MARK TWAIN'S WRITINGS ON ORAL INTERPRETATION

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MARK TWAIN'S WRITINGS ON ORAL INTERPRETATION

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance and Purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. MARK TWAIN'S PHILOSOPHY OF ORAL INTERPRETATION</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pause</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Usage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison of Twain's Theory With</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Authorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. MARK TWAIN AS AN ORAL INTERPRETER</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Significance and Purpose

Mark Twain is universally recognized as an important author in American literature, and in addition to his success as an author, he was equally successful as an oral interpreter. His career as an interpreter and lecturer commenced at the age of twelve in Hannibal, Missouri, and in later years expanded to cover the globe. Twain lectured throughout the United States, Europe, Australia, India, South Africa, England, New Zealand, Scotland and Canada. Throughout his writings, Mark Twain included statements pertaining to his delivery of these lectures and platform readings, and he also included comments on techniques for oral interpretation in general.

His remarks concerning oral interpretation are scattered throughout his essays, letters, lectures and other writings. Nowhere does he compile these remarks into an organized comprehensive volume. Since Mark Twain was so successful as an oral interpreter, the techniques which he employed should be valuable to any student of oral interpretation. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to compile and examine what Mark Twain has said about platform delivery as it would
serve not only as a valuable reference to students of Mark Twain, but also to students of oral interpretation.

Because Mark Twain was a successful interpreter, it is hoped that a study of his comments on the art of oral interpretation may provide some insight to his success. It is further hoped that the criteria which Mark Twain put forth concerning the delivery of a literary composition may be discovered. It is also the purpose of this thesis to compare Mark Twain's philosophy of oral interpretation with that of contemporary authorities. Such a comparison should help determine whether or not Mark Twain's approach is still valid today. Finally, it is also the purpose of this thesis to give some insight into the manner in which Mark Twain approached the interpretation of a selection of his own prose.

The value of this thesis should be twofold. First, to the student of oral interpretation it should provide a deeper understanding of Mark Twain, his work, and the intended meaning of his writings. It should also assist the student of oral interpretation in his preparation of the works of Mark Twain, since he would have a better understanding of how Twain himself prepared his selections for his platform deliveries. The second value of the thesis should provide an additional dimension to Mark Twain as a performer. Since most students of literature are acquainted with Twain only as a writer, an understanding of his interest and success in oral performance
should enhance their appreciation of Mark Twain, as a platform artist.

Mark Twain's platform performances are extremely important, since it is very likely that his popularity as a performer contributed substantially to the sale of his books. It was Twain's practice to take selections from one of his books, revise them, memorize them and deliver them while on tour, all the while publicizing his books. Twain proved to be one of the most outstanding performers of his day and consequently his books enjoyed the same popularity.

Before radio, television, and motion pictures, lecturing and platform readings were one of the most popular forms of entertainment and education, especially in small towns. Mark Twain's lectures came at a point in American history when this form of entertainment was popular and he therefore capitalized on that popularity with his own tours.

The Man

No American writer or lecturer ever enjoyed a more purely democratic reputation than Mark Twain. Through his lifetime, Twain advanced from a small town celebrity to a person of international renown.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born on November 30, 1835, in the small town of Florida, Missouri. His parents, John and Jane Clemens, had migrated west in the early thirties. John A. Quarles, brother-in-law to Jane Clemens, had invited
the Clemens to venture to Missouri to make their fortune. Two months ahead of schedule, Haley's comet blazed through the sky, precisely at the time when Mrs. John Clemens gave birth to her fifth child, Samuel Langhorne Clemens. Twain frequently commented with pride about the coincidence of his birth and Haley's comet.

In 1839, the Clemens Family moved from Florida, Missouri, to Hannibal, where Twain was to draw the memories which he so aptly put down on paper—producing Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, and Life on the Mississippi.

Mark Twain commenced his formal education at the age of four and a half years at a private school under the direction of a New England spinster. At the age of eleven he started working as a printer apprentice with his brother, Orion, on the Weekly Hannibal Journal, and two years later began his career in writing for the local paper. At the age of eighteen Twain left Hannibal for St. Louis, where he worked for several months as a printer, and then ventured to New York. While in New York, Twain wrote to his sister:

You ask where I spend my evenings. Where would you suppose, with a free printer's library containing more than 4,000 volumes within a quarter of a mile of me, and nobody at home to talk to?  

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Twain stayed only a few months in New York, and then moved to Philadelphia where he became employed in a newspaper composing room. Twain stayed only for the winter, and on his way back to St. Louis, stopped in Washington, D. C. for a general tour of the capitol, and in his letters to his family gave a vivid picture and account of Washington as seen through the eyes of a tourist.

Upon his arrival in St. Louis, Twain was employed as a typesetter for the St. Louis Evening Star News. In St. Louis he met such literary figures as Thackery, Scott and Dickens. Some years later he received letters from Dickens commenting on their first encounter.

Twain soon got the fever to travel again. He was contemplating a trip to the exotic Amazon, but on the first leg of his journey, from St. Louis to New Orleans, he became enthralled with navigation, and after three days of arguing convinced the skipper and pilot of the Paul Jones, Horace Bixby, to teach him the river and piloting. Twain was to pay him five hundred dollars upon completion of his training. This money was to be taken out of his wages once he was on his own. Twain stayed with the river until the outbreak of the Civil War, and upon invitation from his brother Orion who had been commissioned as Secretary to the Nevada Territory, accepted the position as his private secretary.

While in the west, Twain tried silver mining, but this proved unfruitful. He then began to write for the Gate City.
newspaper. In letters to his mother, he gave detailed accounts of his experiences and adventures in both Nevada and California. These letters, along with the letters to the Gate City newspaper, became the primary source for his book, Roughing It. From the west, Twain journeyed to the Sandwich Islands where he wrote for the California newspaper Alto, and these letters became the primary source for Volume II of Roughing It.

Mark Twain commenced his lecture career in California in 1866 after he had returned from his journey in the Sandwich Islands. While at the Islands, Twain had also written a series of letters for the Sacramento Union, a California Journal, and upon his arrival in San Francisco, was asked to lecture about the Islands.

Twain wrote his lecture out, committed it to memory, and was completely satisfied that his preparation would insure success. As the time for the lecture approached, however, he became filled with fear. He felt that he would be a failure on his first attempt due to his lack of experience in the field of lecturing before an audience. To insure success, Twain had previously made arrangements with a woman friend who occupied one of the boxes that if he was not well received and the audience appeared hostile toward him, he would look up at her, twist his mustache, and she was to start the applause. He thought that if he failed to establish a
rapport with the audience he would be encouraged to continue by a round of applause.

Instead of being a failure on this first encounter on the platform, the audience rapturously applauded every point Twain made, and he completely forgot about the planned applause he had arranged with his woman friend. At one point he unconsciously stroked his mustache and looked at the box where his woman friend was seated, and she began to applaud—the entire house joining her. Twain had said nothing humorous to receive this ovation, but he knew then that he was a success.

Twain lectured for almost two years in the West, and then went East to Boston where he delivered his first Eastern lecture at the Redpath Lyceum Music Hall. He was an instantaneous success. In his autobiography, Twain recalls:

I began as a lecturer in 1866 in California and Nevada; in 1867 lectured in New York once and in the Mississippi Valley a few times; in 1868 made the whole Western circuit; and in the following seasons added the Eastern circuit to my route.²

The following year Twain sailed for Europe and the Holy Land, a trip sponsored by the San Francisco Daily Alto California. While traveling through Europe and the Holy Land, Twain wrote letters for the Daily Alto California, and the New York Tribune and Herald. These letters were the primary source for his book Innocents Abroad, which was published in 1880.

While touring Europe, Twain became good friends with Charles Langdon, who showed Twain a picture of his sister. When Twain arrived back in the United States in 1867, he was introduced to Olivia Langdon, whom he was to marry two years later.

In the spring of the following year, Twain returned to San Francisco, where he lectured during the spring and summer and then returned to New York. Fatout gives this account of his departure from California:

In 1866 both he and the press had made much of his farewell to California, but in 1868 there were no remarks about an affecting leave-taking. Yet this farewell was final. He did not so consider it then, for several times in later years he planned western tours. They did not materialize, and he never returned to California. He had finished with the Pacific Coast, as he had also finished his lecturing apprenticeship preparatory to the professional circuit.3

In the fall of 1868, Twain commenced his Eastern tour under the aid of James R. Redpath, who employed him at one hundred dollars a night, and engaged him in forty lectures. During this tour Twain lectured in the East and Midwest following a tour schedule where he had to backtrack over much of the territory he had already covered, taking up much of his time traveling from one town to another, and spending much of the money he earned. Fatout makes the following comment about this tour:

3Paul Fatout, Mark Twain on the Lecture Circuit (Bloomington, Indiana, 1960), p. 96.
(Twain) . . . enjoyed himself, and in about 7000 miles of hard travel he had proved his stamina as an itinerant performer. He had also so ingratiated himself with the audience that none might question his right to take a prominent place among veterans of the circuit. He had improved his lecturing reputation, and he had learned much. Still not a consistently accomplished speaker, he was more polished than the rough-and-ready story-teller of California mining camps.

In the spring and summer of 1869, Twain lectured again in the East, but with his desire for luxurious living, found that lecturing was not profitable. That same summer his book *The Innocents Abroad* was published and he was receiving $1400 a month in royalties. He left the lecture circuit with the hopes of putting his time to writing another book. During Twain's second Eastern lecture tour, he used the method of Artemus Ward, noted lecturer and platform artist, to introduce himself. He states:

Ladies and gentlemen: The next lecture in this course will be delivered this evening, by Samuel L. Clemens, a gentleman whose high character and unimpeachable integrity are only equalled by his comeliness of person and grace of manner. And I am the man! Twain felt that no chairman could introduce him as he should be introduced. He later states in his autobiography:

My introduction of myself was a most efficient "starter" for awhile, then it failed. It had to be carefully and painstakingly worded and very earnestly spoken, in order that all

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4 Patout, pp. 118-119. 5 Ibid., p. 130.
strangers present might be deceived into the supposition that I was only the introducer and not the lecturer; also that the flow of overdone compliments might sicken those strangers; then, when the end was reached and the remark casually dropped that I was the lecturer and had been talking about myself, the effect was very satisfactory. But it was a good card for only a little while, as I have said; for the newspapers printed it and after that I could not make it go, since the house knew what was coming and retained its emotions.  

Twain further comments on how he introduced himself.

He states:

Next I tried an introduction taken from my California experiences. It was gravely made by a slouching and awkward big miner in the village of Red Dog. The house, very much against his will, forced him to ascend the platform and introduce me. He stood thinking a moment, then said: "I don't know anything about this man. At least I know only two things; one is, he hasn't been in the penitentiary, and the other is (after a pause, and almost sadly), I don't know why." . . . . That worked well for awhile, then the newspapers printed it and took the juice out of it, and after that I gave up introductions altogether.

It was after his last lecture in Hartford, Connecticut, a benefit, that Twain went to Elmira, New York, and on February 2, 1870, married Olivia Langdon. Twain was sure his days as a platform artist were over, but the fall of the following year found Twain back in the lecture field again. Twain took to the lecture field to pay off the debts he had encountered in Elmira. He lectured until February of the following year, when Roughing It was published.

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7 Ibid.
In August, 1872, Twain sailed for England where he was royally received by the British. While a tourist and guest in England, Twain was asked many times by the British literary societies if he would lecture for them. Twain replied: "but I have not the least idea of doing so—certainly not at present."

