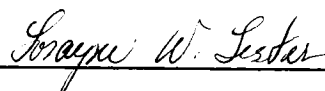


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Faye D. Julian, Major Professor

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THE EVOLUTION AND CONTEMPORARY PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES
OF THE ONE-PERSON SHOW

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kina A. Steed

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to compile the historical evolution of the one-person show from the 1740's to the present and to present an analysis of the contemporary one-person shows which have increased in popularity over the past 50 years. In compiling this overview, this writer was concerned with initial one-person performers including Samuel Foote, Charles Dibdin, Charles Mathews, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charles Farrar Brown, Mark Twain, Will Rogers, the Chautauqua performers and others. The contemporary one-person shows studied in this thesis are as follows:

Pat Carroll--"Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein"

Jane Curry--"Samantha"

Henry Fonda--"Clarence Darrow for the Defense"

John Geilgud--"Ages of Man"

Julie Harris--"The Belle of Amherst"

Hal Holbrook--"Mark Twain Tonight!"

Rob Ingles--"The Canterbury Tales"

Jack MacGowran--"MacGowran in the Works of Samuel Beckett"

Alec McCowen--"St. Mark's Gospel"

Vincent Price--"Diversions and Delights"

James Whitmore--"Will Rogers, U.S.A."

"Give 'Em Hell, Harry!"

"Bully"

Emlyn Williams--"Charles Dickens"

"Bleak House"

"Dylan Thomas Growing Up"

"The Playboy of the Weekend World"

William Windom--"Thurber II"

Little has been written on these early one-person shows, and the primary resources used for gathering information included theatre history texts, biographies, and a few journal articles. More information was available for the contemporary shows. This writer had access to audiotape for five shows, was able to see four shows, and studied multiple reviews for fifteen shows.

The major findings of this study have shown that the main difference between the initial one-person shows and the contemporary regards the script. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the scripts adhered to no set form and manifested light, comic sketches, songs and monologues. Contemporary artists select material with literary value to adapt to a more sophisticated audience. The performances provide a learning experience as well as an evening's entertainment. Another conclusion which can be drawn from this study is that the selection of material, adaptation processes, and style of presentation follow no fixed form. Each show is different due to the performer's attitudes and the type of literature selected. From the reviews studied, it seems that more emphasis is placed on the acting abilities of the performer than on the content or organization of the script.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The one-person show has increased in popularity over the past 30 years. This form of presentational interpretation of literature is defined by this author as a production at least one hour in length which is presented by one actor or actress. In some instances the shows are written, directed and produced by the performer. More frequently however, the performer is presenting another author's work and adapting the material for this mode of entertainment. The one-person show varies in form from full length texts to a potpourri of various pieces generally woven together thematically.

In 1952, Emyln Williams opened his one-man show of Charles Dickens's original readings and since that time one-person shows have been produced professionally and have toured the college circuit. Contemporary artists interpret orally the works of great authors of literature such as Mark Twain, Emily Dickenson, William Shakespeare, and Samuel Beckett. Other artists choose to present well-known personalities including Harry S. Truman, Will Rogers, and Clarence Darrow. The material chosen for these monoperformances manifests poetry, prose, creative monologues, and the Bible. Whatever subjects these artists choose for their attention, each show is an original creation which adheres to no set form.

Although the one-person show is now recognized as a separate form of entertainment, little has been written about it. This writer has found only scanty references to its history. Contemporary attention lends itself to reviews and interviews with little comparison or discussion. This writer feels that, in order to understand the popularity of this mode of entertainment it is necessary to study the metamorphosis of the one-person show. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is two-fold. First, this writer will present a historical survey of the one-person show and assess how the first shows of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have influenced contemporary shows. Secondly, this writer will discuss, compare, and analyze production techniques of contemporary artists currently involved in one-person shows.

The questions to be explored by study and analysis are as follows:

1. What is the composition of the contemporary one-person show? In exploring this question several factors will be considered including selection of material, adaptation process, staging conventions, i.e., use of make-up, properties, and costumes, and overall effectiveness of the production of the one-person show.

2. Are contemporary one-person shows reflective of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth century shows? Drawing from the historical evolvement presented in this thesis, this writer will make comparisons and discuss differences between the early one-person shows and the contemporary.

