

# An Analysis of Mark Twain's Humor in His *The Innocents Abroad*

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## Preface

Many people are fond of Mark Twain and his humor. To my surprise, his humor is totally understandable and acceptable to me, though I live in different times and in a different country from his own. One of the reasons why I can accept and sympathize with him from the bottom of my heart is that Twain describes universal human beings, and he himself has so deep and layered personalities to observe them, and find out their secret. Whenever reading his books, I see the double Twain; one is the innocent or funny Twain described as their main character, and the other is the author, who is controlling and talking of himself and others. To me, his humor is not just a form of entertainment side of; his humor always inspires me because his humor urges me very naturally to realize his deep and warm feelings for human beings.

*The Innocents Abroad*, which was originally carried in the San Francisco newspaper *The Alta California*, established Twain's status as a writer, because it was not a common travel writing; it was full of humor—more full, probably, than any other that had ever been written in history. To publish it in book form, he had to rewrite the newspaper articles because of the copyright troubles, but the revised version is still full of humor and very interesting not only as a travel book, but also as a work of literature—a work of art.

In this essay, I would like to analyze his humor and his intention behind humor, as seen in his *The Innocents Abroad*. My analysis will go as follows: Chapter 1 is to consider “laughter”, Chapter 2 is to show Twain's techniques of humor, Chapter 3 is to think of matters which Twain jokes about, and Chapter 4 is to find out Twain's true intentions in *The Innocents Abroad*.

## I. Bergson's Idea of Laughter

The purpose of this chapter is to consider “laughter.” As a reaction, “laughter” is common

to every human being. First of all, we need to think of laughter in general by consulting the theory of a philosopher, Henri Bergson <sup>1</sup>, before we make a detailed explanation of Mark Twain's laughter in the following chapters.

Let me clarify the features of Twain's laughter. His way of evoking laughter is apparently by writing a book; there is no interaction between Twain and his readers. There is a time lag till readers laugh about Twain's humor, and he cannot be influenced by an audience. Therefore, in this paper, I am concerned with analyzing laughter in conversation, but laughter in reading. The important thing is in what condition Twain's readers should start laughing, while reading, say, his *The Innocents Abroad*.

There are four questions. The first one is "What is laughter?" The second one "When do people (receivers) laugh?" Then "What makes people laugh?" And the last one is "What is the influence of laughter on readers' mind?"

## 1. What is laughter?

The first question to consider is what laughter is. Leonard Feinberg<sup>2</sup> defines humor as "an attack with a play."<sup>3</sup> He agrees to Bergson's opinion that "Always rather humiliating for the one against whom it is directed, laughter is really and truly a kind of social 'ragging.'"<sup>4</sup> Bergson further points out:

It [laughter] always implies a secret or unconscious intent, if not of each one of us, at all events of society as a whole. In laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct our neighbour, if not in his will, at least in his deed.<sup>5</sup>

It is true that *The Innocents Abroad* Twain criticizes in authorities like the Italian government with humorous expressions. The expressions seem to be literally just jokes, or sometimes even to praise objects. In other words, his descriptions sometimes lack seriousness on the surface, but they imply deeper truths. To quote Bergson again, "Humor is the more emphasized, the deeper we go down into an evil that actually is, in order to set down its details in the most cold-blooded indifferences."<sup>6</sup> Laughter, especially in the form of humor, has its property as attacking; Twain,

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<sup>1</sup> *Bergson, Henri*. "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic." (Brereton, Cloudesley, & Rothwell, Fred., Trans.). New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005.

<sup>2</sup> *Feinberg, Leonard*. "The Secret of Humor."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Bergson, Henri*. "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic," p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> *Bergson, Henri*. "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic," p. 63.

a producer of laughter, has a secret intention to assail his objects.

## 2. When do people laugh?

There needs to be two conditions for triggering people's laugh. The first condition is that people need to accept the element of laughter as their pleasure despite its form of attack. And the second, more essential condition is: people laugh when they take it for granted that the expressed things are someone else's affairs, which is, according to Henri Bergson, "a symptom equally worthy of notice, the absence of feeling."<sup>7</sup> He says, "Indifference is its natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion."<sup>8</sup> He also says:

There are moods [...], which move us as soon as we perceive them, joys and sorrows with which we sympathise, passions and vices which call forth painful astonishment, terror, or pity, in the beholder; in short, sentiments that are prolonged in sentimental overtones from mind to mind. All this concerns the essential of life. All this is serious, at times even tragic. Comedy can only begin at the point where our neighbour's personality ceases to affect us.<sup>9</sup>

Even when people laugh at themselves, they have detachment. That is why people are delighted with laughter even when they are being attacked. In *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain describes its ass-characters, including himself, manipulating his characters as totally detached from sentiments. At the moment of laughing, people not only feel what's happening is someone else's affairs but also accept its attack with satisfaction. When writers write well, readers burst into laughter.