Twain remained in England for three months, returned to the United States, lectured for several months, and in May returned to England with his family. While in England, Twain had finally come to terms with George Dolby, Dickens' manager, to give a lecture. Twain chose the Sandwich Islands for his debut in England.

Twain had advertised in the London paper and described his anticipation of the lecture as follows:

(no one) . . . can allay this unwholesome excitement as effectually as I can . . . . I feel and know that I am equal to this task, for I can allay any kind of an excitement by lecturing upon it . . . . I have always been able to paralyse the public interest in any topic that I chose to take hold of and elucidate with all my strength.9

In 1874, Twain returned to the United States. Two years later The Adventures of Tom Sawyer was published. During the following winter Twain gave a reading in Philadelphia.

That performance marked a change in his platform technique. From this time forth he relied entirely upon anecdotes, most of them from his own

8Paine, op. cit., p. 191.
9Fatout, op. cit., p. 179.
books, some having been used in his several lectures. The stories of the Mexican plug (which he worked into a curtain speech at the 100th performance of The Gilded Age in 1874); of Dick Baker, the miner, and his sagacious cat, Tom Quartz, who got "blowed up" and never thereafter approved of quartz mining; of grandfather's old ram, as told by a mauldering narrator who floundered around in so many irrelevant details that he always fell asleep before he got to the remarkable ram; of the misguided blue jay that tried to fill an empty cabin with acorns and thereby became the laughingstock of a swarm of guffawing jays; of the incorporated company of mean men, the Nevada duel, the champion liar, the golden arm, the jumping frog; these and other familiars made a continually enlarging collection.10

Twain only lectured occasionally following his return from England, and during this period, A Tramp Abroad was published in 1880, in 1882 The Prince and the Pauper, and the following year Life on the Mississippi.

In 1884, Twain contacted George W. Cable, a noted lecturer and platform artist who had been touring alone, and made arrangements where both he and Cable were to go on an extended tour, both reading from their own works. This tour lasted for four months. The following year after his "Reading Tour," The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was published, and four years later The Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court.

During his tour with Cable, Twain usually varied the selections he read:

10 Ibid., pp. 189-190.
Usually he read from his new book, *Huckleberry Finn*, about King sollermum and "How come a Frenchman doan' talk like a man?" For others he drew upon his growing repertoire: tragic tale of the fishwife, a trying situation, encounter with an interviewer, Buck Fanshaw's funeral, the jumping frog, Tom and Huck rescuing Jim, Tom Bowline and the governor-elect of Massachusetts. He might tell an audience that its printed programs were useless, then substitute the stories of his struggle with the German language, the trials of editing an agricultural paper, Colonel Sellers, the whistling stammerer. A standard reading was the ghost story of the golden arm, which moved an audience literally. When he quaveringly repeated the eerie question "Who-o-o-o's got my go-o-o-olden arm?" then after a well-timed pause, leaped into the air and shouted, "You got it!" everybody jumped, and impressionable girls yelped.\(^{11}\)

Although there had been some dessension between Cable and Twain on their lecture tour, Cable describes Twain as:

... a big man with disheveled hair, knotted forehead, heavy middle and dowdy dress. An easy talker, a coarse man of the harder word, successful and satisfied.\(^{12}\)

The year after his tour with Cable, Twain was interviewed in Seattle, Washington, and asked if there was any truth about his quarrel with Cable. Twain commented:

There is no truth whatever in the story... going the rounds... that the lecture partnership in which Cable and I were at one time engaged was broken up by a quarrel between us. There is no foundation for such a story... Mr. Cable and I entered into a specific agreement for four months, and it is a sufficient contradiction of the story about a quarrel to say that we did not miss a single engagement. We are of exactly opposite temperaments, and on that account perhaps became not only


close friends, but the most congenial of traveling companions.\textsuperscript{13}

Twain wrote to Cable in 1895 saying:

Yes sir! I liked you in spite of your religion; and I always said to myself that if a man could be good and kindly with that kind of a load on him, he was entitled to homage—and I paid it. And I have always said, and still maintain, that as a railroad-comrade you were perfect—the only railroad-comrade in the world that a man of moods and frets and uncertainties of disposition could travel with, a third of the year, and never weary of his company.\textsuperscript{14}

From 1885 to 1895 Twain had invested much of his money in non-profit enterprises, and these all failed, so he moved to Europe in 1891 with his family where he felt living expenses would be cheaper. Twain used most of what he had saved commuting back and forth across the Atlantic.

In April, 1895, Mark Twain, after a financial ruin, signed with Carlyle G. Smythe to embark on a six to nine months world tour. First, Twain had arranged a lecture tour in the United States and Canada. He lectured in the Midwest, West, and British Vancouver before he sailed from Seattle, Washington. During this tour, Twain had arranged to charter a private car to take him and his family to Seattle. This was typical of Twain—in financial distress, yet always wanting to travel first-class.

\textsuperscript{13}Fatout, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 230.

\textsuperscript{14}Guy A. Cardwell, \textit{Twins of Genius} (East Lansing, Michigan, 1953), p. 111.
While on this lecture tour, Twain employed several new devices he had not previously used. Fatout points out:

One was the illustrated lecture, showing a number of pictures of himself and each time giving the photograph a different name. What evolved was a series of stories loosely held together by transitional sentences. Reflections on the human disposition to trust strangers led to the Mexican plug; a drift to comments on the wandering mind introduced grandfather's old ram; ruminations on the nobility of a good heart in a moral emergency brought him to the story of Huck and Jim. Mark Twain did not take his assignments lightly. As if he were not a seasoned campaigner, he worked as hard preparing for this tour as any novice uncertain of his preparation.\(^1\)

Twain had contemplated trying his readings and lectures before a trial audience before he embarked on his world tour. In a letter to Henry Rogers, Twain states:

Nothing in the world can save it from being a shabby, poor, disgusting performance. I've got to stand. I can't do it and talk to a house, and how in the nation am I going to sit? Land of Goshen, it's this night week! Pray for me.\(^2\)

Twain did manage two rehearsals before he left, one to a boys' orphanage, and the other to the juvenile inmates of the Elmira Reformatory. Both performances were blazing successes.

Twain's lecture in British Vancouver ended his appearance in America on his world tour. After leaving Seattle, Twain sailed for Honolulu, but was unable to lecture there.

\(^1\)Fatout, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

as an outbreak of cholera on the Island prevented any passengers from going ashore. His next stop was Sydney, Australia. While traveling from Honolulu to Sydney, he worked up a jingle that became one of his most frequently-used readings in Australia, India, and South Africa. The story, as he told it on the stage, was about his struggle to find rhymes for the names of peculiar animals of the antipodes.17

Twain gave several lectures in Sydney, and both his wife Livy and his daughter made notes on the effects of his reading. Both commented on the effect of the length of the pause in the golden arm of his grandfather's old ram. They would discuss this with Twain, and he would continue to revise so that he would get the pause right to the "millionth" of a second. He had spent much of his time in memorizing and revising so that he could usually give the right effect.

After lecturing in several large cities in Australia, Twain journeyed to New Zealand. From New Zealand, Twain returned to Australia, and then sailed for Ceylon and India. The trip to India was probably the first trip Twain ever enjoyed, as he was afforded all the comforts that could possibly be given to a person.

During an interview in India, Twain said that no speaker could succeed unless he had,

... gone over every sentence again and again until the whole thing is fixed upon his memory.

17 Fatout, op. cit., p. 243.
I write my lectures, and try to memorize them, but I don't always succeed. If I had a better memory it would be worse in some respects, for when one has to fill up an ellipsis on the spot, there is a spontaneity about the thing which is a considerable relief.\textsuperscript{18}

Twain constantly rehearsed his lectures. As Fatout states:

Constant drill had given him such command of his material that by this time he could shift from one story to another, or introduce an unscheduled new one at the last moment without destroying continuity. So skillfully could he cover a lapse of memory that an audience was not aware of the slip. He had been known to get lost in the middle of one story, switch to the middle of another and carry on without anybody's being the wiser, not even Livy, who knew his stories as well as he did.\textsuperscript{19}

After spending ten days in Bombay, and lecturing in ten other cities in India, Twain embarked on his trip to South Africa. While in Africa, Twain lectured in eight different cities throughout the southern section, and felt after it was over that he had been lecturing for a thousand years. The complete trip took Mark Twain twelve months, and he was ready to retire from the platform.

Twain and his family sailed for England in July, and the following month their daughter, Susy Clemens, died. This shattered Twain's plans to lecture in England and in the United States. The Clemens family remained in England, and Twain

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 260.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 261.
spent the winter writing *Following the Equator*, which was published in 1897.

The same year that *Following the Equator* was published, word was received in New York that Twain was still heavily in debt. A fund was set up for him, but Twain had to decline the accepting of the fund due to Livy's persistence.

Twain had paid off seventy-five per cent of his debt upon completion of his world tour, and with the publication of his book, his financial status was back where it was during his Hartford days. Twain was under the impression that he had been victimized by others, as he thought that the investments he made were sound. He felt this way until he died.

In 1897 Twain left England and spent the next few years in Switzerland and Vienna. Fatout states:

> In the Austrian city Mark Twain admirably performed the duties implicit in his title of "self-appointed ambassador-at-large of the United States of America—without salary."\(^{20}\)

Fatout further points out:

> He believed that in Vienna he finally learned the art of reading; walking on with a book, he read a few sentences, then switched to an improvised introduction, and worked into the story while the audience was still expectantly waiting for the sketch to begin.\(^{21}\)

Twain only memorized certain aspects of the speech, and discovered:

> . . . one flashes out the happiest suddenly-begotten phrases now and then! . . . Such a

\(^{20}\)Ibid., p. 270.  \(^{21}\)Ibid.
phrase has a life and sparkle about it that twice as good a one could exhibit if prepared beforehand, and it "fetches" an audience in such an enthralling and inspiring and uplifting way that that lucky phrase breeds another one, sure.\textsuperscript{22}

By 1898, Twain was completely out of debt. He again expressed his dislike for the platform, but while still abroad he persuaded Livy to let him lecture once he returned to the United States. When he was offered a lecture tour, he refused. Years later Twain commented:

I love to hear myself talk, because I get so much instruction and moral upheaval out of it, but I lose the bulk of this joy when I charge for it.\textsuperscript{23}

After nine years of traveling and living abroad, Mark Twain returned to his native soil. Upon his return he was offered $10,000 for ten nights on the lecture platform, but refused the offer. This time Twain decided he had seen the last of the lecture platform. He stated he would only do a lecture or reading for a benefit, but never again for money. Twain states: "I shan't retire from the gratis-platform until after I am dead and courtesy requires me to keep still and not disturb others."\textsuperscript{24}

In 1901, Twain was honored with an honorary degree at Yale, the following year another degree, Doctor of Letters, was conferred on him at the University of Missouri, and in

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Paine, op. cit.}, p. 685.
\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 791.
\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Ibid.}
1907, was called back to England where Oxford honored him with the Litt. D. degree.

In 1903, Twain returned to Italy with his wife Livy because she had been in poor health and the doctors recommended that a change in climate would cure her, but the following year she died. Twain returned to the United States and commenced writing and lecturing. A Dog's Tale was published in 1904, in 1905 King Leopold's Soliloquy was published, Eve's Diary, The $30,000 Bequest and Other Stories in 1906, Christian Science in 1907, Is Shakespeare Dead?, and Extracts from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven were published in 1909; these were the last pieces to be published while Twain was still alive.