The Methodology

In the nineteenth century two terms became an important issue in the field of oral interpretation: impersonation and personation. Eugene and Margaret Bahn in their book, A History of Oral Interpretation tell us that John Hanbury Dwyer defined personation as "the representation by a reader or speaker of the words and actions of one or more persons, as if they were themselves reading or speaking. . . ." ¹ Bahn and Bahn further discuss E. B. Warman's distinction between reading, recitation, and impersonation:

He described reading as applying to the presentation of didactic material not requiring gestures. Recitation required "gestures of description and often strong heroic attitudes." Impersonation, more dramatic in style called for more careful training in voice, gestures, and attitudes. ²

The distinction between different forms of oral interpretation was still unresolved at the beginning of the twentieth century. In The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 1916, a debate on the issue of impersonation occurred between Maud May Babcock and Rollo Anson Tallcott. David A. Williams in an article titled, "Impersonation: The Great Debate" in The Study of Oral Interpretation by Richard Haas and David A. Williams, states "The most ironic feature of the Babcock-Tallcott debate was the inability to agree on definitions of terms." ³

¹Eugene Bahn and Margaret Bahn, A History of Oral Interpretation (Minn.: Burgess, 1970), p. 159.

²Bahn, p. 159.

³Richard Haas and David A. Williams, The Study of Oral Interpretation (Indiana: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1975), p. 44.

Miss Babcock defines interpretation as "the presentation of any form of literary material . . . without the aid of dress, furniture, stage settings, or of literal characterization in voice, action, or make-up." She defines impersonation as "an attempt to give exact, literal characterization in voice, action, and make-up, in realistic surroundings of dress, furniture and stage settings."⁴

Tallcott disagrees with Babcock's definitions and presents four of his own. The first of Tallcott's terms, interpretative reading, is defined as pure interpretative presentation. The second term, impersonative reading, employs suggestive characterization in voice and action. Tallcott states, "I think that a play in which characters, their peculiarities, mannerisms, and contrarelations to each other are paramount may be most effectively presented by impersonation."⁵

The third form of interpretation named is straight personation. This term encompasses "literal characterization in voice and pantomimic action." Tallcott believes that the utilization of personation provides a stable foundation for the audience to use their imagination to create further details of characterization and action. "When the speaking character is literally personated, the imagination of the audience is free to work out the pictures of the essential attending object and persons."⁶ According to Tallcott, the monologue and the soliloquy are

⁴Maud May Babcock, "Interpretative Presentation versus Impersonative Presentation," QJS, 2 (1916), p. 16.

⁵R. A. Tallcott, "The Place for Personation," QJS, 2 (1916), p. 117.

⁶Tallcott, p. 118.

two types of literature which lend themselves to personation because they include a great deal of action and the handling of imaginary properties. Tallcott's fourth term is acting and is not appropriate to this discussion.

Theorists and scholars in the oral interpretation field are still struggling with the categorization of different forms of literature presentation. Charlotte Lee, one of the most prolific contemporary writers in oral interpretation offers the following distinction:

Somewhere between acting and oral interpretation of drama comes the art of impersonation, or monodrama. In this form of presentation, a single person presents material which focuses attention on a single character in a single situation. . . . He will probably use a minimum of properties such as a chair or a table. He may suggest costume by a hat or a pair of gloves. . . . The monoactor also concentrates on only one character. . . . The interpreter, on the other hand, presents many characters by suggesting them.⁷

The important distinction between what modality the artist chooses to use for performance is the type literature being presented. R. A. Tallcott discusses the importance of choosing the right art form to enhance the literature. He states, ". . . it is more artistic to know when not to personate than not to personate at all. I believe that a reader, whether he be a college professor or a lyceum entertainer should be able to adapt his program to the audience and to give both interpretation and personation."⁸ This writer feels that contemporary one-person

⁷Charlotte Lee, Oral Interpretation (Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), p. 87.

⁸Tallcott, pp. 151-152.

shows do as Mr. Tallcott has suggested--they are a combination of both interpretation and personation.

The attempt to categorize one-person shows using any of the previously stated criteria seemed futile. This writer found no common threads between the different theorists definitions of interpretative reading, impersonation, and personation. Therefore, due to the diversity in the style and format of contemporary one-person shows, this writer has chosen to dismiss categorization and rely instead on Aggert and Bowan's three criteria for selection of form as a guideline. According to Aggert and Bowan, the decision concerning which form should be used depends on three factors: (1) the type of literature, (2) the composition of the audience, (3) the aesthetic distance inherent in the reading situation."⁹

The seventeen contemporary one-person artists to be analyzed are as follows:

Pat Carroll--"Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein"

Jane Curry--"Samantha"

Henry Fonda--"Clarence Darrow for the Defense"

John Geilgud--"Ages of Man"

Julie Harris--"The Belle of Amherst"

Hal Holbrook--"Mark Twain Tonight!"

