form or subset of heritage tourism. However, this argument could be

challenged by consideration of Stone's (2006) term 'dark fun factories'; which may have little or nothing to do with heritage and everything to do with consuming death.

Other conceptualisations which have been subject to discontent include Stone and Sharpley's (2008) sequestration thesis. This thesis proposes that in the modern era death is largely absent; sequestered to medical professionals, a perspective challenged by Seaton (2009a), who believes such a situation renders thanatourism a distinctly modern phenomenon. Instead Seaton proposes a congruence thesis, which argues that modern death has never been as publicly owned, desired or consumed, evidenced by its dominant position in mass media.

Yet postmodernism, congruence and secularisation are but a sample of potential thanatourism conceptualisations. Hyde and Harman (2011) for example raise the possibility of nationalism mediating the thanatourism experience. There are doubtless many other personal and sociological perspectives, particularly beyond the confines of Western thanatourism research which has been almost completely situated in Europe and North America. It seems therefore that Seaton's (2009a) most telling observation in his appraisal of thanatourism scholarship was a note that the relative absence of experiential data on thanatourism consumption is to the detriment of theorising the subject. This paper helps to address this imbalance by offering a new reading of Twain's *The Innocents*. It is proposed that a historical multi-site case study can help negotiate some of the spatial and temporal discontents associated with the postmodern, sequestration, secularisation and congruent perspectives.

### *1.2.2 Thanatourism and the production of tourist deathscapes*

Although early definitions of thanatourism and dark tourism discussed experience and motivation (Seaton, 1996, Foley and Lennon, 1996), much of the work which emerged over the next decade focussed on theory and site classification. The site classification papers generally applied the label 'dark' to site history and character, as opposed to referencing tourist motivation to consume. Much thanatourism research has adopted an almost Marxist approach to the phenomenon, focussing on the production of tourist landscapes of death; exploring the various commercial and political economies of commodified death and in particular the ethics of the journey of 'death' as the final human act, to its new found position as tourism product. This work has variously focussed on tour guides (Macdonald, 2006), museum interpretation (Miles, 2002), guidebooks (Siegenthaler, 2002), sites of incarceration (Wilson, 2008, Strange and Kempa, 2003) and national geopolitics (Bigley *et al*, 2010), among exploration of many other organic and autonomous production agents. Drawing from

this body of research, various theoretical papers emerged to locate the diversity of supply, including Stone's typology of thanatourism sites which proposed a 'spectrum of supply' (Stone, 2006, p. 157), locating sites on a framework relating to their 'shade' of darkness. Other models from Ashworth (2004), Dunkley (2007), Dann (1998), Sharpley (2005) and Tarlow (2005) proposed frameworks for exploring motivations and site characteristics independently.

It could be argued that the production of thanatourism exists in what geographers term 'deathscapes'. Although the suffix 'scape' is perhaps now overused, Appadurai (1990) proposes its use as a means of understanding contemporary social processes. Thus, a deathscape, could be defined as a space or place where interaction between society, death and bereavement is intensified. Such sites have the capacity to create particular spatial geographies of the dead for the living, which Maddrell and Sidaway note can be emotionally fraught, heavily contested, both socially and politically, and potentially places where public and private emotions can intersect. Exploring the production and investment of meaning at such sites provides a better understanding of how tourists and society negotiate mortality and ontological security.

### *1.2.3 Thanatourism and consumption of death*

While arguably less work has been carried out on the thanatourist experience, this has been addressed in recent years with motivational and experiential work from Biran *et al* (2011) on Auschwitz-Birkenau, Dunkley *et al* (2011) and Iles (2008) on World War 1 landscapes and Hyde & Harman (2011) on Gallipoli. However, the risk with work which focuses on individual sites or events is that although the polysemic nature of one site may be explored in depth, the multiple understandings of death across society remains unknown.

Sharpley (2009) proposes that a matrix of supply and demand exists in dark tourism; with purposeful supply and dark demand representing the darkest form of thanatourism; and accidental supply and pale demand/ low motivations representing the paler form. Recent work from Stone (2012b) proposes that dark tourism consumption can be categorised into narrative, educational, entertainment, haunting, memorialisation or *memento mori* functions which incorporates some of the supply and demand phenomena. However, as Seaton (2009a) notes, whether thanatourism should be seen as a primarily demand or a supply side concept is not yet resolved and that challenges remain in integrating the two. He therefore resolves that thanatourism is an appropriate term to avoid the pejorative association with the label 'dark'. Whatever the resolution to the supply-

demand question, and thus in many ways the labelling issue, dark tourism, or thanatourism as is preferred for this paper, is clearly a significant institution for the mediation of death.