Twain never let the platform die. He appeared regularly giving lectures until 1909. This man who had given so much of himself, bringing laughter to people the world over, and leaving some of the finest literature to be written in America by an American died in April, 1910. Before he died, Twain had desired to go when Haley's Comet was in the sky, as he wanted to go under the same sign as he came. Mark Twain said farewell as Haley's Comet blazed across the sky.
CHAPTER II

MARK TWAIN'S PHILOSOPHY OF ORAL
INTERPRETATION

Mark Twain's first platform performance was delivered in Hannibal, Missouri, when he was twelve years old. The speech delivered was impromptu, and he "spoke reluctantly, as befitted a lowly compositor earning mythical wages of five dollars a week in his brother Orin's Ben Franklin Book and Job office."¹ Approximately thirty years after Twain delivered this speech, an eyewitness claimed, "that he got up slowly, blushing and stammering, but that he pulled himself together to deliver a remarkable production of pathos and wit, the latter predominating . . . convulsing his hearers with round after round of applause."² There are no records of this first platform performance, but the wit and pathos employed by Twain were to be the trademark of his long career in lecturing and reading of his own material.

In his later years when he returned to lecturing, Twain stated that he was unable to deliver any sort of speech without first carefully preparing it. Each speech or reading

¹Paul Fatout, Mark Twain on the Lecture Circuit (Bloomington, Indiana, 1960), p. 23.

²Ibid.
had to be written out, rehearsed aloud; revised to fit the occasion, and then memorized. Literary forms said Twain:

... are not for speech; they are stiff, inflexible, and will not lend themselves to happy and effective delivery with the tongue—where their purpose is to merely entertain, not instruct, they have to be limbered up, broken up, colloquialized, unpremeditated talk—otherwise they will bore the house, not entertain.  

In 1884 Mark Twain and George W. Cable, noted lecturer and platform artist, embarked on an extensive tour of the United States, and each read selections from his own works. Platform delivery was not new to Mark Twain as he had delivered lectures in Nevada and California in 1866 and 1867, and appeared in England, Boston, and New York. During these platform deliveries, Twain became known as a man possessing great powers of elocution, and was noted for his parlor readings of Shakespeare which was said to be masterly performed.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the factors which contributed to making Mark Twain a successful oral interpreter. By his own admission, he was not effective in his early attempts. He worked diligently to overcome the weaknesses of his presentation and attempted to derive workable methods which could be employed to make his platform performances more successful. Throughout his writings he makes comments regarding the various techniques he found useful.

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He does not, however, discuss these points in an organized or codified manner. His remarks are scattered throughout his essays, letters and other writings. This chapter is the result of an effort to organize those comments and to compare them with contemporary philosophies of oral interpretation.

Most of his pertinent remarks may be grouped under three major headings: preparation, pause, and word usage. Therefore, Twain’s comments will be treated under these three headings.

**Preparation**

Concerning the speeches delivered by Twain, he states:

I never made a speech without getting together a lot of statistics and being instructive. The man who starts in upon a speech without preparation enters upon a sea of infelicities and trouble . . . the advantages of a prepared speech is that you start when you are ready and stop when you are through. If unprepared, you are all at sea, you don’t know where you are.4

In his thorough preparation, one finds in Mark Twain, . . . a style which is as personal, as biographical as the style of anyone who has written, and expresses a civilization whose courage of the chances, the preferences, the duties is not the measure of its essential modesty.5

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Although Twain prepared himself carefully and conscientiously for his platform deliveries, he possessed a quick wit, and took advantage of any comment made by the audience, and could easily spring a truly spontaneous retort.

Throughout his life, Mark Twain never stopped experimenting, as he was a perfectionist in the art of speaking. Mark Twain tells a story about the results of an unprepared speech. Using this story as an illustration, he goes on to point out.

The dummy touched the man on the shoulder and said "I think I have s-s-s-se (whistles) seen you before." "What makes you whistle?" asked the man. "I used to stammer, and the d-d-d-d- (whistles) octor told me when I w-w-w-w-w-w (whistles) anted to speak and s-s-s-s tammered to whistle. I d-d-d-d (whistles) id whistle and it c-c-c-c ured me." 6

So it is with a man who makes an unprepared speech. He tries to be brief and it takes him longer. 7

There is for instance, his account of the care with which he constructed his professional lectures and readings, and how he tried them out in small towns before he went on his tour. He said, "the country audience is the difficult audience." 8 Twain always believed that individuals living in the country were more skeptical than those in the city, and if his readings were accepted there, then he felt sure that they would be gloriously received in the larger cities.

6 Clemens, op. cit., p. 158. 7 Ibid. 8 Samuel L. Clemens, Autobiography (New York, 1925), p. 151.
While delivering his speech on "On Speech Making Reform" he declares:

That speech is most worth listening to which has been carefully prepared in private and tried on a plaster cast or on an empty chair, or any other appreciative object, that will keep quiet until the speaker has got his matter and his delivery limbered up so that they will seem impromptu to an audience.9

As Twain progressed in years, he still felt the same concerning the preparation of a speech. He expressed himself even more strongly on this point when he said,

A person who is to make a speech at any time or anywhere upon any topic whatever, owes it to himself and to his audience to write the speech out and memorize it, if he can find the time for it.10

There seems to be no radical change in Twain's philosophy concerning the preparation of a speech, except that perhaps in his earlier days, he seemed dogmatic about writing the speech out, revising it, and memorizing it. In his later years he states these should be done "if he can find the time for it."11

As already stated, Twain thoroughly prepared his speeches, rehearsing them to himself, taking great pains to get the right shadings in delivery, and especially the right pause.


10DeVoto, op. cit., p. 301.

11Ibid.
Pause

To Mark Twain, the use of the pause was probably the most effective device he used in his platform deliveries. He felt that the pause could either enhance the delivery if correctly used, or it could either destroy the complete effect if it was either too short or too long. He comments extensively on the pause in his essay "How to Tell a Story."

The pause is an exceedingly important feature in any kind of story, and a frequently recurring feature too. It is a dainty thing, and delicate, and also uncertain and treacherous; for it must be exactly the right length--no more and no less--or it fails of its purpose and makes trouble. If the pause is too short the impressive point is passed, and the audience have had time to divine that a surprise is intended—and then you can't surprise them, of course. 12

Twain gives his own account as to the effect the pause had on his audience while he was delivering a story.

On the platform I used to tell a Negro ghost story that had a pause in front of the snapper on the end, and—that pause was the most important thing in the whole story. If I got it the right length precisely, I could spring the finishing ejaculation with effect enough to make some impressionable girl deliver a startled little yelp and jump out of her seat—and that was what I was after. . . . You must get the pause right; and you will find it the most troublesome and aggravating and uncertain thing you ever undertook. 13

Twain further elaborates on the pause, "When the pause was right, the effect was sure; when the pause was wrong in length, by the five-millionth of an inch, the laughter was only mild, never a crash." 14

When Twain delivered his speeches or readings, he sometimes stammered repeatedly as if he was unsure of himself. He of course, had written and memorized his speech, but to add to the flavor of it being an impromptu speech, he searched artistically for the correct word which included repetition, pauses and then gave the effect that he had luckily hit upon it.

When a man is reading from a book on the platform he soon realizes that there is one powerful gun in his battery of artifice that he can't work with an effect proportionate to its caliber: that is the pause—that impressive silence, that eloquent silence, that geometrically progressive silence which often achieves a desired effect where no combination of words howsoever felicitous could accomplish it. The pause is not of much use to the man who is reading from a book because he cannot know what the exact length of it ought to be; he is not the one to determine the measurement—the audience must do that for him. He must perceive by their faces when the pause has reached the proper length, but his eyes are not on the faces, they are on the book; therefore he must determine the proper length of the pause by guess; he cannot guess with exactness and nothing but exactness, absolute exactness, will answer. 15

In an article, "Mark Twain Stands and Delivers," Matthew Brander gives a clear picture as he witnessed Mark Twain deliver one of his speeches:

15 DeVoto, op. cit., p. 225.
Many of those who are lucky enough to have heard Mark speak in his easy fashion, with his customary drawl, with his seeming spontaneity, with his frequent pauses while he was obviously questing the exact word he wanted—probably many of those who have heard Mark when he was standing and delivering, will be surprised to learn that Mark had even written out in advance what had fallen upon their ears as the apparent improvisation of the moment. . . . he must seem spontaneous, of course, but for the most part spontaneity is the result of thorough preparation.16

Twain was as painstaking in telling a story as he was in preparing his speeches. Evidence of his artistry in the field of story-telling is seen in his well-known essay "How to Tell a Story." In this essay he defends the manner of telling the story and states, "The humorous story is strictly a work of art—high and delicate art and only an artist can tell it."17

In a letter to Edward W. Bok in New York, Twain further elucidates on delivery:

Spoken speech is one thing, written speech is quite another. Print is the proper vehicle for the latter, but it isn't for the former. The moment "talk" is put into print you recognize that it is not what it was when you read it; you perceive that an immense something has disappeared from it. That's it soul.18

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17 Samuel L. Clemens, op. cit., p. 12.

18 Albert Bigelow Paine, Mark Twain's Letters, II (New York, 1923), 504.
Few men ever pondered word choice more than Twain, as indicated by this statement: "The difference between almost the right word and the right one is really a large matter--tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."¹⁹

In Mark Twain's Tramp Abroad, he states:

A person who does not appreciate the exceeding value of pauses, and does not know how to measure their duration judiciously, cannot read the grand simplicity and dignity of a composition like [the Lord's Prayer] effectively.²⁰

In an address given at the Jubilee Celebration of the Emancipation of the Hungarian Press in March, 1899, Twain comments:

But impromptu speaking--that is what I was trying to learn. That is a difficult thing. I used to do it this way. I used to begin about a week ahead, and write out my impromptu speech and get it by heart . . . in order to do an impromptu speech as it should be done you have to indicate the place for pauses and hesitations. I put them all in it. And then you want the applause in the right place . . . I do that kind of speech (I mean an off-hand speech), and do it well, and make no mistakes, in such a way as to deceive the audience completely and make that audience believe it is an impromptu speech--that is art.²¹

Twain further comments on the use of the pause as he used it in his own deliveries.

¹⁹Charles Neider, Mark Twain: Life As I Find It (New York, 1923), p. 504.


²¹Paine, op. cit., p. 182.
The man who recites without the book has all the advantages; when he comes to an old familiar remark in his tale which he has uttered nightly for a hundred nights—a remark preceded or followed by a pause—the faces of the audience tell him when to end the pause. For one audience the pause will be short, for another a little longer, for another a shade longer still; the performer must vary the length of the pause to suit the shades of difference between audiences. 22

In his essay "Platform Readings," Twain states:

... reading from the book renders the nicest shadings of delivery impossible. I mean those studied fictions which seem to be the impulse of the moment and which are so effective; such as, for instance, fictitious hesitancies for the right word, fictitious unconscious pauses, fictitious unconscious side remarks, fictitious unconscious embarrassments, fictitious unconscious emphases placed upon the wrong word with a deep intention back of it—these and all the other artful fictive shades which give to a recited tale the captivating naturalness of an impromptu narration can be attempted by a book reader and are attempted, but they are easily detectable as artifice, and although the audience may admire their cleverness and their ingenuity as artifice, they only get at the intellect of the house, they don't get at its heart; and so the reader's success lacks a good deal of being complete.23

Mark Twain took delight in speaking, and in also playing upon the feelings of his audiences. He became a master of his craft, with the pauses which he used frequently, and he liked to give the impression that his platform readings and lectures were impromptu, but these were all delivered through careful preparation.