## 3. What do people laugh at?

The next question is what kind of elements make people laugh. Bergson mentions that, "[t]he laughable element [...] consists of a certain mechanical inelasticity, just where one would expect to find the wide awake adaptability and the living pliability of a human being,"<sup>10</sup> in other words, "a rigidity,"<sup>11</sup> "a momentum,"<sup>12</sup> or "the hallucination of a mechanical effect."<sup>13</sup> People expect things to be as they should be. When the result is different from what people have expected, laughter occurs to them. The key point is unexpectedness. Bergson says:

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<sup>7</sup> Bergson, Henri. "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic," p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Our imagination has a very clear-cut philosophy of its own; in every human from it sees the effort of a soul which is shaping matter, a soul which is infinitely supple and perpetually in motion, subject to no law of gravitation, for it is not the earth that attracts it. [...] Matter, however, is obstinate and resists. It draws to itself the ever-alert activity of this higher principle, would fain convert it to its own inertia and cause it to revert to mere automatism.<sup>14</sup>

Imagination can reach anywhere in people's mind, while the body cannot do likewise. That is why there are always ideal and reality; in other words, our expectation and unexpected happenings. The body causes our mind to perceive the world as it is, but "[b]y a certain arrangement of rhythm, rhyme and assonance, it is possible to lull the imagination, to rock it to and fro between like and like with a regular see-saw motion, and thus prepare it submissively to accept the vision suggested."<sup>15</sup> Our mind is apt to revert this automatism caused by the limitation of the body.

Twain knew how to extract this mechanical inelasticity, from people or things around him, and knew how to show it humorously before readers who could only receive it. Whenever readers find out before them the mechanical vision, they laugh.

#### **4. What is the influence of laughter upon readers' mind?**

The last question is what the influence of laughter on readers' mind is. What is happening in readers' mind at the moment of laughing? Bergson answers the question, comparing art and laughter:

[I]t [laughter] creates works which doubtless belong to art in that their only visible aim is to please, [...] and their scarcely confessed or scarcely conscious intention to correct and instruct.<sup>16</sup>

With laughter, readers try to correct or instruct about mechanical rigidity found in the story. Bergson also mentions:

The rigid, the ready-made, the mechanical, in contrast with the supple, the ever-changing and the living, absentmindedness in contrast with attention, in a word, automatism in contrast with free activity, such are the defects that laughter singles out and would fain correct.<sup>17</sup>

People's mind flows from one moment to the next, and the detached people, free from any restriction, can select where to go consciously. Bergson also says that laughter is the work of

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<sup>14</sup> *Bergson, Henri*. "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic," p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

people's common sense:

Common sense represents the endeavour of a mind continually adapting itself anew and changing ideas when it changes objects. It is the mobility of the intelligence conforming exactly to the mobility of things. It is the moving continuity of our attention to life.<sup>18</sup>

To sum up, laughter shows our common sense that attacks, corrects and instruct about mechanical inelasticity. In his Autobiography, Twain says about humor, comparing a humor of speech and a novel that:

Humor must not professedly teach and it must not professedly preach, but it must do both if it would live forever. [...] I have always preached. That is the reason that I have lasted thirty years.<sup>19</sup>

Twain's humor aims to preach, showing people's strangeness on purpose by using various kinds of techniques. Finding his characters' rigid actions or reactions, readers naturally try to correct them with laughter.

## II. Twain's techniques of humor

Mark Twain's techniques of telling a humorous story accords with what Henri Bergson says about the ways of telling a humorous story. Twain points out in *How to Tell a Story*, "The humorous story depends for its effect upon the manner of telling."<sup>20</sup> Also, Twain is very much concerned with expressing in a poker-faced tone, saying "The humorous story is told gravely; the teller does his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects that there is anything funny about it."<sup>21</sup> In *The Innocents Abroad*, there are various techniques shown by Twain, making the story flow smoothly. He says in the same essay, "The humorous story bubbles gently along."<sup>22</sup>

### 1. Repeating

Repeating is one of Twain's remarkable ways of telling humorous tall tales. Twain says, "Repetition is a mighty power in the domain of humor."<sup>23</sup> He tends to repeat some key words in *The Innocents Abroad*, or even in each of its chapters. He repeats the same evolutions of

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<sup>18</sup> Bergson, Henri. "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic," p. 90.

<sup>19</sup> Twain, Mark. "The Autobiography of Mark Twain," p. 358.

<sup>20</sup> Twain, Mark. "Humorous Stories and Sketches / Mark Twain," p. 70.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>23</sup> Twain, Mark. "The Autobiography of Mark Twain," p. 188.

situations, phrases, or words. By putting those key words at the time when readers have nearly forgotten them, Twain gives a strong and funny impression of those key words.

For example, whenever Mr. Blucher, one of Twain's companions in *The Innocents Abroad*, shows up, readers expect that he is going to do something silly, because foolishness has already been repeated a few times. When he booked his excursion, "He [...] came at last to consider the whole nation as packing up for emigration to France."<sup>24</sup> Mr. Blucher misunderstands the time difference, thinking "his watch got seasick."<sup>25</sup> He falls off from his donkey several times "without any harm,"<sup>26</sup> and finally he is almost "arrested"<sup>27</sup> at a Moorish mosque because of his total innocence.