The adapted definition carried forward to interpret Twain's experiences therefore, is that thanatourism arises from a movement of people to sites at which encountering death becomes a significant experience. Recent research focus has been on the motivations of tourists to visit such sites but this paper argues that thanatourism research should be equally concerned with the actual experience of consuming death and what the tourist does with this experience, considering that the encounter may not have been pre-motivated anyway. This is not to state that motivations are without importance, as motivations ultimately play a role in constructing the experience. However, the focus on motivation should not be to the detriment of understanding subsequent behaviour and emotional experience.

### **1.3 Methodology and rationale**

Three phenomena in *The Innocents* make it an appropriate thanatourism case study. These include the diversity of thanatourism experience sought by Twain, his subsequent representation of the experience in his travelogue and finally, his empathetic approach in documenting the encounters.

Firstly, Twain was by no means unusual in terms of being a great literary author interested in thanatourism; contemporaries such as Dickens, Beckford and Waugh (Seaton, 2009a) described many similar examples of the dark side of travel. Twain's work is particularly relevant today due to his illustration of the continuum of intensity proposed by Seaton (1996). His knowledge of the sites he visits varies; at some he demonstrates great interest and describes his long held desire to visit, yet at other sites his motivation is low and he exhibits little knowledge or interest. While Twain is but one traveller, and a 19<sup>th</sup> century traveller at that, positioning his encounters on the various thanatourism models can help us understand the potential experiential outcomes when faced with particular motivations and supply.

Secondly, *The Innocents* is chosen for its potential to refocus thanatourism research on to the experiential and away from the motivational. Although the motivational question formed a key component of the original definitions (Foley and Lennon 1996, Seaton, 1996), recent perspectives, such as those offered by Walter (2009) and Stone (2009) have since called for wider engagement with the relationship between the living, the dead and the spaces they co-inhabit. This shifts the emphasis towards the thanatourism *experience*. Twain's observations on how he consumes death,

contemplates mortality and understands his own life is presented herein, with an argument that there is greater need for thanatourism researchers to understand the emotional impact potential of sites of death and disaster. While it is unlikely that any one study could encapsulate a full range of thanatourism encounters, the breadth offered by Twain goes at least part of the way towards addressing this. At various points he is fascinated by the sites he encounters, yet at others he is disinterested, amused, frustrated and even deeply uncomfortable. At others again, his encounters are, as Lennon and Foley (2000) would put it, serendipitous in nature.

Finally, Twain's writing presents thanatourism as a clear and distinct form of encounter to a heritage tourism experience. Although Twain comments regularly on his and the pilgrims' interaction with heritage, he frequently privileges discussion of death, but does so in a very personal and humanistic manner. He considers the final moments of many of the dead he gazes upon, contemplating their mortality, his own and the beyond; a contemplation for Romantic travellers which represented an encounter with the 'greatest 'Other' of all' (Seaton, 2009a, p.531). For Seaton, the Romantic period afforded travellers the opportunity to reengage with individual subjectivity and Twain used *The Innocents* as a vehicle to express this subjectivity; exploring his own personal contemplations of death, particularly at sites where the death was present and raw, but also at the temporally distant Pompeii.

It is the *use* of these spaces where the encounter differs from a simple heritage experience; Twain's contemplation of the dead becomes his outlet for considering his own mortality. His interest extends beyond the history and heritage *of* death; to a contemplation of death itself. At many of the sites he visits he grows emotional, displaying compassion for the dead, and it is this empathetic style and reverence which makes his work relevant today. Too often in thanatourism literature the dead and mortality itself are neglected, considered as static objects, devoid of any human qualities. They are simply an object for a tourist to consume. For Twain, the dead were not simply a number, a newspaper headline or a line in a guidebook. They were real people; fathers, mothers, siblings, friends and enemies.

Analysis of *The Innocents* was conducted by reviewing Twain's encounters within the frameworks of contemporary thanatourism theories and models. A full analysis of Twain's thanatourism experiences was conducted, with samples chosen for illustrative purposes in this paper. Table 1 illustrates a sample of the sites Twain visits, but it is not an exhaustive list, given a) the volume of sites visited by the pilgrims and b) the breadth of interpretation possible on what constitutes an

encounter with death. The samples analysed were chosen to either challenge or affirm existing thanatourism scholarship, because of the eloquence of the passage, depth or breadth of discussion afforded to the experience by Twain, or because of the relevance of some of the sites to 21<sup>st</sup> century thanatourism encounters, including sites visited by Twain which remain popular today.

The following section describes Twain's experiences at sites encountered by the pilgrims.