22Ibid., p. 2.

William Dean Howells, one of Twain’s closest friends and literary critics tells us that Twain:

... studied every word and syllable, and memorized them by a system of mnemonics peculiar to himself, consisting of an arbitrary arrangement of things on a table—knives, forks, salt cellars, inkstands, pens, boxes, or whatever was at hand—which stood for points and clauses and climaxes, and were at once indelible diction and constant suggestions... he studied every tone and gesture, and he forecast the results with the real audience from its result with the imagined audience... and because he had his end in mind he knew when to stop. 

Twain was meticulous about details, and he spent many long hours writing, rewriting, and memorizing a manuscript, and composing "transition sentences to give a semblance of unity, and rehearsing varieties of phrasing and inflection. Seldom did he give any critic the chance to say that he had not done his best." 

When Mark Twain returned to the lecture platform he used the method of singling one person out of the audience and talking directly to that person until he had the attention and approval of the entire audience. "To the end of his career he measured the audience by the frequency and volume of its laughter."

Twain’s first lectures and readings proved to be quite dull, but he thought them to be amusing until one day he

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25 Fatout, op. cit., p. 61.

26 Ibid., p. 60.
re-read them and then "regretted he could not bring a coffin on the stage and turn the whole thing into a funeral."27

From the very beginning of his career as a platform artist, Twain,

... adopted the techniques of Artemus Ward, humorist and lecturer, he cultivated casualness and apparent artlessness, experimented with modulation, and used incongruous association, all of which he improved upon as he gained experience. Manner was the secret of success.28

In an essay written in 1908, Twain nostalgically recalls, "In the days when I was still able to memorize a speech, I was always faithful to that duty—for my own sake, not the hearers."29

Richard Watson Gilder, who witnessed Twain deliver many of his lectures and readings, remarks:

His is the art of a dramatist and actor in one. He can always speak his own stories better than can anyone else. He creates his drama, so to speak, on the spot, in whole or part. I have heard stories told by him which were either largely improvisation, or rehearsals, or studied performances, on public occasions and before private audiences of three or four or more, and always with the same spirit, originality, dramatic completeness, artistic finish, and sustained and suppressing humor.30

Noah Brooks, who attended Mark Twain's first lecture wrote:

27Ibid., p. 35

28Ibid., p. 42.

29DeVoto, op. cit., p. 301.

30Richard Watson Gilder, "Mark Twain: A Glance at His Spoken and Written Art," Outlook, LXXVIII (December, 1904) 842-844.
Mark Twain's method as a lecturer was distinctly unique and novel. His slow, deliberate drawl, the anxious and perturbed expression of his visage, the apparent painful effort with which he framed his sentences, and above all the surprise that spread over his face when the audience roared with delight or rapturously applauded the finer passages of his word-painting, were unlike anything of the kind they had ever known. All this was original; it was Mark Twain.

Scattered throughout Twain's writings are these remarks which he makes concerning delivery. In the essay "The Return of the Pilgrims," he states, "It's a terrible death to be talked to death." In a speech given at a dinner in Quebec in 1880 he says: "... that the average man likes to hear himself talk, when he is not under criticism." In Tom Sawyer Abroad, Twain states: "The finer a person talks, the certainer it is to make you sleep." In reply to a letter from Mr. Gordon Miller who inquired as to how long Mark Twain would lecture, Twain replied, "I cannot say for sure. It is my custom to keep talking till I get the audience cowed. Sometimes it takes an hour and fifteen minutes, sometimes I

33 Albert Bigelow Paine, Mark Twain's Speeches (New York, 1923), p. 84.
can do it in an hour." Throughout his writings Twain constantly injects modes of speech and delivery as cited above.

In many of his essays and letters, Mark Twain refers to the audience and feels that all the preparation which he has made had a definite reflection on the audience when he states:

... and I was a lecturer on the platform a number of seasons and was a responder to toasts at all the different kinds of banquets—and so I know a great many secrets about audiences—secrets not to be got out of books, but only acquirable by experience.

In an unpublished letter to Clara Clemens, Twain wrote:

Remember, the audience most surely and powerfully stirred is the small audience, when you've learned all the deep arts of your trade. They rise in their might when you let them see that theirs are welcome faces and that you are not ashamed of them for being a small house.

Word Usage

In his writings there is evidence that Twain had a natural gift for making effective use of words. The importance of language is undeniable, but word choice per se delivers only a partial message, since it is unable "to transmit the looks, the invisible gestures, intonations, pauses and


37 Opie P. Read, Mark Twain and I (New York, 1940), p. 61.
silences." In this case, Twain had to pick the exact word to convey much of this in his platform performances.

Twain's extraordinary skill in descriptive passages shows, not only merely keen observation, but the instinct for the specific word—the one word that is always better than any of its synonyms, for it makes the picture real—it creates the illusion.

Thus, the audience have a clear picture of what Twain is conveying to them.

William Dean Howells, in 1901, stated concerning Twain's use of words: "One of the characteristics I observed in him is his single-minded use of words which he employs." Twain employed this in both his writings and his oral presentations.

Twain admits that humor is not his guiding purpose. His intent was to convey a message. Rudolf Flesch, well known advocate of the use of common language points out that, "He was well aware that plain talk was the language of the people;" that "a living language will vary within groups of people;" and that "the sense of locality may be revealed by the shape of vowels quite as definitely as by the contours of

41 Flesch, op. cit., p. 109.
mountains, valleys or caves. Guided by his sensitivity to language, he had only to use a pattern of words, so simple and easy to understand, that it would serve as the excelsior in which he could pack his abstractions. Mark Twain and Rudolf Flesch would have been great friends. Both appreciated the impact of simple language and both profited from its usage.

The way Twain uses words the listener powerfully reacts to the auditory stimulus. Since light travels faster than sound the "written symbols are conveyed to the eye through light waves, while the speech sounds which identify forms of words as well as qualities of expression . . . are conveyed to the ear by sound waves." At the precise moment when the two stimuli, visual and auditory, converge or seem to mesh, comprehension very nearly attains that plateau of speaker-listener association, known as personal confrontation. Thus, it follows that two lines of communication operating sympathetically and almost simultaneously enable people "to project themselves into the thing they see and hear." Had this


44 Flesch, *op. cit.*, p. 29.


phenomenon not been adhered to, Twain would have been guilty of infidelity to his artistic sensitivity. As Dean points out, it is the responsibility of the writer and speaker to recognize this phenomenon:

[The speaker may] . . . use visual elements to do the work of the auditory elements in speech. Such elements indicate divisions and sub-divisions of the material to help make the meaning of words or groups of words clear and to indicate variations in meaning and expression.47

Twain was never satisfied with the approximate word; he had word-sense that was always both acute and alert. He had trained himself to be careful and to pick out the exact word to convey his message to his listeners.

Twain’s preoccupation with word choice and usage brings to mind the concern of the general semanticists who also recognize the value of accuracy in word choice. Twain would no doubt agree with Richards when he says, "When a communicator uses a word he has so checked against the thing it stands for, he is much more likely to be clearly understood."48 The semanticist also recognizes that it is sometimes extremely difficult to be as accurate as might be wished. As Johnson points out, "All our words are in some measure 'abstract' or generalized. In part, . . . this is because there are at any

47 Dean, op. cit., p. 56.
given moment more facts than there are words with which to refer to them.\textsuperscript{49}

The semanticist is not altogether satisfied with the word which is \textit{likely} to be clearly understood, but is more concerned with finding the word which will communicate with the maximum amount of accuracy.

... words may be considered as pointers, indicator forms of representation, which are intended to correspond to anything whatsoever that may exist, that may be experienced or that anyone might want to talk about .... If a word is not what it represents, then whatever you might say about a thing will not be it.\textsuperscript{50}

When Twain had a specific mental image in mind, he searched for the best possible means of conveying it. As Fogarty states:

The communicator using a certain word or expression can cause his hearers to form a thought somewhat similar to his own. And conversely, the thought of reference can cause, at least in part the use of a certain symbol to express it.\textsuperscript{51}

This is precisely what Twain attempted to do in his search for exactness in word choice.

\textsuperscript{49} Wendell Johnson, \textit{People in Quandaries} (New York, 1946), pp. 113-117.

\textsuperscript{50} Irving J. Lee, \textit{Language Habits in Human Affairs} (New York, 1941), p. 15.

Comparison of Twain's Theory With Contemporary Authorities

Many modern day authorities on oral interpretation tend to agree with Mark Twain as to his philosophy concerning the method he used in preparation of his platform performances. Charlotte Lee gives this advice: "Always work on your material aloud . . . and start work on your selection well in advance of the assigned day." Lee expresses herself very much as Mark Twain did. She feels that thorough preparation is a prerequisite for good oral interpretation, and that practicing it aloud enhances the selection, as you are able to hear the sound, as well as analyze it.

Martin Cobin points out:

You must be sensitive to your audience as well as to your material, and the sensitivities are closely interrelated. You must be aware of your audience in the choice, preparation and presentation.

Armstrong and Brandes state: "Extensive preparations are required of both the experienced and inexperienced." As both have "... an ethical responsibility to represent faithfully the author whose material he is reading." Armstrong and Brandes, The Oral Interpretation of Literature (New York, 1963), p. 127.

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55 Ibid.
and Brandes further state: "He must perform. He must practice. He must learn to listen carefully to himself so that he can correct his mistakes." 56

Lionel Crocker gives these rules for preparation:

Read over the selection in its entirety. . . . read it aloud . . . read the selection aloud and imagine the audience is listening. Do this at least three times a day for a week before you give the selection to the audience. 57

In the initial preparation, Grimes and Mattingly feel that "the interpreter is the silent reader, responding aesthetically to the literary object created by the writer." 58 They feel that "thorough preparation at this stage strengthens his possibilities of success when he is the reader-become-interpreter." 59

In comparing Twain's method of preparation with that of contemporary authorities, Twain advocates memorization, whereas the contemporary authorities feel that the interpreter should possess a copy of the selection when he is giving his oral presentation.

Charlotte Lee feels that:

56 Ibid., p. 128.
59 Ibid.
With drama, the interpreter will need to come closer to a complete memorization of his material than with any other type of writing, because of the speed with which he must handle the interplay of characters. He cannot afford to look down after each speech for his next cue. This would slow the performance—and worse still, it would break his own concentration on the continuity of the scene and destroy most of the necessary interplay and reaction between the characters. For these reasons, he would do best to get his material pretty well by heart, using the printed page to refresh himself from time to time, and to serve as a psychological reminder to the audience that the interpreter is a middleman, a reader and not an actor or participant in the play.60

An extremely close correlation exists between Twain and Lee in relation to the use and effect of the pause. Lee states:

He may need to slow his tempo to allow the unexpected idea to reach his listeners, and will probably want to make use of a pause before the climax to point it sufficiently. A slight pause will accomplish two very important things. In the first place, it will give you time for a good full breath and to pull your thoughts together. In the second place it will give your listeners time to focus their attention upon you so they are ready to respond to your material.61

Wayland M. Parrish points out:

One device for good expression, though mechanical in nature . . . is the pause. Pauses will, of course, be longer and more frequent when the thought is difficult or unfamiliar, or when the reader desires to be very impressive.62

61 Ibid., pp. 130-131.
Crocker and Eich give several examples as to the use of the pause which closely relates to that of Twain.