Other than Mr. Blucher's stupid behaviors, there are repeated key words such as soap, and a fragment of the cross. A member of Twain's party is in serious trouble while having a shower, because there is no soap in a European bath. Twain says, "This thing of having to ring for soap every time we wash is new to us, and not pleasant at all."<sup>28</sup> In Chapter 19, when they go to a public bath-house, there is no soap. Finally, when an Italian soldier takes Twain to the guard-house, the soldier finds no "sedition" on Twain but a small piece of soap.<sup>29</sup> Twain also mentions fragments of the cross, pretending as if he thought that all of them are from the real cross. He says, there are "some nails of the true cross, a fragment of the cross itself. [...] We had already seen a large piece of the true cross in a church in the Azores, but no nails."<sup>30</sup> However, with so many scattered fragments of the cross, we know imply that he doubts the origin.

Not only throughout one book does Twain use repetitions in the similar situations but also in one chapter. For instance, he begins the story by saying, "If there is one thing in the world that will make a man peculiarly and insufferably self-conceited, it is to have his stomach behave itself, [...] when nearly all his comrades are seasick."<sup>31</sup> Following this sentence, seasick people appear one after another in the ship:

"Good morning, Sir. It is a fine day." He put his hand on his stomach and said, "Oh, my!" and then staggered away and fell over the coop of a skylight. Presently another old gentleman was projected from the same door, with great violence. I

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<sup>24</sup> *Twain, Mark*. "The Innocents Abroad," p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.—The Quaker City was gaining about twenty minutes every day, going to the east.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> *Twain, Mark*. "The Innocents Abroad," p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

said: “Calm yourself, Sir—There is no hurry. It is fine day, Sir.” He, also, put his hand on his stomach and said, “Oh, my!” and reeled away. In a little while another veteran discharged abruptly from the same door, clawing at the air for a saving support. I said: “Good morning, Sir. It is a fine day for pleasuring. You were about to say—” “Oh, my!” I thought so. <sup>32</sup>

The repeated “Oh, my!” has funny effects. In the end, Twain “staid there and was bombarded with old gentlemen for an hour perhaps.”<sup>33</sup> And all he got out of any of them was “Oh, my!” He is fed up with “Oh, my!”

## 2. Paraphrasing

People name something when they need to distinguish it from other things. To name is the same as to give those objects their meanings. Twain is good at giving new names to things around him and pulling down their value, as seen in the following example, “to use such a saddle was the next thing to riding a dinner table.”<sup>34</sup> It is certain that the shape of a saddle and that of a dinner table are somehow similar, but people categorize those two things into different chunks. Linking them together suddenly—or sudden replacement makes a shocking impression on readers.

Ferguson, a kind of nickname, is another example of replacement, appearing several times in *The Innocents Abroad*. In France, in Chapter 13, Twain’s party hires a guide whose name is Billfinger. Twain and his friends like the guide’s handsome appearance, but the name does not sound like what they have expected to be for a cool French name; therefore, they start to call him Ferguson. And after that, every guide is called Ferguson. Even in Chapter 27, we find “Our Roman Ferguson”<sup>35</sup> or Ferguson in the Sea of Galilee<sup>36</sup> in Chapter 48, though they are all different guides in different places.

Twain also called a French Barber “an incipient assassin”<sup>37</sup>, for the assassin scalped Twain’s face skin, and he describes an Italian gondola as a hearse, saying, “We [...] entered a hearse belonging to the Grand Hotel d’ Europe. At any rate, it was more like a hearse than anything else, though to speak by the cars, it was a gondola.”<sup>38</sup> The fact is that a gondola has been used as a hearse since old days, but Twain seems to know how beautiful an image American

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<sup>32</sup> *Twain, Mark*. “The Innocents Abroad,” p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 371.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154-55.

people have of a gondola.

A certain object is replaced by a totally different image, based on some similarity; for example, a donkey saddle in the Azores by a dinner table, Billfinger and others by Fergusons; a barber by an assassin, and a gondola by a hearse. All these procedures evoke laughter.

### 3. Puns

Although Twain rarely uses puns, he plays upon words. In chapter 12, he says that there is no French word meaning “home,” so he is sorry for the “homeless” France, saying, “I have observed that Frenchmen abroad seldom wholly give up the idea of going back to France [...]. I am not surprised at it now.”<sup>39</sup> Twain also describes Oracle, one of his innocent companions, as often making mistakes. He mistakenly calls Italian wine “Asti” as “nasty.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, unfortunately, the Italian wine is deprived of its value. Regarding the inserted *The Story of Abelard and Heloise*, he calls Heloise’s friend as “Parachute, or the Paraclete, or whatever it was.”<sup>41</sup>