Rob Ingles--"The Canterbury Tales"

Jack MacGowran--"MacGowran in the Works of Samuel Beckett"

⁹ Otis J. Aggert and Elbert R. Bowan, Communicative Reading (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 8-9.

Alec McCowan--"St. Mark's Gospel"

Vincent Price--"Diversions and Delights"

James Whitmore--"Will Rogers, U.S.A."

"Give 'Em Hell, Harry!"

"Bully"

Emlyn Williams--"Charles Dickens"

"Bleak House"

"Dylan Thomas Growing Up"

"The Playboy of the Weekend World"

William Windom--"Thurber II"

Each of these shows will be analyzed and compared using the following criteria:

1. Motivational influences
2. Selection of material
3. Adaptation process and preparation
4. Staging conventions
5. Style of presentation
6. Overall effectiveness

Chapter II will trace the historical evolution of one-person shows from the 1740's to the Chautauqua movement. Various British and American performers will be discussed in relation to their shows. This writer's primary interest in analyzing these early shows is to determine why these performers chose to direct their talents toward this modality and the style of their shows which encompasses both type material used and the manner of presentation.

Chapter III will discuss contemporary one-person shows. It will be organized alphabetically by performers. Eighteen shows will be discussed. The shows were chosen based on their accessibility. This writer was able to see four of the shows: "Samantha," "Mark Twain Tonight!," "Canterbury Tales," and "Thurber II." Five shows were available to this writer in the form of audiotapes: "Ages of Man," "The Belle of Amherst," "Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein," "Will Rogers, U.S.A.," and "Charles Dickens." Multiple reviews were studied for the following shows: "Clarence Darrow for the Defense," "Gertrude Stein," "Ages of Man," "The Belle of Amherst," "Mark Twain Tonight!," "MacGowran in the Works of Samuel Beckett," "St. Mark's Gospel," "Diversions and Delights," "Will Rogers U.S.A.," "Give 'Em Hell, Harry!," "Bully," "Charles Dickens," "Bleak House," "Dylan Thomas Growing Up," and "The Playboy of the Weekend World."

Chapter IV will compare in a general analysis the contemporary shows to the early shows. Comparisons will be made in detail concerning the different current one-person shows. Conclusions will be drawn concerning selection and adaptation decisions of various artists, staging techniques and overall effectiveness. A general summation will conclude this chapter with suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE ONE-PERSON SHOW

As stated earlier the purpose of this chapter is a historical overview of the evolvement of the one-person show from the mid-1700's through the Chautauqua movement.

Although foundations of this kind of oral interpretation could be traced back to ancient Greece where literature was passed by word of mouth by rhapsodes, the current popular form did not emerge until much later. In the early 1700's verbal ability was combined with showmanship, and speakers became performers doing original work including mimicry, imitations of audience members, songs and monologues. This mimicry was very influential to the beginnings of what can be termed a one-person show.

The one-person show as we think of it today evolved as a theatrical form in England in the 1740's. The British are given the credit for venturing into a new area and being successful with their one-person show endeavors. Several texts have been helpful in determining the roots of this form. Eugene and Margaret Bahn's book was the primary source used by this writer to establish the history from antiquity to the starting point for this theses--the 1740's. Various books about British theatrical personalities have contributed. David E. Baker's Biographia Dramatica Vol. I is a basic reference to British actors prior to 1812, and W. Davenport Adam's Dictionary of the Drama gives general information concerning actors in England in the eighteenth century.

The starting point for the evolution of the one-person show presented in this thesis begins in the 1740's with a man named Samuel Foote. Foote was an actor, playwright, manager, and great mimic. After acting in both tragedy and comedy somewhat unsuccessfully, Foote began searching for another means by which to use his talent. Knowing he had an exceptional talent as a mimic, Foote decided to try mimicry professionally. Percy Fitzgerald states in his biography, Samuel Foote, that Foote had "an extraordinary originality of talent and methods, and this can be supported by the fact that he was the first to elevate mimicry into a regular profession or dramatic system. . . ." ¹ Although there were many mimics before him, Foote was the first to formulate the art into a complete show, introducing a new form of theatre. For this reason, this overview of one-person shows begins with him.