... the pause is frequently used to point up a phrase ... the pause is also used to give the audience time to reflect on what has been said ... the reader can make use of the pause to get his bearings for the scene or mood of the passage ... the pause is used to build up mood. 63

An important note made by these authors is "when you are in a hurry, skip everything but the pause." 64

Armstrong and Brandes are also in accord with Mark Twain in the use of the pause. The four purposes of the pause as stated by these authors are:

(1) The pause gives the listener time to digest what has preceded before more complications are added; (2) The pause gives the audience time to enjoy what it is hearing; (3) The pause provides emphasis to what precedes and what follows; (4) The pause provides time for the reader to gain his bearings and move with ease through his selection. 65

Although the pause can be extremely effective, it loses its effectiveness if it is used incorrectly. It becomes rather artificial, and the delivery becomes choppy, thus destroying the mood of the selection.

Woolbert and Nelson state that "there is no fixed rule for phrasing; only that as you break up a sentence by pauses--

64 Ibid., p. 101.
or fail to break it up—you settle the meaning your audience will get. 66

Gail Boardman's statement as to the effect and length of the pause appears to be closely related to that of Mark Twain's in his essay "How to Tell a Story." She states: "If it is too short, it fails to serve its purpose; if it is too long, it may sever the contact. The best rule is to let pause grow out of the thought and emotion involved in the material." 67

Boardman's philosophy concerning the use of the pause is as follows:

The pause is one of the most important techniques of interpretation . . . . Interpreters sometimes pause to gauge the effectiveness of their communication by noting the audience reaction . . . . The interpreter will find pause necessary to make transition of mood, differences in character, change in scene, and end of narrative or explanatory insertions. 68

Boardman appears to follow Twain's philosophy as to the importance and stresses it as one of the most important devices in oral interpretation.

Concerning the use of words by contemporary authorities, Crocker and Eich state:

Not only words themselves, but the order in which they are written is important for

68 Ibid., pp. 206-207.
meaning . . . The changing word or phrase can affect the rhythm of the passage.  

The author usually chooses words whose very sound gives the listener his mood or feeling. Many words are used as illusions, or as a direct reference to something generally familiar. Henneke states that, "The total effect of an author's words and images is the mood he creates."  

Esenwein and Stockard point out:

. . . printed words linger on the page, so that the impressions they make may be renewed indefinitely, whereas the spoken word . . . is like the arrow-flight, swift and not easy to follow. Each idea, therefore, must have its appropriate spoken word, each word its well chosen mate, each group its sequence, and all must be picture-producing, so that one scene—or moving picture, as it were—may follow another with clearness and interesting liveliness.

Toose gives this advice as to the use of words:

The medium you use is words, so trust these words and your way of using them . . . . Trust the words. They are your medium as tones. Experiment widely with words and their sound effects.

Geiger states that the choice of words by the author is of the utmost importance as he points out:

69 Crocker and Eich, op. cit., p. 64.


We must remember that the interpreter must sound out the words in their order. He is never at liberty to bundle up a few lines or pages in a tight—or loose—generalization, but must tick off the lines and the pages, word by demanding word.\(^{73}\)

Woolbert and Nelson state:

The interpreter should treat a new word as a discovery, as something that will add to his experiences and to the meaning he is trying to get from the printed symbol. The listener can usually tell whether the words have stirred up the right meanings in the interpreter.\(^{74}\)

In conclusion, there is a definite resemblance to what Mark Twain has said about certain aspects concerning oral interpretation, and what contemporary authorities have stated.

Both Twain and the contemporary writers agree on the same method of preparation, except that Twain feels memorization is an extremely important aspect of preparation. Whereas, the contemporary authorities feel that the individual should not memorize his selection, but carry a book to the platform with him.

Both Twain and the contemporary writers are in accord as to the use of the pause, both feel it is one of the most important and effective devices in oral interpretation.

In word usage, Twain was exact as to the word he chose to convey a message, and contemporary authorities also feel that only the correct word will convey the intended message.

\(^{73}\)Don Geiger, *Oral Interpretation and Literary Study* (San Francisco, California, 1958), p. 16.

\(^{74}\)Woolbert and Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
As Twain once said: "The right word may be effective, but no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause."  

According to contemporary authorities, it is the duty of the oral interpreter to read the words as the author selected and wrote them, and not to insert words they feel will enhance the selection.

It may be summed up that the techniques employed by Mark Twain are still being employed today in oral interpretation.

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CHAPTER III

MARK TWAIN AS AN ORAL INTERPRETER

Upon completion of his lecture tour in 1871, Twain settled down to a married life, but in 1884 decided to return to the lecture platform; this time as a reader of his own work. He had listened to Charles Dickens perform, and became impressed with the methods employed by him. He states:

He read with great force and animation, in the lively passage, and with stirring effect. It will be understood that he did not merely read but also acted.¹

Twain further comments:

What is called a "reading", as a public platform entertainment, was first essayed by Charles Dickens, I think. He brought the idea with him from England in 1867. He had made it very popular at home and he made it so acceptable and so popular in America.²

There was a great demand during the middle and late nineteenth century for adult education and amusement, "and it was here that the Chautauqua really grew into an institution with an influence that can scarcely be measured."³ Bishop Vincent, in 1874, "established the Sunday School Teachers Assembly which later became the original Chautauqua."⁴

²Ibid., p. 213.
³Mary Margaret Robb, Oral Interpretation of Literature in American Colleges and Universities (New York, 1941), p. 128.
⁴Ibid.
McLaren gives this account of his own experience as a "dramatic reader."

While the original purpose was the study of the Bible, the fame of the institution grew and its patronage increased when the course of study was expanded to include secular subjects. Lectures, music, and readings were added to furnish "pure, wholesome entertainment" for the Bible students. Boating, bathing, and outdoor games were provided to encourage healthful exercise. Thus the Assembly developed a uniquely American blending of religion, education, and recreation. . . . An intense, almost fanatical interest in education took possession of the Chautauqua devotees. Heretofore the pursuit of knowledge had been confined to the four walls of the schoolroom. Adult education was almost unknown. But with the establishment of the Assembly at Lake Chautauqua, pupils from eighteen to eighty began to enroll. Men and women who, like Dr. Vincent, had been denied the advantages of a college education flocked to the great resort where they could pursue their studies with dignity and at the same time take a vacation . . . . Chautauquas now began to spring up all over the country in groves of trees and by likesides. The original idea of combined study and entertainment with the health-making influences of trees and water seemed the keynote of Chautauqua's appeal, because when the idea was tried in cities it was almost always a failure.5

The first lyceum came into being in 1826 in Millbury, Massachusetts. It was originally for lectures, and forty-two years later, the first lyceum bureau was established in Boston by James Redpath. Such men as Horace Greeley, Wendell Phillips, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Mark Twain were members of this bureau.

As the Chautauqua became more popular, it became more varied.

5Gay McLaren, Morally We Roll Along (Boston, Mass., 1938), pp. 74-77.
public reading became an essential part. The word "reader" was an outgrowth of the term "elocutionist" and was first applied only to one who read a play or book in monologue form.  

McLaren points out:

In the early days of Chautauqua "Culture," the audiences were made up, almost exclusively, of church people who were violently opposed to the theatre and anything connected with it. . . . The only way that Chautauqua patrons could hear the plays of Shakespeare or other dramatic literature was in a "reading" . . . . The "reading" referred to as "platform art" was exclusively a product of the Chautauqua and Lyceum and was little known outside of these institutions.  

Many individuals had tried reading as a trade, but only a few were successful. Twain felt that he could be as successful in "readings" as he was on his lecture tour, so he contacted George W. Cable, noted lecturer and platform artist, and both set out on an "Author's Reading" tour. Twain remarks about his first reading:

It was ghastly! At least at the beginning. I had selected my reading well enough, but had not studied it. I supposed it would only be necessary to do like Dickens--get out on the platform and read from the book. I did that and made a botch of it . . . after a week with the book I laid it aside and never carried it to the platform again; but meantime I had memorized those pieces, and in delivering them from the platform they soon transformed themselves into flexible talk, with all their obstructing preciseneses and formalities gone out of them for good.

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6 Robb, op. cit., p. 130.
7 McLaren, op. cit., p. 134.
8 DeVoto, op. cit., p. 216.
Twain comments on the written style as compared with the oral style:

Written things are not for speech; their form is literary; they are stiff, inflexible, and will not lend themselves to happy and effective delivery with the tongue—where their purpose is to merely entertain, not instruct; they have to be limbered up, broken up, colloquialized, and turned into the common forms of unpremeditated talk—otherwise they will bore the house, not entertain it.9

One of the readings which Twain commented on is "His Grandfather's Old Ram" from Roughing It. He points out:

After I had memorized it it began to undergo changes on the platform and it continued to edit and revise itself night after night, until by and by, from dreading to begin on it before an audience I came to like it and enjoy it.10

Twain had not realized the transformation this selection had undertaken until some ten years later when he was asked to read it to a group of friends. He started to read from his book and stated:

It wouldn't read—that is, it wouldn't read aloud. I struggled along with it for five minutes and then gave it up and said I should have to tell the tale as best I might from memory.11

Twain believed that through verbal communication he could perform the artistic responsibility of relating the tale, since written symbols are unfortunately static symbols devoid of life—without animation and all the qualities that make verbal communication live.

9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p. 214.
11 Ibid., p. 217.
Upon comparing the platform version with the original in *Roughing It*, Twain states:

I find myself unable to clearly and definitely explain why one can be effectively recited before and audience and the other can't; there is a reason but it is too subtle for adequate conveyance by the lumbering vehicle of words; I sense it but cannot express it; it is as elusive as an odor, pungent, pervasive, but defying analysis. I give up. I merely know that the one version will recite, and the other won't.12

By reciting, Twain meant "delivery from memory."13 He points out that:

... neither version can be read effectively from the book. There are plenty of good reasons why this should be so, but there is one reason which is sufficient by itself, perhaps; in reading from the book you are telling another person's tale at secondhand; you are a mimic, and not the person involved; you are an artificiality, and not a reality; whereas in telling the tale without the book you absorb the character and presently become the man himself, just as is the case with the actor.14

Twain feels that one loses the personal contact that the oral interpreter has with the character he is talking about. He gives a comparison between the reader and the actor. He feels that the oral interpreter, as well as the actor, would have little or no effect upon the audience if he held the book in his hand, as "reading from the book renders the nicest shadings of delivery impossible."15

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12 Ibid., pp. 223-224
13 Ibid., p. 224.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
John Dolman, like most contemporary authorities, disagrees with Mark Twain as to the philosophy concerning the reader and the actor. He states:

The attitude of the actor is necessarily exhibitionist, in the sense that he uses himself—his body, mind and voice—as the instrument of his art, identifying himself imaginatively with the character he portrays, and exhibiting that character objectively before the eyes and ears of his audience. He lives a kind of dual existence on two planes at once. He must be sympathetically aware of the author's intention. The reader is just one person, not two. He functions on one plane only. He is in no sense part of the play, or book, or poem, in his own body, mind or voice. He is a reader, appreciating what he reads with more or less imaginative vividness, but without involvement of his person; if he is reading to others he is psychologically one of them, sharing his appreciation and understanding of what he reads with them. His essential relationship with his listeners is one of communicative participation, not exhibitionism.