### 4. Overstatement

#### (1) Stretching stories

One of Twain’s techniques is to stretch stories like “the snow-ball,”<sup>42</sup> according to Bergson’s expression. Twain gets so bored of Michael Angelo in Italy that he starts discharging his pent-up emotion by making his talk big, saying, “I used to worship the mighty genius of Michael Angelo. [...] But I do not want Michael Angelo for breakfast—for luncheon—for dinner—for tea—for supper—for between meals.”<sup>43</sup> Here he displays things which he thinks are created by Michael Angelo: St. Peter’s, the Pope, the Pantheon, the uniform of the Pope’s soldiers, the Tiber, the Vatican, the Coliseum, the Capitol, the Tarpeian Rock, the Barberini Palace, St. John Lateran, the Campagna, the Claudian Aqueduct, the Cloaca Maxima, and the Eternal City.<sup>44</sup> In the over long run, he concludes, howling, “EVERYTHING is designed by Michael Angelo Bonarotti!”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Twain begins to call a gondolier as “Roderigo Gonzales Michael Angelo.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Twain, Mark*. “The Innocents Abroad,” p. 73.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>42</sup> *Bergson, Henri*. “Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic,” p. 38.

<sup>43</sup> *Twain, Mark*. “The Innocents Abroad,” p. 209.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 209-10.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.—Twain’s friend, Dan’s saying.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

## (2) Superfluous modifiers

Superfluous modifiers often appear in *The Innocents Abroad*. Those varnished words exaggerate so much that they overwhelm their nouns. This effect by modifiers shows as follows: “The community is eminently Portuguese, [...] slow, poor, shiftless, sleepy, and lazy.”<sup>47</sup> Another example is when Twain talks of Italy as a whole. He says he is “in the heart and home of priestcraft — of a happy cheerful, contented ignorance, superstition, degradation, poverty, indolence, and everlasting unaspiring worthlessness.”<sup>48</sup>

## (3) Superfluous descriptions and explanations

Twain sometimes describes or explains things and people around him so exaggeratingly that they seem to turn something strange and funny. He introduces a sophisticated scholar as follows:

Rev. William H. Neligan, LL. D., M.A., Trinity College, Dublin; Member of the Anrchæological Society of Great Britain. [...] He tells of one St. Joseph Calasanctius whose house in Rome.

This poor scholar is explained superfluously by Twain. Moreover, Twain cited Rev. William H. Neligan’s writing:

His tongue and his heart, which were found after nearly a century to be whole, when the body was disinterred before his canonization, are still preserved in a glass case, and after two centuries the heart is still whole. When the French troops came to Rome, and when Pius VII was carried away prisoner, blood dropped from it.

And Twain seriously comments William’s writing as follows:

To read that in a book written by a monk far in the Middle Ages, would surprise no one; it would sound natural and proper; but when it is seriously stated in the middle of the nineteenth century, by a man of finished education, and LL.D., M.A., and Archæological magnate, it sounds strangely enough.<sup>49</sup>

Though the criticized miserable Rev. Neligan is acclaimed as a cultivated reverend, the more Mark Twain praises Rev. Neligan, the more dignity Rev. Neligan loses. The disagreement between William’s academic career and his unrealistic statement evokes a laugh.

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<sup>47</sup> *Twain, Mark*. “The Innocents Abroad,” p. 33.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

## 5. Missing the point of the keystone

In *Innocents Abroad*, many humorous characters including Twain often miss the point of the keystone in a conversation, developing and talking of their thoughts, and seem innocently unaware of their mistakes. Their innocence evokes a laugh. Twain says the key to tell a humorous story is “making minor mistakes now and then and stopping to correct them and explain how he [or she] came to make them.”<sup>50</sup> Twain’s characters “string incongruities and absurdities together in a wandering and sometimes purposeless way, and seem innocently unaware that they are absurdities.”<sup>51</sup> The following is an example of how Twain gets off the point by correcting unimportant minor mistakes, keeping his poker face:

We wish to learn all the curious, outlandish ways of all the different countries, so that we can “show off” and astonish people when we get home. [...] The gentle reader will never, never know what a consummate ass he can become, until he goes abroad. I speak now, of course, in the supposition that the gentle reader has not been abroad, and therefore is not already a consummate ass. If the case be otherwise, I beg his pardon and extend to him the cordial hand of fellowship and call him brother. I shall always delight to meet an ass after my own heart when I shall have finished my travels.<sup>52</sup>

Twain supposes that ALL CREATURES are asses if they have ever been abroad. And he continues to assume all of his readers have never been abroad. Then, suddenly, realizing his small mistake, he corrects the minor mistake in case there may be someone who has been abroad, making another mistake. Finally, he politely apologizes to and welcomes him or her without noticing his major mistake. Here, the major mistake should be in his first assumption that everyone is an ass if he or she has ever been abroad.

## III. The contents of humor

According to Twain, the important thing for a humorous story is not the matter, but the manner of telling. However, Twain was good not only at using an effective manner of telling a humorous story, but also at selecting the matter, because he had a unique point of view to observe people and things around him. The quality of *The Innocents Abroad* was different from that of other travel journals. He did write about various specialties at the places where he stayed just

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<sup>50</sup> Twain, Mark. “Humorous Stories and Sketches / Mark Twain,” p. 72.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>52</sup> Twain, Mark. “The Innocents Abroad,” p. 167.

as other common American travel journals did. But when revising the original journals mainly because of the copyright troubles, Twain inserted unique and humorous episodes, narrating people's behaviors and thoughts. His concern was always about human beings. That is why the book, *The Innocents Abroad* has much more elements of literature than of a single travel book.