## **1.4 Twain's encounters**

### *1.4.1 Relics, Cadavers and The Christian Cult of Death*

Seaton's (2009a) thanatourism development sketch situates the influence of Christianity as a major contributor to Western consumption of death; through symbolism and the display of relics, and the prominence of death in the liturgy itself, the Christian Church kept death at the forefront of everyday life. While secularisation in contemporary society has reduced exposure to death (Stone, 2009), the history of the Christian Cult of Death is recognised as playing a role in constructing contemporary thanatourism practices (Seaton, 2009a). In *The Innocents* Twain regularly comments on the prominent position of death on the pilgrims' excursions; including encounters with death through architecture, symbols and occasionally the liturgy. The focus of their gaze lies on the representations of death in relics and artefacts. Early in the trip, Twain pauses to reflect on his experience in Paris.

But isn't this relic matter a littler overdone. We find a piece of the true cross in every church we go into, and some of the nails that held it together. I would not like to be positive, but I think we have seen as much as a keg of these nails. Then there is the crown of thorns; they have part of one in Saint Chapelle, in Paris, and part of one also in Notre Dame. And as for bones of St Denis, I feel certain we have seen enough of them to duplicate him if necessary.

Twain, 1869, p.165

Death inhabited the majority of Christian sites encountered by the pilgrims; with bones, body parts, pieces of the crucifix and crown of thorns presented for their perusal alongside painted artwork and sculptures. In Italy, Twain describes a tour of the cathedral in Milan, embellished with relics of death.

The priests showed us two of St Paul's fingers, and one of St. Peter's; a bone of Judas Iscariot, (it was black), and also bones of all the other disciples; a handkerchief in which the Saviour had left the impression of his face. Among the most precious of the relics were a



stone from the Holy Sepulchre, part of the crown of thorns (they have a whole one at Notre Dame), a fragment of the purple robe worn by the Saviour, a nail from the Cross, and a picture of the Virgin and Child painted by the veritable hand of St Luke. This is the second of St Luke's Virgins we have seen. Once a year all these holy relics are carried in procession through the streets of Milan.

Twain, 1869, p.180

Seaton (2009a, p.527) wryly observes that Christianity is the only world religion to utilise death in its branding, with the crucifix as its 'corporate logo'. While such *memento mori* are relatively sequestered from contemporary society (Stone, 2009), they were remained visible in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Indeed less than 100 years earlier, death was prominent in the urban landscape of Paris, a result of hundreds of years of incorporating such symbols into public space (Etlin, 1984). The earliest example of the *danse macabre*, the late-medieval allegory on death, originated in Paris, appearing in 1424 on Rue de la Ferronnerie (Etlin, 1984, p.3). This allegory, usually presented as a gothic painting on cemetery walls, included people from all ranks of society and vibrantly illustrated the fragility of life. Although the city's deathscapes had evolved by Twain's 1867 visit, death remained a feature in Parisian tourism (Schwartz, 1995, 1998, MacCannell, 1989).

While in Paris, Twain visits a morgue, cemetery and assassination location. Gazing upon these sites, he comments on the geography and sociology of death. Discussing a tree on the Bois De Boulogne for example, he comments on the ecological challenges faced by the preservation of dark sites.

The cross marks the spot where a troubled troubadour was waylaid and murdered in the fourteenth century. It was in this park that that fellow with an unpronounceable name made the attempt on the Russian Czar's life last spring with a pistol. The bullet struck a tree. Ferguson showed us the place. Now in America that interesting tree would be chopped down or forgotten within the next five years, but it will be treasured here. The guides will point it out to visitors for the next eight hundred years, and when it decays and falls down they will put another up there and go on with the same old story just the same.

(Twain, 1869: 88)

Throughout *The Innocents*, Twain notes the rawness of many of the sites the pilgrims encounter; with death having occurred at several within a recent timeframe. This lends a rawness to the experience and Twain notes that some sites may eventually drift out of public consciousness.

However, beyond observations of the physical properties of deathscapes, he additionally notes the temporal proximity to death. Touring Notre Dame for example, the pilgrims are afforded the opportunity to inspect artefacts of death. Among the usual observation of the nails of the cross, they view some bloody robes worn by a recently murdered archbishop (nine years prior, in 1848), a cast of his corpse, the bullet which killed him and two vertebrae in which it lodged (Twain, 1869, p.131). Parisian deathscapes fascinate and perplex Twain and he notes that 'these people have a somewhat singular taste in relics' (1869, p.131). This exposure to the Christian Cult of Death continues beyond Paris however, and is particularly evident in Rome. Announcing his arrival at the most gruesome site they encounter, Twain proclaims:

From the sanguinary sports of the Holy Inquisition; the slaughter of the Coliseum; and the dismal tombs of the Catacombs; I naturally pass to the picturesque horrors of a Capuchin Convent. We stopped a moment in a small chapel in the church to admire a picture of St. Michael vanquishing Satan--a picture which is so beautiful that I can not but think it belongs to the reviled "Renaissance," notwithstanding I believe they told us one of the ancient old masters painted it--and then we descended into the vast vault underneath.