Probably one of the greatest determinants of the success of the one-person show in its genesis was the English government's restrictions. The Licensing Act of 1737 prohibited the performance of plays at any theatres with the exception of Covent Garden and Drury Lane. The plays submitted for censorship had to be approved and licensed by the Lord Chamberlain. ² The Little Theatre in the Haymarket, banned from producing "legitimate" drama, began advertising such entertainments as puppet shows, pantomines, concerts, and orations. Entertainers, actors,

¹Percy Fitzgerald, Samuel Foote (London: Chatto and Windus, MCMX), p. 43.

²Elizabeth N. Chatten, Samuel Foote (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), p. 15.

and mimics soon found ways to avoid censorship by advertising their shows as "concerts" or "variety shows."³

In 1747, Foote opened his first show (which he called a concert) at the Haymarket. He titled the show "Diversions of the Morning" and advertised it as follows: "At the Theatre in the Haymarket this day (April 22, 1747) will be performed a Concert of Musick, with which will be given gratis a new entertainment."⁴

Percy Fitzgerald provided the most extensive description of Foote's show in his biography, Samuel Foote:

This show of Foote's was really an original device. It was neither a play nor monologue. . . . A strange half-painter, half-actor, who hung loose upon the coffeehouse had the clever gift of taking off the various friends and characters who frequented this place. He did not merely simulate their oddities, but he gave a reproduction of the person. This struck Foote, who had much the same gift, and it occurred to him that he might work the mimicked person into a regular stage character. Then was suggested another device. He would have a set of living puppets--a few figures who were to say nothing and do nothing but what he told them, thus avoiding the monotony of a one-man recitation. Hence, "The Diversions."⁵

Foote continued to produce "Diversions of the Morning" adding some characters and deleting others. His visual and vocal imitations were adaptable to almost anyone and his ability to alter his script kept audiences coming again and again. Foote shifted the times of his shows periodically to escape the Lord Chamberlain's licensing and cleverly advertised by inviting his audience to "Tea" at 6:30 p.m., or to

³Chatten, p. 16.

⁴Fitzgerald, p. 66.

⁵Fitzgerald, p. 66.

"Foote's Sale" on June 11th, where he would present his newest skit, "The Auction."⁶

Foote presented shows at the Haymarket until 1777. Although they were not all one-man shows, they did rely to a large extent upon Foote's skill of impersonation. Foote spent his later years writing and producing "legitimate" stage comedies. Many of these plays were written especially for one-legged actors. In 1766, Foote had a serious accident that resulted in the loss of a leg. He was fitted with a wooden replacement and continued his acting career. Foote's style of humor is evident in the titles of the shows he wrote and produced after his accident: The Devil upon Two Sticks (1768) and The Lane Lover (1770).⁷

Samuel Foote was the first to popularize the one-person show. His talent and style directly influenced many other mimics including George Alexander Stevens and Charles Mathews. He can be considered one of the first to bring social satire to the stage. W. Davenport Adams in Dictionary of the Drama relates the following observations made by a British reviewer:

His comedies have little or no plot, which is a great deficiency; but his dialogue is superior to that of most authors; it abounded with wit, humor and satire. . . . He boldly attacked the vice and higher orders of life, and his plays contain a history of the follies, customs, and corruptions of the age in which he lived.⁸

⁶ Richard L. Klepac, Mr. Mathews at Home (London: The Society of Theatre Research, 1979), p. 9.

⁷ Fitzgerald, p. 66.

⁸ W. Davenport Adams, Dictionary of the Drama Vol. I (London: Chatto and Windus, 1904), p. 9.