Twain believes that by reciting you become the person involved in the tale as does the actor, and that in reading it directly from the book, you lose the personal contact not only with the original work, but also the audience. Dolman feels quite the opposite. He feels that reading should be directly from the book, and the reader should not identify himself with the character in the tale, as that is the job for the actor.

16 John Dolman Jr., The Art of Reading Aloud (New York, 1956), p. 27.
Woolbert and Nelson point out:

The actor who interprets his lines best must be the one who best strikes a balance between restraining his feelings and letting them go. . . . An actor or interpreter of lines to be successful must be sensitive enough to the meaning of lines to be moved by them in the spirit the author intended . . . but because all art requires headwork and planning and foresight, he must not get so caught in emotion that he loses his judgment and his sense of values. 17

Twain could be classified as an actor, but he did not get caught in emotions enough that he lost "his judgment and his sense of value." 18

A comparison of the original written version of "His Grandfather's Old Ram" with the revised version which was used for oral presentation illustrates Twain's practice of altering a selection in an effort to make the style more oral. The difference in the two versions also illustrates the freedom Twain exercised in altering and adapting his own work. A modern interpreter does not exercise the same sort of freedom since he is obligated to remain true to the author's original intent.

The original version and the platform version are cited in full so that the reader may see the drastic change that "His Grandfather's Old Ram" tale underwent.

18 Ibid., p. 34.
I don't reckon them times will ever come again. There never was a more bullier old ram than what he was. Grandfather fetched him from Illinois—got him of a man by the name of Yates—Bill—Yates—maybe you might have heard of him; his father was deacon—Baptist—and he was a rustler, too; a man had to get up ruther early to get the start of old Yates; it was him that put the Greens up to jining teams with my grandfather when he moved.

(This is the last the reader ever hears of the ram and grandfather.)

"Well, as I was a-sayin', he bought that old ram from a feller up in Siskiyou County and fetched him home and turned him loose in the medder, and next morning he went down to have a look at him, and accidently dropped a ten-cent piece in the grass and stooped down—so—and was a-fumblin' around in the grass to git it, and the ram he was a-standin' up the slope taking notice, because he had his back to the ram and was int'rested about the dime. Well, there he was, as I was a-sayin', down at the foot of the slope a-bendin' over—so—fumblin' in the grass, and the ram he was up there at the top of the slope, and Smith—Smith was a-standin' there—no, not jest there, a little further away—fifteen foot perhaps—well, my grandfather was a-stoopin' down at the foot of the slope a-bendin' over—so—fumblin' in the grass, and the ram he was up there observing, you know, and Smith he ... (musing) ... the ram he bent his head down, so ... Smith of Calaveras ... no, no it couldn't ben Smith of Calaveras—I remem-  

ber now that he—b'George it was Smith of Tulare County --course it was, I remember it now perfectly plain.  

"Well, Smith he stood just there, and my grand-  

father he stood just here, you know, and he was a-bendin' down just so, fumblin' in the grass, and when the old ram see him in that attitude he took it fur an invitation--and here he come! down the slope thirty mile an hour and his eye full of business. You see my grandfather's back being
Seth Green was prob'ly the pick of the flock; he married a Wilkerson--Sarah Wilkerson--good cretur, she was--one of the likeliest heifers that was ever raised in old Stoddard, everybody said they knewed her. She could heft a bar't of flour easy as I can flirt a flapjack. And spin? Don't mention it! Independent? Humph! When Sile Hawkins come 'a browsing around her, she let him know that for all his tin he couldn't trot in harness alongside of her.

to him, and him stooping down like that, of course he--why sho! it warn't Smith of Tulare at all, it was Smith of Sacramento--my goodness, how did I ever come to get them Smiths mixed like that--why, Smith of Tulare was jest a nobody, but Smith of Sacramento--why the Smiths of Sacramento come of the best Southern blood in the United States; there warn't ever any better blood south of the line than the Sacramento Smiths. Why look here, one of them married a Whitaker! I reckon that gives you an idea of the kind of society the Sacramento Smiths could 'sociate around in; there ain't no better blood than that Whitaker blood; I reckon anybody'll tell you that.

(In the revised version the story of the ram is developed and is carried to the point of great suspense. Twain succeeds in this version to arouse the interest of the audience where he had failed in the original.)

"Look at Mariar Whitaker--there was a girl for you! Little? Why yes, she was little, but what of that? Look at the heart of her--had a heart like a bullock--just as good and sweet and lovely and generous as the day is long; if she had a thing and you wanted it, you could have it--have it and welcome; why Mariar Whitaker couldn't have a thing and another person need it and not get it--get it and welcome. She had a glass eye
You see, Sile Hawkins was—no, it warn't Sile Hawkins, after all—it was a galoot by the name of Filkins—I dis-remember his first name; but he was a stump—come into pra'r meeting drunk, one night, horraying for Nixon, becuze he thought it was a primary; and old Deacon Ferguson up and scooted him through the window and he lit on old Miss Jefferson's head, poor old filly. She was a good soul—had a glass eye and used to lend it to old Miss Wagner, that hadn't any, to receive company in; it warn't big enough, and when Miss Wagner warn't noticing, it would get twisted around in the socket, and look up, maybe, or out to one side, and every which way, while t'other one was looking as straight ahead as a spy-glass. Grown people didn't mind it, but it most always made the children cry, it was so sort of scary. She tried packing it in raw cotton, but it wouldn't work, somehow—the cotton would get loose and stick out and look so kind of awful that the children couldn't stand it no way. She was always dropping it out, and turning up her old deadlight on the company empty, and making the oncomfortable, becuze she never could tell when it hopped out, being blind on that side, you see. So somebody would have to hunch her and say 'Your game eye has fetched lose, Miss Wagner, dear!'—and then all of them would have to sit and wait till she jammed it in again—wrong side before, as a general thing, and green as a bird's egg, being a bashful cretur and easy sot back before and she used to lend it to Flora Ann Baxter that hadn't any, to receive company with; well, she was pretty large, and it didn't fit; it was a number seven, and she was excavated for a fourteen, and so that eye wouldn't lay still; every time she winked it would turn over. It was a beautiful eye and set her off admirable, because it was a lovely pale blue on the front side—the side you looked out of—and it was gilded on the back side; didn't match the other eye, which was one of them browny-yellery eyes and tranquil and quiet, you know, the way that kind of eyes are; but that warn't any matter—they worked to-gether alright and plenty picturesque. When Flora Ann winked, that blue and gilt eye would whirl over, and the other one stand still, and as soon as she begun to get excited that hand-made eye would give a whirl and then go on a-whirlin' and a-whirlin' faster and faster, and a-flashin' first blue and then yaller and then blue and then yaller, and when it got to whizzing and flashing like that, the oldest man in the world couldn't keep up with the expression on that side of her face. Flora Ann Baxter married a Hogadorn. I reckon that lets you understand what kind of blood she was—old Maryland Eastern Shore blood; not a better family in the United States than the Hogadorns.

(In the revised version, Twain changed the name of Sarah Wilkerson to Mariar
company. But being wrong side before warn't much difference, anywhay, becuz her own eye was sky-blue and the glass one was yaller on the front side, so whichever way she turned it it didn't match nohow. Old Miss Wagner was considerable on the borrow, she was. When she had a quilting, or Dorcas S'iety at her house she gen'ally bor-rowed Miss Higgin's wooden leg to stump around on; it was considerable shorter than her other pin, but much she minded that. She said she couldn't abide crutches when she had company becuz--they were so slow; said when she had company and things had to be done, she wanted to get up and hump herself. She was as bald as a jug, and so she used to borrow Miss Jacops's wig--Miss Jacops was the coffin-peddler's wife--a ratty old buzzard, he was, that used to go roosting around where people was sick, waiting for 'em; and there that old rip would sit all day, in the shade, on a coffin that he judged would fit the can'didate; and if it was a slow customer and kind of uncertain, he'd fetch his rations and a blanket along and sleep in the coffin nights. He was anchored out that way, in frosty weather, for about three weeks, once, before old Robbins's place, waiting for him; and after that, for as much as two years, Jacops was not on speaking terms with the old man, on account of his disapp'inting him. He got one of his feet froze, and lost money, too, becuz old Robbins took a favorable turn and got well. The next time Robbins got sick, Jacops tried to make up with him, and varnished up the same
old coffin and fetched it along; but old Robbins was too many for him, he had him in, and 'peared to be powerful weak; he bought the coffin for ten dollars and Jacops was to pay it back and twenty-five more besides if Robbins died, and at the funeral he busted off the lid and riz up in his shroud and told the parson to let up on the performance, becuz he could not stand such a coffin as that. You see he had been in a trance once before, when he was young, and he took the chance on another, cal'rating that if he made the trip it was money in his pocket and if he missed fire he couldn't lose a cent. And, by George, he sued Jacops for the rhino and got judgment; and he set up the coffin in his back parlor and said he 'lowed to take his time, now. It was always an aggravation to Jacops the way that miserable old thing acted. He moved back to Indiany pretty soon—went to Wellsville—Wellsville was the place the Hogadorns was from. Mighty fine family. Old Maryland stock. Old Squire Hogadorn could carry around more mixed licker, and cuss better than most any man I ever see. His second wife was the Widder Billings—she that was Becky Martin; her dam was Deacon Dunlap's first wife.

(In the original version Twain tells about Jacops and his coffin, but left this out in the revised version.)

Her oldest child, Maria, married a missionary and died in grace—set up by the savages. They et him, too, poor feller—biled him. It warn't the custom, so they say, but they explained to friends of his'n that went down there to "Sally—that's Sally Hogadorn—Sally married a missionary, and they went off carrying the good news to the cannibals out in one of them way-off islands round the world in the
bring away his things, that they'd tried missionaries every oth-

er way and never could get any good out of 'em—and so it annoyed all his relations to find out that that man's life was fooled away just out of a dern'd experiment, so to speak. But mind you, there ain't anything ever reely lost; everything that people can't under-

stand don't see the reason of does good if you only hold on and give it a fair shake; Providence don't fire no blank-scartridges, boys. That there missionary's sub-

stance, unbeknowns to himself, actu'ly converted every last one of them heathens that took a chance at the barbecue. Nothing ever fetched them but that. Don't tell me it was an accident that he was biled. There ain't no such a thing as an accident.

(In the original he doesn't expound on the missionary in-

cident as he does in the revised version.)

When my Uncle Lem was leaning up agin a scaffolding once, sick, or drunk, or suthin, an Irishman with a hod full of bricks fell on him out of the

middle of the ocean somers, and they et her; et him too, which was irregular; it warn't the custom to eat the missionary, but only the family, and when they see what they had done they was dreadful sorry about it, and when the relations sent down there to fetch away the things they said so--said so right out--said they was sorry, and 'pologized, and said it shouldn't happen again; said 'twas an accident.

"Accident! now that's foolishness; there ain't no such thing as an accident; there ain't nothing happens in the world but what's ordered just so by a wiser Power than us, and it's always fur a good purpose; we don't know what the good purpose was, sometimes--and it was the same with the families that was short a missionary and his wife. But that ain't no matter, and it ain't any of our business; all that concerns us is that it was a special providence and it had a good intention. No, sir, there ain't no such thing as an accident. Whenever a thing happens that you think is an accident you make up your mind it ain't no accident at all--it's a special providence.