In consideration of *The Innocents Abroad*, there are five things to clarify the uniqueness of this book. One of them is that he has inserted some episodes unrelated to his traveling experiences such as a reminiscence trivia of Lake Tahoe<sup>53</sup>, a memory of traveling to the West<sup>54</sup>, and HIS version of *The Story of Abelard and Heloise*<sup>55</sup>, etc. This was because he had copyright troubles, and had to change its contents from the original journal, but those added creative stories are also filled with humor. The transition is abrupt between his traveling experience and irreverent episodes. Talking about Lake Como, he digresses away from a description of the Lake Como to his favorite American Tahoe:

As I go back in sprit and recall that noble sea, reposing among the snow-peaks six thousand feet above the ocean, the conviction comes strong upon me again that Como would only seem a bedizened little courtier in that august presence. Sorrow and misfortune overtake the Legislature that still from year to year permits Tahoe to retain its unmusical cognomen! Tahoe! It suggests no crystal waters, no picturesque shores, no sublimity.<sup>56</sup>

Twain's emotion toward Lake Tahoe gets so strong that his memory occupies a few pages here. They show the humor pattern of "missing the point," as mentioned in Chapter 1, and the description is very vivid and beautiful. And here is another example; Twain suddenly starts to talk about his traveling memory of the West, changing the original topic suddenly:

[T]he phrase "butchered to make a Roman holyday." I am the only free white man of mature age, who has accomplished this since Byron originated the expression. [...] I find it in all the books concerning Rome—and here latterly it reminds me of Judge Oliver. Oliver was a young lawyer, fresh from the schools, who had gone out to the deserts of Nevada to begin life.<sup>57</sup>

Twain continues this Oliver story, which is irrelevant to his original expedition. For a few pages he tells how patient Oliver was; Oliver had complained only once in his life. Also, a whole episode of "The Story of Abelard and Heloise" is suddenly inserted by Twains re-narrating:

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<sup>53</sup> Twain, Mark. "The Innocents Abroad," p. 380.

—Mark Twain puts footnote, saying, "I measure all lakes by Tahoe, partly because I am far more familiar with it than with any other, and partly because I have such a high admiration for it and such a world of pleasant recollections of it, that is very nearly impossible for me to speak of lakes and not mention it."

<sup>54</sup> Twain, Mark. *The Innocents Abroad*, p.207.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

## STORY OF ABELARD AND HELOISE

Heloise was born seven hundred and sixty-six years ago. She may have had parents. There is no telling. She lived with her uncle Fulbert, a canon of the cathedral of Paris. I do not know what a canon of cathedral is, but that is what he was. He was nothing more than a sort of a mountain howitzer, likely, because they had no heavy artillery in those days. Suffice it, then, that Heloise lived of her uncle the howitzer, and was happy. [...] She then returned to her uncle, the old gun, or son of a gun, as the case may be<sup>58</sup>

Forgetting to describe the beauty of the town in his traveling, Twain instead talks of and makes fun of the uncle of Heloise. Moreover, *The story of Abelard and Heloise* is account for about one third of Chapter 15. Thus, *The Innocents Abroad* shows elements of both a travel journal and a tall tale, a work of literature.

The second uniqueness of *The Innocents Abroad* is that Twain has an eye for finding out “minor” yet attractive things that almost no one pays attention to. According to Twain, humorous objects should contain “simplicity and innocence and sincerity and unconsciousness.”<sup>59</sup> For example, he talks about humorous behaviors of a bird in France, of a sociable boisterous driver, and of Twain’s vices, etc. Visiting a zoo in France, Twain finds a strange animal, a funny bird, a suitable object to laugh at:

This fellow stood up with his eyes shut and his shoulders stooped forward a little, and looked as if he had his hand under his coat tails. Such tranquil stupidity, such supernatural gravity, such self-righteousness, and such ineffable self-complacency as were in the countenance and attitude of that gray-bodied, dark-winged, baldheaded, and preposterously uncomely bird! He was so ungainly, so pimply about the head, so scaly about the legs; yet so serene, so unspeakably satisfied! He was the most comical looking creature that can be imagined. [...] We stirred him up occasionally, but he only unclosed an eye and slowly closed it again, abating no jot of his stately piety of demeanor or his tremendous seriousness. [...] We did not know his name, and so we called him “The Pilgrim.”<sup>60</sup>

To Mark Twain, the bird must be very funny; however, nobody usually talks about “the Pilgrim” in travel journals, nor spends an hour for him, because the Pilgrim is just a bird for others. And the following is one more example—an episode about the boisterous driver:

[T]he driver picked up, in the street, a stump of a cigar an inch long, and put it in his mouth. When he had carried it thus about an hour, I thought it would be only Christian charity to give him a light. I handed him my cigar, which I had just lit, and he put it in his mouth and returned his stump to his pocket! I never saw a more sociable man. At least I never saw a man who was more sociable on a short

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<sup>58</sup> *Twain, Mark*. “The Innocents Abroad,” p. 100.