Here was a spectacle for sensitive nerves!

Twain, 1869, p.298

Constructed and decorated with thousands of human bones taken from 4,000 deceased monks of the Capuchin order, Twain's gaze is unavoidably directed towards the convent's architecture. The Capuchin Convent was full of 'quaint architectural structures of various kinds, built of shin bones and the bones of the arm; on the wall were elaborate frescoes, whose curving vines were made of knotted human vertebrae; whose delicate tendrils were made of sinews and tendons; whose flowers were formed of knee-caps and toe-nails' (Twain, 1869, p.298). The pilgrims are guided by an old friar, who Twain notes takes 'high pride in his curious show' (*ibid*, p.299), a pride Twain believes is augmented by a great degree of interest from the pilgrims. With the bones of the monks stacked everywhere, nailed to the walls and scattered between different rooms, Twain turns to the friar and contemplates aloud the potential chaos and confusion on doomsday.

"Their different parts are well separated--skulls in one room, legs in another, ribs in another--there would be stirring times here for a while if the last trump should blow. Some of the brethren might get hold of the wrong leg, in the confusion, and the wrong skull, and find

themselves limping, and looking through eyes that were wider apart or closer together than they were used to. You can not tell any of these parties apart, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, I know many of them."

He put his finger on a skull. "This was Brother Anselmo--dead three hundred years--a good man."

He touched another. "This was Brother Alexander--dead two hundred and eighty years. This was Brother Carlo--dead about as long."

Then he took a skull and held it in his hand, and looked reflectively upon it, after the manner of the grave-digger when he discourses of Yorick.

Twain, 1869, p.300

However, despite his humour at this point, Twain appears sombre and even quite upset. He writes that the monk has a business-like way of illustrating a touching story, and calls his performance 'grotesque' and 'ghastly'; 'I hardly knew whether to smile or shudder' (*ibid*, 1869, p.301). He compares the monk's performance to that of a surgeon, telling of a recently deceased patient in medical terminology. The monk eventually adopts a more sombre tone, speaking of his own mortality and desire to be buried in the convent, which seems to placate Twain.

I asked the monk if all the brethren up stairs expected to be put in this place when they died. He answered quietly:

"We must all lie here at last."

See what one can accustom himself to.--The reflection that he must some day be taken apart like an engine or a clock, or like a house whose owner is gone, and worked up into arches and pyramids and hideous frescoes, did not distress this monk in the least. I thought he even looked as if he were thinking, with complacent vanity, that his own skull would look well on top of the heap and his own ribs add a charm to the frescoes which possibly they lacked at present.

Twain, 1869, p.301

Continuing around the convent, Twain finds one skull which particularly interests him. Lying in one of the ornamental alcoves is a dead and dried up monk. The pilgrims examine it closely, noting the details of its posture. The head is of most interest; with its yellow teeth, sunken eyes and prominent nostrils, the skull appears to be laughing.

It was the jolliest laugh, but yet the most dreadful, that one can imagine. Surely, I thought, it must have been a most extraordinary joke this veteran produced with his latest breath, that he has not got done laughing at it yet. At this moment I saw that the old instinct was strong upon the boys, and I said we had better hurry to St. Peter's. They were trying to keep from asking, "Is--is he dead?"

Twain, 1869, p.302

Considering present death - temporally, socially and spatially closer in proximity than the Christian Cult of Death -the pilgrims tour a Parisian morgue. At the time, 'the Morgue served as a visual auxiliary to the newspaper, staging the recently dead who had been sensationally detailed by the printed word', and attracted as many as 40,000 visitors on big days (Schwartz, 1995, p.298). Twain doesn't specify which morgue, and it appears not to be a pre-motivated visit, or indeed one that he held in any anticipation, but several, such as the morgue situated on the quai de l'Archeveche, behind Notre Dame but now a memorial (Schwartz, 1998) were open to the visiting public at the time. Although only afforded a few paragraphs, Twain's morgue encounter is one of the most striking thanatourism experiences in *The Innocents*.

19<sup>th</sup> century Parisian morgues institutionalised the viewing of corpses (Schwartz, 1998), acting as receptacles where those who died unidentified in the city could be exhibited to the public for identification. Although Twain offers no explanation as to why the pilgrims visited the morgue, such visits were relatively commonplace for tourists in Paris, particularly for English visitors who could not easily visit morgues at home (Schwartz, 1998), and sought an authentic experience in 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris (MacCannell, 1989). Given that Parisian morgues featured on established touring routes, appearing in guidebooks alongside attractions, a slaughterhouse, accommodation and other civic buildings (MacCannell, 1989), and that Twain frequently mentions their private guide's control of their itinerary, it is possible that the pilgrims' morgue visit was part of a pre-arranged itinerary.