(Twain also changed the name from Maria to Sally Hogadorn in the revised version.)

"You look at my Uncle Lem--what do you say to that? That's all I ask you--you just look at my Uncle Lem and talk to me about accidents! It was
third story and broke the old man's back in two places.
People said it was an accident. Much accident there was about that. He didn't know what he was there for, but he was there for a good object. If he hadn't been there the Irishman would have been killed. Nobody can ever make me believe anything different from that. Uncle Lem's dog was there. Why didn't the Irishman fall on the dog? Becuz the dog would a seen him a coming and stood from under. That's the reason the dog warn't appinted. A dog can't be depended on to carry out a special providence. Mark my words, it was a put-up thing. Accidents don't happen, boys. Uncle Lem's dog—I wish you could a seen that dog. He was a regular shepherd—or ruther he was part bull and part shepherd—splendid animal; belonged to Parson Hagar before Uncle Lem got him.

(Twain never tells much about the dog, or his name, but in the revised version he comments on the breed name, and gives exceptional praise to the dog.)

like this: one day my Uncle Lem and his dog was downtown, and he was a leanin' up against a scaffolding—sick, or drunk, or somethin'—and there was an Irishman with a hod of bricks up the ladder along about the third story, and his foot slipped and down he come, bricks and all, and hit a stranger fair and square and knocked the everlasting aspirations out of him; he was ready for the coroner in two minutes. Now then people said it was an accident.

"Accident! there warn't no accident about it; 'twas a special providence, and had a mysterious, noble intention back of it. The idea was to save that Irishman. If the stranger hadn't been there that Irishman would have been killed. The people said 'special providence—shoot the dog was there—why didn't the Irishman fall on the dog? Why warn't the dog appinted?' Fer a mighty good reason—the dog would a seen him a coming; you can't depend on no dog to carry out a special providence. You couldn't hit a dog with an Irishman because—lemme see, what was that dog's name... (musing)...oh, yes, Jasper—and a mighty good dog too; he wa'n't no common dog, he wa'n't no mongrel; he was a composite. A composite dog is a dog that's made up of all the valuable qualities that's in the dog breed—kind of a syndicate; and a mongrel is made up of the riffraff that's left over. That Jasper was one of the most wonderful dogs you ever see. Uncle Lem got him
Parson Hagar belonged to the Western Reserve Hagars; prime family: mother was a Watson; one of his sisters married a Wheeler; they settled in Morgan County, and he got nipped by the machinery in a carpet factory and went through in less than a quarter of a minute; his widder bought the piece of carpet that had his remains wove in, and people came a hundred miles to 'tend the funeral. There was fourteen yards in the piece. She wouldn't let them roll him up, but planted him just so—full length. The church was middling small where they preached the funeral, and they had to let one end of the coffin stick out of the window. They didn't bury him—they planted one end, and let him stand up, same as a monument. And they nailed a sign on it and put—put on—put on it—sacred to—the m-o-r-t-a-l—of—of

(The original is rather brief, and really doesn't give a clear picture of Wheeler or what happened to him.)

of the Wheelers. I reckon you've heard of the Wheelers; ain't no better blood south of the line than the Wheelers.

"Well, one day Wheeler was a-meditating and dreaming around in the carpet factory and the machinery made a snatch at him and first you know he was a-meandering all over that factory, from the garret to the cellar, and everywhere, at such another gait as—why, you couldn’t even see him; you could only hear him whiz when he went by. Well, you know a person can't go through an experience like that and arrive back home the way he was when he went. No, Wheeler got wove up into thirty-nine yards of best three-ply carpeting. The widder was sorry, she was uncommon sorry, and loved him and done the best she could for him in the circumstances, which was unusual. She took the whole piece—thirty-nine yards—and she wanted to give him proper and honorable burial, but she couldn't bear to roll him up; she took and spread him out full length, and said she wouldn't have it any other way. She wanted to buy a tunnel for him but there wasn't any tunnel for sale, so she boxed him in a beautiful box and stood it on the hill on a pedestal twenty-one foot high, and so it was monument and grave together, and economical—sixty-foot-high—you could see it from everywhere—and she painted on it 'To the loving memory of thirty-nine yards best three-ply carpeting
containing the mortal remainders of Millington G. Wheeler go thou and do likewise."

(The revised version enhances the tale by giving a vivid description of what happened to Wheeler and his wife's reaction.)

In April, 1861, during the outbreak of the Civil War, President Lincoln commissioned Orion Clemens as Secretary of the Territory of Nevada on April 26. Mark Twain followed his brother there upon an invitation to act as his private secretary. During Twain's stay in the West, he wrote letters to the newspaper, The Gate City, giving details of his trip and the surrounding country. He also wrote descriptive letters to his mother, later using these letters as a direct source for his book, Roughing It.

Roughing It falls distinctly into two divisions: the narrative of adventures of the overland trip in Nevada and California and the journey to the Sandwich Islands. Volume I consisting of the overland trip in Nevada and California, and Volume II the journey to Sandwich Islands.

Twain's original plan for Roughing It was to include only his adventures in Nevada and California, and the material collected from his journey to Sandwich Islands was to be part of another book, but time did not allow Twain to complete the 600 pages required of him in his contract, so he
combined both the overland trip and his journey to the Sand-
wich Islands into two volumes.

In Volume II, Twain's tale, "His Grandfather's Old Ram," is narrated by Jim Blaine and Twain refers to him as the historian. He states:

The historian of "His Grandfather's Old Ram" . . . often tried to communicate his story to his comrades, the other surface miners, but he could never complete it because his memory defeated his every attempt to march a straight course; it persistently threw remembered details in his way that had nothing to do with the tale; these unrelated details would interest him and sidetrack him; if he came across a name or a family or any other thing that had nothing to do with his tale, he would diverge from his course to tell about the person who owned the name or explain all about that family—with the result that as he plodded on he always got further and further from his grandfather's memorable adventure with the ram, and finally went to sleep before he got to the end of the story, and so did his comrades. Once he did manage to approach so nearly to the end, apparently, that the boys were filled with an eager hope; they believed that at last they were going to find out all about the grandfather's adventure and what it was that had happened.19

In the platform version Twain creates a more completely humorous character in Jim than he did in the original version.

A comparison of the two versions shows that the Jim of the revision is not nearly so bad a rambler as the Jim of the original. Jim's recital is almost exactly the same length in both versions, but, whereas in the original his mind moves at a tangent at least twenty-five times, in the revision he is guilty only eleven times.20

19 Ibid., p. 224.

It appears that Twain's revision followed certain well-planned principles and rules which he stated in his essay "How To Tell A Story." In this essay he states:

The humorous story is strictly a work of art--high and delicate art--and only an artist can tell it. . . . The humorous story may be spun out to great length and may wander around as it pleases, and arrive nowhere in particular. 21

Hollenbach states:

In this essay Twain serves warning that the "rules" of the short story, as handed down by Poe, Brander Matthews, and others, cannot be applied strictly to the humorous story. The principles of compression, totality, suspense, and climax--these are not essential. . . . As such . . . the very elements of his work that suggest lack of artistry, the uncontrolled ebullitions of a great improvisor, may be signs of very conscious painstaking artistic effort. 22

In the platform version, Twain uses words which have more color, especially when he refers to the incident in the carpet factory. Twain used the word "nipped" in the original version when he tells about Wheeler going through the carpet machinery. In the platform version he changed the word to "snatch," which gives the listener a more vivid picture of Wheeler being taken bodily into the machinery. Whereas, nipped would imply only a slight scratch, or a nip at his cloths, "snatch" gives the image of grasping the whole of him. This is one example where Twain searched for, and found

22 Hollenbach, op. cit., p. 305.
the correct word. Twain also used choice words when he expounded on the pedigree of the dog. He states:

A mighty good dog too; he wa'n't no common dog, he wa'n't no mongrel; he was a composite. A composite dog is a dog that's made up of all the valuable qualities that's in the dog breed--kind of a syndicate; and a mongrel is made up of the riffraff that's left over. 23

In the original version the play of words is not as effective, because they lack appeal to the emotion, as well as the intellect, and neglect to stir the soul and touch the heart, and present a clear and vivid picture.

Uncle Lem's dog--I wish you could a seen that dog. He was a regular shepherd--or ruther he was part bull and part shepherd--splendid animal; belonged to Parson Hagar before Uncle Lem got him. 24

Twain also developed the tale, in platform version, and gave more detail to the burial of Wheeler, adding an epitaph to the grave. In the original version Twain wrote:

Parson Hagar belonged to the Western Reserve Hagars; prime family; his mother was a Watson; one of his sisters married a Wheeler; they settled in Morgan County, and he got nipped by the machinery in a carpet factory and went through in less than a quarter of a minute; his widder bought the piece of carpet that had his remains wove in it, and people come a hundred miles to 'tend the funeral. There was fourteen yards in the piece. She wouldn't let them roll him up, but planted him just soo--full length. The church was middling small where they preached the funeral, and they had to let one end of the coffin stick out of the window. They didn't bury him--they planted one

23 DeVoto, op. cit., p. 222.
end, and let him stand up, same as a monument. And they nailed a sign on it and put—put on—-put on it—sacred to—m-o-r-t-o-r-y—of fourteen y-a-r-d-s—of three-ply—car—pet—containing all that was m-o-r-t-a-l—of—W-h-e—

In the platform version, Twain gives a clear picture of what happened to Wheeler, and adds twenty-five yards of carpet to add to the humor and incongruity of the tale.

Well, one day Wheeler was a-meditating and dreaming around in the carpet factory and machinery made a snatch at him and first you know he was a-meandering all over that factory, from the garret to the cellar, and everywhere, at such another gait—why, you couldn't even see him; you could only hear him whiz when he went by. Well, you know a person can't go through an experience like that and arrive back home the way he was when he went. No, Wheeler got wove up into thirty-nine yards of the best three-ply carpeting. The widder was sorry, she was uncommon sorry, and loved him and done the best she could for him in the circumstances, which was unusual. She took the whole piece—thirty-nine yards—and she wanted to give him proper and honorable burial, but she couldn't bear to roll him up; she took and spread him out full length, and said she wouldn't have it any other way. She wanted to buy a tunnel for him but there wasn't any tunnel for sale, so she boxed him in a beautiful box and stood it on the hill on a pedestal twenty-one foot high, and it was monument and grave together, and economical—sixty foot high—you could see it from everywhere—and she painted on it "To the loving memory of thirty-nine yards best three-ply carpet containing the mortal remainders of Millington G. Wheeler go thou and do likewise."25

It seems evident the pains Twain took in revising "His Grandfather's Old Ram." In the above quote, Twain injects more humor than he did in the original. His humor is broader

and he adds phrases that enhance the appeal of the tale, such as, "... you know a person can't go through an experience like that and arrive back home the way he was when he went,"27 and "she wanted to buy a tunnel for him but there wasn't any tunnel for sale,"28 thus making it more appealing to the listener.