<sup>59</sup> *Twain, Mark*. “Humorous Stories and Sketches / Mark Twain,” p. 72.

<sup>60</sup> *Twain, Mark*. “The Innocents Abroad,” p. 69.

acquaintance.<sup>61</sup>

As a writer, he tries not only to describe simplicity, innocence, sincerity and unconsciousness in people, but also to pretend a simple, innocent, sincere, and unconscious author, behaving “Christian charity.” Therefore, readers laugh at both those innocent characters and the innocent narrator.

Furthermore, with sharp observation, he describes society and its customs both in Europe and in America. Society and its customs are created by a man, and become “a mechanical rigidity” mentioned in Chapter 1, so those are appropriate for humor. When he takes a look at “The Last Supper” by Leonardo da Vinci, in Chapter 19, he comments: “The world seems to have genius to outdo this certain of Da Vinci’s.”<sup>62</sup> And he says:

People come here from all parts of the world, and glorify this masterpiece. They stand entranced before it with bated breath and parted lips, and when they speak, it is only in the catchy ejaculations of rapture: “O, wonderful!” “Such expression!” “Such grace of attitude!” “Such dignity!” “Such faultless drawing” “Such matchless coloring!” “Such feeling!” “What delicacy of touch!” “What sublimity of conception!” “A vision! a vision!” I only envy these people; I envy them their honest admiration, if it be honest—their delight, if they feel delight.<sup>63</sup>

Twain notices that people’s vanity creates these praises, even if they are not impressed with “The Last Supper.” Twain extracts molded patterns in society or its customs into jokes. He does not talk about beauty of those masterpieces; rather, fed up with the enormous number of works, he implies what kind of vanity people have, extracting the patterns of people’s reaction toward art.

Twain also describes severe social issues humorously. By mixing up humor and reality, readers can perceive the reality straight enough. One of the problems is that we can find out poverty everywhere in *The Innocents Abroad*. For example, when Twain talks about Magdala, in Chapter 48, Twain portrays the situation of people there, saying:

As we rode in to Magdala not a soul was visible. But the ring of the horses’ hoofs roused the stupid population, and they all came trooping out—old men and old women, boys and girls, the blind, the crazy, and the crippled, all in ragged, soiled and scanty raiment, and all abject beggars by nature, instinct and education. How the vermin-tortured vagabonds did swarm! How they showed their scars and sores, and piteously pointed to their maimed and crooked limbs, begged with their pleading eyes for charity! We had invoked a spirit we could not lay.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Twain, Mark. “The Innocents Abroad,” p. 147.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378.

There is humor, but the situation is miserable enough. He also sketches poverty in Italy and Africa.<sup>65</sup> We can laugh, but we are urged to think of poverty. In addition to poverty, he points out a contradiction of Christian society and partial people with ironical expressions:

[T]he ignorant men of Rome were wont to put Christians in the area of the Coliseum yonder, and turn the wild beasts in upon them for a show. [...] But when Christians came into power, when the holy Mother Church became mistress of the barbarians, she taught them the error of their ways by no such means. [...] —first by twisting their thumbs out of joint with a screw; then by nipping their flesh with pincers—red-hot ones, because they are the most comfortable in cold weather; then by skinning them alive a little, and finally by roasting them in public. [...] The true religion, properly administered, as the good Mother Church used to administer it, is very, very, soothing.<sup>66</sup>

Comparing to Roman, Twain says ironies against Christianity. In other chapters, he jokes Christian people or Church, implying what is RIGHT as a human.

The last point that *The Innocents Abroad* can be a literature is portraits of the inside of people, emotions or thoughts, with his imagination. And those described people have things in common with others, which means that he finds out the universal human being from a subjective point of view. Twain's imagination ability enables him to notice inside of human with a little hint, and to stretch it to a story. For example, when Twain visits Pompeii, he notices one of the Pompeian habits, saying:

They [Pompeian] were not lazy. They hurried in those days. We had evidence of that. There was a temple on one corner, and it was a shorter cut to go between the columns of that temple one street to the other than go around—and behold that pathway had been worn deep into the heavy flag-stone floor of the building by generations of time-saving! They would not go around when it was quicker to go through. We do that way in our cities.<sup>67</sup>

What a sharp observation Twain makes! He knows human nature—a short cut. Another example is the time when he sees an American Consul and his family in Tangier. Twain notices American Consul's loneliness with just games on the centre-table:

When we went to call on our American Consul-General, today, I noticed that all possible games for parlor amusement seemed to be represented on his centre-tables. I thought that hinted at lonesomeness. The idea was correct. [...] Tangier is clear out of the world; [...] So each Consul's family stays at home chiefly, and amuses itself as best it can.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Mark Twain describes the situation in Tangir in Chapter 9.