At the morgue, Twain comments on the poignancy of the encounter, particularly in relation to the gore and horror of the experience. He uses the adjectives 'horrible', 'dismal' and 'dread', (Twain, 1869, p.133) among others, to describe the sights of the freshly deceased corpses. He describes one corpse, recently deceased from drowning:

On a slanting stone lay a drowned man, naked, swollen, purple; clasping the fragment of a broken bush with a grip which death had so petrified that human strength could not unloose

it - mute witness of the last despairing effort to save the life that was doomed beyond all help.

Twain 1869, p.133

Twain makes several further comments on the encounter which posit the morgue as a public exhibition or spectacle, not dissimilar to today's touring exhibitions of cadavers (Stone, 2012). Discussing a recent victim of drowning, Twain imagines a grieving mother and his language again conjures up thanatopic imagery.

We grew meditative and wondered if, some forty years ago, when the mother of that ghastly thing was dandling it upon her knee, and kissing it and petting it and displaying it with satisfied pride to the passers-by, a prophetic vision of this dread ending ever flitted through her brain.

Twain 1869, p.133

Finally, before leaving the morgue, Twain comments on the scale of the gore sought and witnessed by the locals. In the morgue, Twain observes some visitors eagerly pressing their faces against the bars to gaze on the corpses, only to be disappointed with the sight. These people visit morgues regularly, 'just as other people go to see theatrical spectacles every night', (*ibid*, p.133) and need a really gruesome sight to appease their appetite for death. He comments on those who view the drowning victim with: 'Now this don't afford you any satisfaction - a party with his head shot off is what you need', (*ibid*, p.133).

#### 1.4.2 Archaeology, Battlefields and the Geography of Death

Despite his discomfort at the actions of others at the morgue, Twain's personal craving and desire for spectacle death is equally gruesome, and particularly evident later in the excursion when the pilgrims visit the Coliseum in Rome. Not content with a simple heritage encounter, Twain uses his imagination to conjure up brutal scenes of death and dying, in his usual vivid style. He imagines a fictional pamphlet 'The Roman Daily Battle Ax', which he 'finds' in the ruins. The pamphlet describes 'last night's slaughter' in detail, and Twain gives the fictional newsletter some 1200 words in *The Innocents*. He breathes life into his surroundings, imagining the 60,000 people present for the slaughter, the impassable streets and the royalty and pomp of the ceremony before the main event. He describes how a young amateur delivered a blow to a gladiator, received 'with a hearty applause', before being killed in front of his regretful sisters. Another prisoner's mother 'ran

screaming, with hair dishevelled and tears streaming from her eyes, and swooned away just as her hands were clutching at the railings of the arena' (Twain, 1869, p. 274).

He draws the introductory act to a close and introduces the main event, the gladiator 'Marcus Marcellus Valerian (stage name--his real name is Smith)', an 'artist of rare merit' with wonderful management of the battle axe. This gladiator slays two barbarians in Twain's tale, one with a blow to the head and the other by cleaving the barbarian's body in half to the wild applause of the audience. Finally the 'Battle Ax' draws events to a close, promising an afternoon matinee for the young folk.

Later on their itinerary the pilgrims visit the buried city of Pompeii, one of the best known thanatourism attractions of the Romantic era (Seaton, 1996). Buried in 79AD by the nearby volcano Mount Vesuvius, Pompeii was covered with four to six metres of ash for some 1800 years (Twain, 1869, p.327). Although the city was partially rediscovered in 1599, full excavations did not commence until 1738 (Cooley and Cooley, 2004). Today the ruins are a major tourist attraction, with UNESCO designation and approximately 2.5 million visitors per year (UNESCO, 2012). In Twain's era tourism to Pompeii was very much a feature of the Grand Tour, allowing aristocratic tourists to wander the streets, gaze upon the excavations and touch the ruins of the city.

They pronounce it Pom-pay-e. I always had an idea that you went down into Pompeii with torches, by way of damp, dark stairways, just as you do in silver mines, and traversed gloomy tunnels with lava overhead and something on either hand like dilapidated prisons gouged out of the solid earth, that faintly resembled houses. But you do nothing of the kind.

Twain, 1869, p.327

It would be easy to situate Victorian consumption of Pompeii as a heritage tourism encounter - the preserved ruins of the city served (and still serve) a clear function as a link to the past. During his visit to Pompeii, Twain makes many comments about the ruins of the city in general and their status as preserved and toured archaeology. There is an undeniable beauty to ruins of course, which allows for imaginative interpretation; providing a seductive emptiness, space for contemplation and in Twain's case, space for personal reflection. Given the environment, and Twain's vivid imagination, it was easy for him to breathe life back into his surroundings, as at the Coliseum. As he lounges through the utterly deserted streets, he imagines 'where thousands and thousands of human beings once bought and sold, and walked and rode, and made the place resound with the noise and confusion of traffic and pleasure' (Twain, 1869, p.331). The desolation of Pompeii's ruins hold (for

Twain) a visual contrast to the status they once held; whether this was as a simple dwelling place of the everyday man or a symbol of vibrant market and social life. Yet, Pompeii offered a layered experience, and Twain uses the space primarily to contemplate dying and death.