George Alexander Stevens

In 1764 when Foote was at the peak of his career, another man in London decided to venture into one-person shows. George Alexander Stevens opened his famous "Lecture on Heads" at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket. David Baker's Biographia Dramatica was helpful in providing information about Stevens and his show. Baker mentions Mr. Lee Lewes who eventually bought the show from Stevens. The most helpful literature concerning Steven's show was, however, an article by Gerald Kahn that appeared in the 1977 issue of Theatre Survey titled "The American Career of George Alexander Steven's 'Lecture on Heads.'" This article traces the history of Steven's script performed in America. Kahan discusses the various shows and the actors who performed them. The script, which lasted for four hours, "teased, ridiculed, and excoriated such characters as Sir Simple Daisy, A Man of the Town, A City Politician, the legal profession, a variety of wigs, and on to the end."⁹ The lecture was revised and presented two years later in 1766 as "The Supplement."¹⁰

"Lecture on Heads" is probably one of the first one-person show scripts to be sold to other actors to perform. The lecture was brought to America and performed on April 30, 1766, in Charleston, South Carolina, by David Douglass. Another performance of the lecture was given in Williamsburg, Virginia, by William Verling in January 1767.

⁹Gerald Kahan, "The American Career of George Alexander Steven's 'Lecture on Heads,'" Theatre Survey 18, No. 2 (1977), p. 60.

¹⁰Kahan, p. 62.

Steven's show continued to be performed until the 1820's. It was a favorite to use in the openings of new theatres or for "filler shows" in between regular performances. Famous actors of the day who delivered the "Heads" lecture include Mr. William Moore, James Godwin, John Henry, and Richard Goodman.¹¹

Charles Dibdin

The next personality who influenced the evolvement of the one-person show is Charles Dibdin. It is surprising that so little has been written about this man who built his own theatre exclusively for his one-person shows. Robert Fahrner's article, "The First Sans Souci Theatre--1791-1796" provided the primary base of study on Mr. Dibdin's theatre.

Like many other showmen, Dibdin turned to one-person shows when his success in acting began to decline. Although Dibdin was multitalented as a writer, composer, singer, and actor, his personality hindered his success. The one-person show provided a medium in which not only could he combine his talents, but he could also do so without confrontations with other people.

Dibdin's first attempts at this new type of theatre were not very successful. He was "greeted with public indifference, but would not be discouraged."¹² Finally, when he opened his 1790-1791 season at the Lyceum on the Strand, he saw an increase of audience acceptance and profit.

¹¹Kahan, p. 62.

¹²Robert Fahrner, "The First Sans Souci Theatre (1791-1796)," Theatre Notebook, 28, No. 2 (1974), p. 60.

Dibdin's personality once again conflicted with co-workers, and it was not long before he was ready for a change. Unable to get along with the stage hands, he decided to establish his own theatre which he named Sans Souci.

Sans Souci opened on Monday, October 31, 1791, with Dibdin's show called Private Theatricals, or Nature in Nubilus. The creation manifested all of Dibdin's talents and is described by Fahrner as including "twenty-nine songs interspersed with comments. The entire entertainment had been written and composed, and was to be spoken, sung and accompanied by Dibdin."¹³ The following quote from Fahrner's article provides an excellent description of Dibdin's show:

Dibdin produced a total of nine entertainments in five years at Sans Souci on the Strand. All had the same format. . . . The show consisted of monologues--sentimental tales, anecdotes, ethnic impersonations, comments on random subjects--which provided occasions for songs; Dibdin's songs (approximately twenty each evening) were the chief feature of the entertainments. The satire involved in the monologues and songs was genial and inoffensive, the tone always light, chatty, informal and intimate. . . . Dibdin constantly varied his performances, it should be added--alternating songs, introducing new songs, resurrecting old material, or making occasional references.¹⁴

Dibdin's theatre was a success. Public response was enthusiastic, and one would assume that Dibdin would be set for life, but once again his personality interfered. Dibdin became annoyed with the wine merchant who occupied the basement and decided to leave his little theatre on the Strand. Sans Souci on the Strand was closed at the end of the 1795-1796 season. Dibdin "immediately bought a lot at Leicester Place

¹³ Fahrner, p. 61.

¹⁴ Fahrner, p. 63.

where he constructed a theatre--the second Sans Souci (sometimes advertised as the 'new' Sans Souci."¹⁵ He continued his one-person shows for the next nine years, "but never with the success he had when his solo appearances and his exquisite little theatre were new."¹⁶

George Saville Carey and Moses Kean

George Saville Carey and Moses Kean were two well-known mimics in the 1770's. Both were related to the famous tragedian Edmund Kean. Mr. Carey was Edmund Kean's grandfather and Moses Kean was his uncle. Information is scarce about these two artists; however, some reference can be found in J. F. Molloy's biography of Edmund Kean, Life of Edmund Kean, and Giles Playfair's biography, Kean.