<sup>66</sup> *Twain, Mark*. "The Innocents Abroad," p. 198.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241-42.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

The situation is that there are games on the table in the sight, but Twain looks through this family's loneliness from those games. This episode is narrated humorously, but somehow it shows the reality of human that people need to have fun when they feel loneliness.

In Chapter 11, Twain visits an ancient fortress in the Castle'd If, and he finds out how prisoner had felt in the dungeon by looking at a lot of curved names on its dungeon walls, describing the following:

Names everywhere! [...] Plebeian, prince, and noble, had one solicitude in common—they would not be forgotten! They could suffer solitude, inactivity, and the horrors of a silence that no sound ever disturbed; but they could not bear the thought of being utterly forgotten by the world. [...] [w]ho shall tell how many ages it seemed to this prisoner? With the one, time flew sometimes; with the other, never it crawled always. To the one, night spent in dancing had seemed made of minutes in stead of hours; to the other, those self same-nights had been like all other nights to dungeon life, and seemed made of slow, dragging weeks, instead of hours and minutes.<sup>69</sup>

Just taking a look at enormous numbers of names, Twain's mind can reach the feelings of people who had been there, and expand on the story. By closer to Twain's narrator, readers can stretch their imagination when they are forgotten by others, or might have been felt how fast or slow time flows depending to their environment.

#### IV. The aim of Twain's humor

We have studied Twain's humor from the viewpoint of both the manner and the matter of a humor in *The Innocents Abroad*. Then, here is the most important question, "Why did he write the work?" or "What is his intention of his writing toward readers?" To think of this ultimate question, we would like to refer to general criticisms against this book. Edward Wagenknecht mentions that *The Innocents Abroad* is, "the American declaration of independence to Europe's superiority."<sup>70</sup> And, Robert A. Wiggins says, "the westerner's reactions of implicit superiority when confronted with civilizations of the eastern states or Europe."<sup>71</sup>

Certainly, in those days, many American people came to long for European culture, but Twain criticizes not only European culture and society but also the American ones counterparts. Moreover, he plays a joke on himself. Then, is it possible to say *The Innocents abroad* is just a

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<sup>69</sup> Twain, Mark. "The Innocents Abroad," p. 70.

<sup>70</sup> Edward Wagenknecht, ed. "Mark Twain: The Innocents Abroad," Intro., ix.

<sup>71</sup> Robert A. Wiggins, "Mark Twain: Jackleg Novelist," p. 85.

travel book expressing Twain's displeasure, or just for an entertainment? Twain clearly mentions in his Preface,

[I]t [The Innocents Abroad] has a purpose, which is, to suggest to the reader how he would be likely to see Europe and the East if he looked at them with his own eyes instead of the eyes of those who traveled in those countries before him. I make small pretence of showing any one how he ought to look at objects of interest beyond the sea—other books do that<sup>72</sup>

The purpose is not to force his readers to think like Twain, but to describe as an innocent man would be likely to feel and think. He also talks about people's common understandings about the Holy Place, comparing his writing with common travel books in those days. He points out:

I am sure, from the tenor of books I have read, that many who have visited this land in years gone by, were Presbyterian Palestine, and they had already made up their minds to find no other, though possibly they did not know it, being blinded by their zeal. [...] Honest as these men's intentions may have been, they were full of partialities and prejudices, they entered the country with their verdicts already prepared, and they could no more write dispassionately and impartially about it than they could about their own wives and children.<sup>73</sup>

Twain noticed people perceive the world with their partialities. He did not try to describe American superiority to Europe, but "to write honestly."<sup>74</sup>

Then, what is the meaning of "writing honestly?" Twain says that the purpose is "to suggest to the reader how he would be likely to see Europe and the East."<sup>75</sup> And Wonham refers to James M. Cox's opinion that, "Twain's comment expresses the veiled assumption that 'as long as the narrator is honest, there is no real distinction between the narrator and the reader. The narrator's feelings and vision stand for reader's own."<sup>76</sup> However, readers do not always close to the narrator, Twain, so Wonham continues, "The narrator's gullibility and romanticism frequently inject ironic distance between his perspective and that of the reader."<sup>77</sup> If so, Twain's intension must be not just showing his perspective, but also other deep intention.

Considering the above, the point is that Twain writes in this book honestly and humorously. As mentioned in Chapter 1, laughter works on readers' mind to correct and instruct mechanical rigidity, therefore, it is possible to say that Twain tries to draw an ability, from readers, to correct and instruct naturally. Bergson mentions the importance of self-meditation to

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<sup>72</sup> *Twain, Mark*. "The Innocents Abroad," p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p.384.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>76</sup> *Wonham, B Henry*. "Mark Twain and the art of the tall tale," p. 83.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

correct or instruct:

The chief cause of rigidity is the neglect to look around—and more especially within oneself: how can a man fashion his personality after that of another if he does not first study others as well as himself?<sup>78</sup>

Twain does not intend to force readers to see the world as they ought to, but to suggest his perspective. Laughing at portrayed characters, readers can self-reflect their behaviors or thoughts. With his honest writing, Twain's secret intention is to wake readers and lead readers' natural introspection.