In one of these long Pompeian halls the skeleton of a man was found, with ten pieces of gold in one hand and a large key in the other. He had seized his money and started towards the door, but the fiery tempest caught him at the very threshold, and he sank down and died. One more minute of precious time would have saved him. I saw the skeletons of a man, a woman, and two young girls. The woman had her hands spread wide apart, as if in mortal terror, and I imagined I could still trace upon her shapeless face something of the expression of wild despair that distorted it when the heavens rained fire in these streets, so many years ago.

Twain, 1869, p.333

Twain's encounters with dying at Pompeii lead him to consider his own mortality - for him, the ruins act as a portal into the great unknown of death, which he used to contemplate the act of dying. He finishes his visit to Pompeii illustrating the depths of his thanatopic experience. Hearing a cry for his return train to Naples, he awakens from a daydream, to be reminded that he belongs 'in the nineteenth century, and was not a dusty mummy, caked with ash and cinders, eighteen hundred years old. The transition was startling.' (*ibid*, p.335).

The spatial organisation of Pompeii plays a major role in constructing Twain's thanatourism experience. The geography of death, or deathscape, mediates his gaze; he has the opportunity to view a corpse which was mummified by a natural event, he can touch the archaeological ruins of the corpse's surroundings and consider the dilemma faced by the owner of the gold coins during the volcanic eruption. For the pilgrims, Pompeii was a temporally distant, if relatively spatially close event, and required both imagination and interpretation to provoke consideration of death. But the pilgrims were not limited to consuming such temporally distant events on their excursion. In an early example of time-space compression facilitating the availability of battlefield tourism, the pilgrims visit Sebastopol; a battlefield from the recent Crimean War, which took place just over a decade prior, from 1853-1856.

Sebastopol is probably the worst battered town in Russia or anywhere else..... Ruined Pompeii is in good condition compared to Sebastopol. Here, you may look in whatsoever direction you please, and your eye encounters scarcely anything but ruin, ruin, ruin!--

fragments of houses, crumbled walls, torn and ragged hills, devastation everywhere! It is as if a mighty earthquake had spent all its terrible forces upon this one little spot.

Twain, 1869 Pp. 381, 382

In September 1854, allied troops from France, Britain and the Ottoman Empire landed in the Crimea and besieged the city of Sevastopol. Sevastopol, also called Sevastopol, was home to the Black Sea Fleet, a navy which threatened the allied forces in the Mediterranean. The siege became one of the major battles in the Crimean war, lasting from September 1854 to September 1855. Like the battle of Waterloo (Seaton, 1999), the Siege of Sevastopol was watched by British tourists even as it happened (Gordon, 1998). Tourism to battlefields has long been popular; and Vanderbilt (2002, p. 135) notes the legacy of war usually results in tourism.

All wars end in tourism. Battlefields are rendered as scenic vistas, war heroes are frozen into gray memorials in urban parks, tanks and other weapons bask outside American Legion posts on suburban strips.

Twelve years after the siege of Sevastopol, Twain and the pilgrims visited the battlefields. Although they spend but a few hours on site, Twain devotes several pages to describing the experience, mainly detailing the scars of war left by the siege. He describes how 'the storms of war' beat down upon the houses, . solid stone houses all ploughed through by cannon balls, smashed, unroofed and with holes driven through the walls.

These fearful fields, where such tempests of death used to rage, are peaceful enough now; no sound is heard, hardly a living thing moves about them, they are lonely and silent--their desolation is complete.

Twain, 1869, p.384

With little to see beyond destruction, the group takes to hunting relics. One over-eager pilgrim riles Twain with his relentless collection of artefacts, taking two full sack loads on board to add to his collection. 'Cannon balls, broken ramrods, fragments of shell--iron enough to freight a sloop' (*ibid*, P385) are gathered by the pilgrims, with some bringing bones, hoping them to be human. Disappointment comes for the looters when told by the ship's surgeon that the bones belong to animals. Other fragments are collected from the battlefield and mislabelled to increase their value



back home. Frustrated with one companion, Twain challenges him over a mislabelled horse jaw-bone and teeth.

[Twain]: "Fragment of a Russian General! This is absurd. Are you never going to learn any sense?"

He [Twain's companion] only said: "Go slow--the old woman [his aunt at home] won't know any different."

Twain, 1869, p.385

Their plunder of the site complete, the pilgrims depart.