Hollenbach comments on Twain's revision and emphatically states:

Oral story telling suggests the impromptu working of a mind; and the word "impromptu" suggests inexactness, lack of proportion, irrelevancies. For that reason fondness for oral story-telling is sometimes looked upon as one of the reasons for the lack of unity and finish in his writing. But repeated telling of the same story can serve the same function as pondering over a tale in the quiet of one's study. It allows the same opportunities for choosing the right word, for selecting the right detail, for proper ordering of events—if, of course, the artist knows where he is aiming and has principles of art to guide him. Oral revision does even more. It allows the artist to test his theories of art as he practices them. He can make use of his audience to check his art and his principles of art at various stages of the creative process. ... This was Mark Twain's method of revision ... For the revision process was essentially the process of strengthening the unity of plot and the central character and of sifting and changing the content of the recital, all for humorous effect.29

Twain comments on the humorous story and points out:

The humorous story is told gravely "the teller does his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly

27 Ibid.  
28 Ibid.  
29 Hollenbach, op. cit., pp. 311-312.
suspects that there is anything funny about it; but the teller of the comic story tells you beforehand that it is one of the funniest things he has ever heard, then tells it with eager delight, and is the first person to laugh when he gets through.\(^\text{30}\)

Scott states:

In his humorous creations, Mark Twain seldom played upon words, he plays upon ideas; and as a pun would have no value were the words played upon treated without reference to their legitimate use, so he never forgets what a character is in the habit of doing when he makes him do something out of the common, and in his comical situations he uses the antithesis as if he were making a pun or an epigram.\(^\text{31}\)

It is evident that Twain applied this method in revising "His Grandfather's Old Ram." He played upon ideas rather than individual words. An example would be the contrast between the two versions concerning the glass eye. In the original, the ideas expressed by Twain appear rather distressing.

She was a good soul—had a glass eye and used to lend it to old Miss Wagner, that hadn't any, to receive company in; it warn't big enough, and when Miss Wagner warn't noticing, it would get twisted around in the socket, and look up maybe, or out to one side, and every which way, while t'other one was looking straight ahead as a spy-glass. Grown people didn't mind it, but it most always made the children cry, it was so sort of scary. She tried packing it in raw cotton, but it wouldn't work, somehow—the cotton would get loose and stick out and look so kind of awful that the children couldn't stand it no way. She was always dropping it out, and turning up her old deadlight on the company


empty, and making them uncomfortable, becuz she never could tell when it hopped out, being blind on that side, you see.32

Twain's explanation of the glass eye in the above lacks the appeal the revised platform version possessed. Both versions retain the same general idea, but the platform version appears to be more appealing and humorous.

She had a glass eye, and she used to lend it to Flora Ann Baxter that hadn't any, to receive company with; well, she was pretty large, and it didn't fit; it was a number seven, and she was excavated for a fourteen, and so the eye wouldn't lay still; every time she winked it would turn over. It was a beautiful eye and set her off admirable, because it was a lovely pale blue on the front side—the side you look out of—and it was gilded on the back side; didn't match the other eye which was one of them brown-yellery eyes and tranquil and quiet, you know, the way that kind of eyes are; but that warn't any matter; they worked together alright and plenty picturesque.33

In the revised platform version, Twain comments upon completion of the tale:

At this point the historian's voice began to wobble and his eyelids to droop with weariness, and he fell asleep; and so from that day to this we are still in ignorance; we don't know whether the old grandfather ever got the ten-cent piece out of the grass; we haven't any idea what it was that happened, or whether anything happened at all.34

In summarizing the original version, Twain points out:

I learned then that Jim Blaine's peculiarity was that whenever he reached a certain stage of intoxication, no human power could keep him from setting

32Clemens, op. cit., p. 122.
33DeVoto, op. cit., p. 220.
34Ibid., p. 223.
out, with impressive unction, to tell about a won-
derful adventure which he had once had with his
grandfather's old ram—far as any man had ever
heard him get, concerning it. He always maundered
off, interminably, from one thing to another, till
his whisky got the best of him, and he fell asleep.
What the thing was that happened to him and his
grandfather's old ram is a dark mystery to this
day, for nobody has ever yet found out.  

Upon comparing the two comments above, they are com-
pletely different in their content. Commenting on the revised
version, Twain refers to the mystery of the ten-cent piece,
whereas, in the original comment, he mentions only the grand-
father's old ram. The change in the revised version creates
more suspense, and makes the episode more colorful and
picturesque.

In the tale itself, Twain comments on the ram in both
the original and revised versions, but in the original, the
ram is only mentioned, and then leaves the listener to wonder
what happened. In the revised version, Twain gives a vivid
picture of what the ram is about to do. He tells about the
ram staring at grandfather bending over and the ram aiming
his eye at him, and "... the ram he bent his head down, so
..." and leaves the audience to wonder what will be the
next move, but then the historian wanders off on another sub-
ject. As Twain revised this section, he heightened the
suspense by constantly referring back to the ram in his
opening statements, thus creating an interest in the audience,
something the original lacked.

\[35\text{Clemens, op. cit., p. 127.} \quad 36\text{DeVoto, op. cit., p. 219.}\]
In conclusion, Twain states:

The idea of the tale is to exhibit certain bad effects of good memory: the sort of memory which is too good, which remembers everything and forgets nothing, which has no sense of proportion and can't tell an important event from an unimportant one but preserves them all, states them all, and thus retards the progress of the narrative, at the same time making a tangled, inextricable confusion of it and intolerably wearisome to the listener.\(^\text{37}\)

\(^{37}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 218.}\)
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this study several questions were posed. It was the purpose of this thesis to discover the criteria Mark Twain used in approaching the delivery of a literary composition. It was also hoped that a comparison of Twain's philosophy regarding oral interpretation to that of contemporary writers would indicate the validity of Twain's approach for today's student of oral interpretation. Finally, it was the intention of this thesis to discover Mark Twain's method of preparation for the oral presentation of a work of literature.

A survey of Twain's writings was made at the outset of this study in an effort to collect pertinent material concerning the preparation and the use of various oral reading techniques in his platform performances. Also, a selection, "His Grandfather's Old Ram," from his book Roughing It was chosen for study. Mark Twain carefully revised this selection for oral presentation and it provides an excellent example of how he altered his work for oral reading.

Having considered the various aspects of oral interpretation according to Twain, some general observations concerning the study can be made.
First of all, in examining the writings of Twain it was found that Twain believed thorough preparation to be the prerequisite for a successful performance. He felt that each selection to be undertaken should be rehearsed aloud, so as to limber it up and make it more flexible in order to have more appeal for an audience. He felt that a person who did not prepare for his platform performances was due for trouble. Twain stated that a speech that was worth listening to was a speech that was carefully prepared in private and practiced aloud.

Contemporary authorities are in accord with Twain as to the extent of preparation. They feel that the student of oral interpretation should always rehearse his selection aloud to get the complete meaning of the author's intent. Also, in rehearsing aloud, he is better able to detect errors and is thus more apt to correct them. The contemporary authorities also feel that proper preparation enhances the selection, and strengthens the possibility of a successful performance.

One aspect where Twain and the contemporary authorities are not in accord concerns memorization. Twain felt that no selection could be read effectively; it had to be memorized in its entirety before delivery. Twain felt that the individual owes it to his audience to memorize his selection. Most contemporary authorities insist that the oral interpreter
should familiarize himself with the selection, but should not memorize it. He should always keep the original selection in front of him so as not to wander from the original intent of the author.

This difference of opinion is due in large measure to the fact that Twain read primarily from his own work and so could exercise absolute freedom in altering and revising the selection. Most readers, on the other hand, are reading the work of another and are therefore obligated to present the material exactly as written.

One of Twain's most effective devices used in his platform performances was the pause. Twain felt that after thorough preparation and analysis of the selection, the proper use of the pause, more than any other device, could enhance the selection, and if it were not properly used could destroy the meaning intended by the author. By rehearsing the selection aloud and experimenting with the length of the pause, Twain was able to foretell the exact reaction he would receive from his audience.

Twain felt that the pause was of little use to the individual who was reading from a book because he was unable to perceive what the exact length of the pause should be. His eyes would be on the book and not on his audience. It would be impossible to guess the exact length of the pause, unless the selection was memorized and rehearsed. Contemporary authorities are not in agreement with Twain as to the use of
the pause in oral reading. They feel that the reader may use
the pause to achieve the desired impression he is seeking
from his audience, but memorization is not a prerequisite for
its successful use. Both contemporary authorities and Twain
are in agreement as to the importance of using the pause to
enhance the selection.

As to word usage, Twain was at liberty to revise and
select the word that fitted the selection and occasion, but
students of oral interpretation must not alter the written
symbol, as they must convey the message as the author intended.
Contemporary authorities agree with Twain that the proper
selection of words is important and feel that only the cor-
rect word will convey the intended meaning. But the word
choice belongs in the realm of writing. The interpreter's
task, according to contemporary philosophers is to extract
the full value of the word, not to alter it to suit one's
own wishes.

Many semanticists of today reflect Twain's attitude re-
garding word usage. They are not altogether satisfied with
the word that is likely to be clearly understood, but are
more concerned with finding the exact word that will com-
municate with maximum efficiency. Twain's concern with this
aspect of writing is evident in his revision of "His Grand-
father's Old Ram."

The changes in the revised version create and arouse
curiosity, whereas, the original fails to create this
curiosity and suspense. Twain cut certain incidents from the original, and elaborated on others in the revised version. In the original the ram's tale is never developed, the glass eye tale is rather crude and distressing, the missionary, and the Irishman and dog story were revised to possess more appeal to the audience. In the incident about Wheeler's death, Twain changed the plot, giving a more vivid picture of what actually happened to him, and what his "widder's" reaction was, which adds to the humor of the tale.

In changing the names of the characters in the tale, Twain usually added some comment as to their being from the very "best blood." The story of Jacops, the coffin maker, was omitted because it was probably in bad taste, although it may have appealed to some, it did not appeal to others.

Twain felt that written symbols were not for platform use. He felt them to be stiff and inflexible, and only through drastic revision could the written static symbol be orally delivered. In 1884, Twain attempted oral reading as a trade, but found he was unable to read directly from his book. He had to revise the selection, rehearse it and commit it to memory to make it effective. Twain felt that an individual who was reading from a book was telling another's tale second-hand. For when the individual tells the tale without the use of a book, he absorbs the character and becomes the man himself. Many of the contemporary authorities disagree
with Twain on this account. They feel that the individual should read directly from the book and not identify himself with the character involved, for they feel that is the job for the actor.

Herein lies the chief difference between the kind of performance which Mark Twain gave and that which we do today call oral reading. By contemporary standards Mark Twain would be much more accurately described as an actor than as an oral interpreter. Today the general consensus among contemporary authorities is that the reader is not the performer, but a reader who, along with the members of the audience, is sharing in the enjoyment of the literary work. The reader seldom assumes the role of the character whose lines he is reading, but simply attempts to convey some element of characterization. Mark Twain, however, frequently became the actor. He did not interpret the lines of Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, Jim Blaine, and others, but rather he assumed the role and impersonated these characters.

While much of Mark Twain's philosophy is valid, it would not be useful as an instructional technique for the student of oral interpretation. Primary emphasis is currently placed upon differentiating between acting and interpreting. To Mark Twain this difference was not apparent. He performed as an actor portraying the characters he created. Today's reader attempts only to indicate something of the nature of those characters.
This study is limited in its scope to include only Twain's philosophy of the delivery and preparation of literature. It does not profess to include a thorough analysis of the works of Mark Twain. In spite of its limitations, however, the student of Mark Twain as well as the student of oral interpretation in general should find the thesis useful in preparing selections for oral interpretation or for revising an original literary work for oral presentation.
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Articles