While laughing, in a sense, readers' minds flow strangely, because a part of them assimilates to Twain's eyes and is detached from their subjective perspectives, while the other part of them cannot forget that they have still different individuals from Twain. Bergson expresses this condition as "like we are in dream," as in the following:

We allude to the strange fusion that a dream often effects between two persons who henceforth from only one and yet remain distinct. Generally, one of these is the dreamer himself. He feels he has not ceased to be what he is; yet he has become someone else. He is himself, and not himself. He hears himself speak and sees himself act, but he feels that some other "he" has borrowed his body and stolen his voice. Or perhaps he is conscious of speaking and acting as usual, but he speaks of himself as a stranger with whom he has nothing in common; he has stepped out of his own self.<sup>79</sup>

The same thing happens when people laugh. This alluded condition enables readers to introspect for correcting and instructing themselves.

By introspection of laughter, people get two effects; one is self-reflection, the other is self-forgiveness. Self-reflection tends to tense up people's mind, while self-forgiveness helps to relax. When people get tense, they need to relax; on the other hand, when they get negligent, they need to be tense. Laughter balances their mind, and Twain uses its function effectively.

First, we would like to consider self-reflection. Bergson claims that people can overcome their vanity only by self-reflection:

True modesty can be nothing but a meditation on vanity. It springs from the sight of others' mistakes and the dread of being similarly deceived. It is a sort of scientific cautiousness with respect to what we shall say and think of ourselves.<sup>80</sup>

In *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain describes individual personalities with a description of exaggerated characters like Oracle, and readers take precaution not to behave like the characters:

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<sup>78</sup> Bergson, Henri. "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic," p. 72.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>80</sup> Bergson, Henri. "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic," p. 85.

Oracle is an innocent ass who eats for four and looks wiser than the Whole Academy of France would have any right to look, and never uses a one-syllable word when he can think of longer one, and never by any possible chance knows the meaning of any long word he uses, or ever gets it in the right place, [...] <sup>81</sup>

Readers avoid acting like this innocent Oracle, if they reflect.

Next, Twain's humor leads readers to forgive themselves. Laughter takes a form of attack, as stated in Chapter 1, so his humor targets imperfectness of people or things. He seems to disagree with those people who tend to have too many fantastic images about their reality as if it is a fantasy: those people like to put something higher than humanity like God in Christianity, and human beings cannot reach it, in the end that created utopia by humans oppresses themselves. Twain describes Christians' contradictory their behaviors to their teaching. For example, this followings are about his Christian companies when they fail to a ship in the Sea of Galilee:

How the pilgrims abused each other! Each said it was the other's fault, and each in turn denied it. No word was spoken by sinners [...] Sinners that have been kept down and had examples held up to them, and suffered frequent lectures, and been so put upon in a moral way and in the matter of going slow and being serious and bottling up slangs, and so crowded in regard to the matter of being proper and always and forever behaving, that their lives have become a burden to them [...] We took an unworthy satisfaction in seeing them fall out, now and then, because it showed that they were only poor human people like us, after all. <sup>82</sup>

Here, "sinners" means Twain and his party. We can sympathize with sinners' feelings. Readers laugh at those Christians as others' imperfectness, feeling like it is someone else's affair. But at the same time, they forgive their own imperfectness by laughing at someone else's imperfectness. Even Christian people, who have perfect doctrines, have faults, so readers notice they do not need to be affected, but be natural.

Thus, Twain's honest description produces humor, and humor produces laughter, and laughter produces introspection. Therefore, Twain's intention is not only for an entertainment, but also for introspection which is an opportunity to balance readers' mind by laughing.

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<sup>81</sup> *Twain, Mark*. "The Innocents Abroad," p. 45.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372-73.

## Conclusion

*The Innocents Abroad* is more than a common travel book. In the preface, he says, “I offer no apologies for any departures from the usual style of travel-writing that may be charged against me”<sup>83</sup> He agrees that his book has “departures” from other books. As he says, *The Innocents Abroad* is a unique and literary travel writing, particularly in that the book is filled with humor.

It is obvious that humor causes people to laugh, so humor can be a form of entertainment in spite of its property of harsh criticism. However, Twain does not use humor to express American superiority complex against Europe or the East, as he takes up anything for the target of his jokes, whether it is European or American, with “impartial eyes.”<sup>84</sup> Twain manages to balance Twain, the main character of his book, with others, using various humor techniques.

Twain’s humor multiplies effects on readers’ mind because of its literary elements. Twain’s humor enables readers to detach themselves from the real world and to observe themselves. He describes people and things around him from his sharp viewpoint, so the described contents link to universal human beings; this is a work of literature. By mixing up humor and reality, people can back and forth between detached selves and themselves, which causes people to have self-reflection. Therefore, even though Twain’s view is sharp and severe, readers can laugh and reflect on their behaviors and thoughts. That is Mark Twain’s secret intention for readers in his *The Innocents Abroad*.

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<sup>83</sup> Twain, Mark. “The Innocents Abroad,” p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

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