## **1.5 Discussion**

### *1.5.1 Motivation, experience and affect*

Seaton made clear in his original definition that thanatourism comprised travel to sites motivated by a desire to encounter death, whether death was seen as the principle motivation or even at all consciously seen as a motivation (Seaton, 2009a, p. p. 522). He acknowledged (1996) that thanatourism existed across a continuum of intensity, regulated by tourist motivations and knowledge of the deceased; the more differentiated a traveller's knowledge of the dead the paler his/ her thanatourism experience would be. Conversely, the weaker the knowledge of the dead, the stronger the pure thanatourism element.

While we know much already about the reproduction of death for tourist consumption (e.g. Keil, 2005, Macdonald, 2006, Strange & Kempa, 2003), and increasingly more about tourist motivations to consume reproduced death (for examples see Biran *et al*, 2011 & Hyde and Harman, 2011) there is comparatively less research on the thanatourism experience (Stone, 2009), and almost none at the purest end of the scale; purposeful consumption or deep contemplation of deliberately commodified death. One could posit that little is known about the psychological impacts of encountering death in a touristic form. Key questions persist, such as, for example, what do tourists contemplate when facing commodified death? How do they negotiate the paradox of death as an everyday occurrence, anthropological constant and tourist attraction, yet also an extraordinary departure in the lives of those affected? Does the experience impact on the tourist's psyche? If so, how? What insights does the encounter offer into the tourist's own mortality? Is the encounter carried forward into other parts of the tourist's life?

*The Innocents* provides clues to some of these such questions. Whilst it is acknowledged that Twain is a literary icon, a 19th century traveller, and a highly imaginative and often eccentric individual, the representations of his experiences in *The Innocents* nonetheless offer an insight into the power of thanatopsis. In his early 30s at the time of *The Innocents*, Twain's career as an author was at a relatively early stage. Publication of *The Innocents* in 1869, along with subsequent travelogue *Roughing It* (1872), helped launch him into mainstream American literature. In *The Innocents*, Twain's representation of the thanatourism experience is eloquent, often sensitive and most importantly, laden with personal reflection. Many of the sites visited by Twain offered a very intimate and involved encounter. At Sebastopol for example, his compatriots *touch* the landscape, collecting artefacts from the soil, holding the bones of whom they believe to be the deceased, an encounter which clearly upsets Twain. Similarly, in the Capuchin Convent, they are guided by a monk who also touches the bones of deceased contemporaries; a 'grotesque performance' (Twain, 1869, p.301) for Twain. But the sensory experience of 'touching' death is not the only mediating influence for him, and he comments on his auditory experience at a number of sites. The silence of the fields in Sebastopol and the irreverent whistling of a train in Pompeii are but two of many examples throughout *The Innocents*. It could be argued therefore that although 'gaze' is used in tourism literature generally as a 'catch all', the sensory experience of consuming death is far greater than a visual encounter. Smell, touch, auditory and taste are generally absent from thanatourism literature; yet must surely play a role in constructing the experience. A morbid thought perhaps, but a potential avenue for future thanatourism consumption research; and one which would likely require new methodological approaches.

### *1.5.2 Methodologies and the geography of thanatourism*

Twain's encounters illustrate the need for an examination of the geography of thanatourism. Despite the established focus in contemporary literature on the supply of sites (Biran et al, 2011), the physical properties of deathscapes have received surprisingly less attention (Charlesworth and Addis, 2002). Tourism is an inherently spatial activity, yet many thanatourism publications neglect to comment on the ecology, topography, architecture and other physical attributes of sites.

Weathering, new construction, invasive species and other activities at the sites take their toll on the topography and ecology. Does this impact on the thanatourist experience? Although few authors have explored the mediating power of deathscapes, or indeed noted the fluidity of the geography, work by Charlesworth and Addis (2002) and Iles (2008) explicitly draws attention to the impact of the physical landscape on the thanatourist.

Further to the ecology and topography, thanatopsis, the gaze on death, or what could be termed a 'thanagaze', is influenced by autonomous and organic images. In *The Innocents*, Twain comments on his expectations, explicitly noting that they have been preconfigured by tour guides, guidebooks, signage and popular literature. Semiotics have been studied to some degree in thanatourism, with Keil (2005) noting the power of signage and memorialisation in constructing the thanatourism experience at Auschwitz Birkenau. However, despite an increasing volume of empirical material on the role of signage in constructing the thanatourism experience and provoking thanatopsis, there has yet to be a broader conceptual engagement with the semiotics of death and the resulting implications for management and tourist behaviour.

### **1.6 Conclusion**

Exploration into the darkest thanatourism experiences will provide a better understanding of how and why society and individuals contemplate mortality. Walter (2009, p.55) writes that '[I] may be wrong that most dark tourism visits are typically contingent rather than motivated'; and that thanatourists do not seek to remedy a demonstrable senses of detachment from morality by seeking encounters with death. Many of Twain's visits were indeed contingent, or serendipitous in nature, yet his contemplation of death would appear to lie at the darkest end of the spectrum. While he was of course a well-known author and dramatized his experiences for popular consumption, it is evident that 'The Other' of death was the defining feature of many of his experiences. In *The Innocents*, Twain is variously disgusted and frustrated by his colleagues' behaviour and the behaviour of his guides; in particular at the lack of empathy and sensitivity they display towards the dead. For Twain their actions are inappropriate and cold, provoking a great degree of discomfort. However, the most frequent behaviour Twain exhibits is his humour and he negotiates the paradox of consuming death with recourse to wit and satire. While this humour in consuming death may not be widespread beyond Twain, the examples illustrated throughout the paper serve to remind that the potential breadth of behaviours when encountering death is much broader than currently reflected in the literature; which focuses mostly on empathy.

Twain's encounters with deathscapes, at both temporally close and temporally distant sites, provides further evidence that thanatourism has the power to induce anxiety beyond contemplation of the failings of modernity and contemplation of those who passed within living memory. This notion is in conflict with Lennon and Foley's (2000) and Rojek's (1993) work, who situate thanatourism within a post-modernity paradigm, by focussing on tourism at sites associated with the failings of modern institutions. Twain's contemplation of temporally distant death, far beyond living

memory and exhibiting little in relation to institutions of modernity, serves to illustrate that theoretical reflections on thanatourism may benefit from looking beyond the postmodern frame of reference.

Finally, in terms of methodological significance, Twain's experience in *The Innocents* illustrates the need for new methodological approaches in thanatourism research. While not all thanatourists possess Twain's imaginative prowess or the opportunity to so conspicuously publish their experiences (travel blogs aside), contemporary tourists will encounter equally mediated thanatourism experiences. The challenge is to uncover the breadth of production and consumption influences which mediate the gaze on death; while acknowledging the varying differences in meaning invested by tourists. Recent methodological innovations in thanatourism research have proposed approaches which are increasingly sympathetic to the highly personal process of contemplating death. Dunkley *et al* (2011) propose a compassionate oral history approach, Iles (2008) adopts an ethnographic approach, Seaton (2012) uses guestbook comments as a data source, while Sharpley (2012) draws upon travel blog research. Such methodological innovations are necessary to overcome the possible reluctance to discuss death, noted by Biran *et al* (2011).

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Table 1: A selection of the thanatourism sites visited by Mark Twain in 1867, (Twain, 1869)

Site	Site function	Twain's comments
A Parisian morgue	Working morgue and tourist attraction	..that horrible receptacle for the dead who die mysteriously (p. 132).
A cave in Gibraltar	Burial cave	...human bones, crusted with a very thick, stony coating (p. 68).
The buried city of Pompeii	Archaeological ruin	It is a city of hundreds and hundreds of roofless houses, and a tangled maze of streets where one could easily get lost, without a guide, and have to sleep in some ghostly palace that had known no living tenant since that awful November night of eighteen centuries ago (p. 329).
An assassination attempt site at the Bois de Boulogne, Paris	Urban park	It was in this park that that fellow with an unpronounceable name made the attempt upon the Russian Czar's life last spring with a pistol. The bullet struck a tree. Ferguson showed us the place (p. 139).
Père Lachaise, Paris	Working cemetery and tourist attraction	One of our pleasantest visits was to Père la Chaise, the national burying-ground of France (p. 139).
The battlefields of Sebastopol, Crimea (modern day Ukraine)	Crimean War battlefield from the Siege of Sebastopol, 1854	Sebastopol is probably the worst battered town in Russia or anywhere else (p. 381).
Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris	Working cathedral	He [a bishop] was shot dead. They showed us a cast of his face taken after death, the bullet that killed him, and the two vertebrae in which it lodged. These people have a somewhat singular taste in the matter of relics (p. 131).
The Capuchin Convent, Rome	Working convent	...on the wall were elaborate frescoes, whose curving vines were made of knotted human vertebrae; whose delicate tendrils were made of sinews and tendon (p. 298).
A Genoan cemetery	Working cemetery	Our last sight was the cemetery (a burial place intended to accommodate 60,000 bodies) and we shall continue to remember it after we shall have forgotten the palaces (p. 170).
The Castle d'If, France	Former prison and tourist attraction	We saw the damp, dismal cells in which two of Dumas' heroes passed their confinement--heroes of "Monte Cristo" (p. 104).
The Coliseum, Rome	Former amphitheatre and tourist attraction	Weeds and flowers spring from its massy arches and its circling seats, and vines hang their fringes from its lofty walls. An impressive silence broods over the monstrous structure where such multitudes of men and women were wont to assemble in other days (p. 277).