George Saville Carey never achieved fame on the stage, although he was noted for his mimicry. Playfair tells us that he earned his livelihood by touring the country giving lectures on mimicry. "He was famed as a public lecturer, which meant that he provided a species of light entertainment very popular in his day. In halls and sometimes in theatres he gave humorous talks and recitations, debated and imitated the singers, actors, politicians, and statesmen of contemporary note."¹⁷ Harold Hillebrand's biography, Edmund Kean, refers to George Saville Carey performing "Lecture on Heads." This is the only reference to that fact this writer has found.

¹⁵Fahrner, p. 63.

¹⁶Fahrner, p. 63.

¹⁷Giles Playfair, Kean (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1939), p. 12.

Moses Kean was better known than Carey although the two sometimes combined shows for an evenings entertainment. Kean performed at Covent Garden, Drury Lane, and the Haymarket, and had his own show called "The Evening Lounge" which he toured.¹⁸ Molloy quotes an advertisement of Kean's which reveals some insight concerning his style of mimicry, "He delineated with perspicuity the voices, gestures, and manners of the most conspicuous characters of the Senate and the stage."¹⁹ Part of Kean's popularity can be attributed to his resemblance to Foote. Not only was his acting style similar, but Kean shared the same handicap as Foote--both had a wooden leg. Playfair mentions that Kean's thumping onstage sentimentally reminded his audience of Samuel Foote.²⁰

Charles Mathews

Scholars of British drama enjoy deliberating about the influence of the next great one-person showman to be discussed. It is hard to ascertain who had the greatest influence on the evolvement of the one-person show--Samuel Foote or Charles James Mathews the Elder. There is no arguing that both were great showmen as well as mimics, that both made many contributions to the art, and that Mathews was influenced greatly by Foote's work.

¹⁸Playfair, p. 11.

¹⁹J. F. Molloy, Life of Edmund Kean (London: Downey & Co., 1897), p. 4.

²⁰Playfair, p. 11.

Charles Mathews began his theatrical career in September, 1793, when "he paid the manager of the Richmond Theatre in Surrey ten guineas for the privilege of playing Richmond in Richard III."²¹ Mathews turned to comedy soon after, and his luck grew. He was soon considered one of the leading comedians of the day. Although he was successful, the idea of doing a show by himself appealed to Mathews. He constructed his first show called "The Mail Coach Adventure," or "Rambler in Yorkshire" and presented it in Hull on April 22, 1808.²² Mrs. Mathews helped somewhat with the show, but retired when Mathews created his second show in 1811, titled "The Travellers," or "Hit or Miss." This should perhaps be considered a two-person show because Mathews was usually joined by Charles Incledon.²³

After this season, Mathews had an accident which left him lame for the rest of his life. Even with his obvious limp, Mathews was determined to continue in theatre. He continued doing "The Mail Coach Adventure" and in 1817 was given "a contract to appear at the English Opera House every Spring for the next seven years. The title 'At Home' was first used by Mathews in London during this season of 1817."²⁴

Richard L. Klepac's book, Mr. Mathews at Home, provided the most helpful information about Mathews. Klepac's first chapter is a short summary of one-person shows. The rest of his book is devoted to Charles Mathews and his one-man show, "At Home."

²¹Klepac, p. 12.

²²Klepac, pp. 14-15.

²³Klepac, p. 15.

²⁴Klepac, p. 17.

Charles Mathews' show consisted of satirical take-offs on the national figures of the day. Francis Hodge in Yankee Theatre: The Image of America on Stage, 1825-1851 states that Mathews "lightly ridiculed through songs, skits, and monologues the Scots, Welsh, Irish, many of the English types, and Dutch."²⁵

After five years of performing "At Home" in London, Mathews began to become bored. He had heard of actors gaining financial success with American tours and decided to revise his show somewhat and take it to the States. The format of his show by this time was set as Klepac describes:

The evening would begin with an introductory monologue followed by a monologue-dialogue sequence, which in turn was followed by a song. This pattern continued until there had been a total of three songs and three recitations. This form was repeated for the second act, but the third act was a short farce, typical of the regular comedy of the period except that all roles were played by the same actor. Mathews called this one-man farce a monopolylogue.²⁶

This revised show, titled "Trip to Paris," debuted in the fall of 1823, in Baltimore, Maryland.²⁷ Mathews toured from city to city, was very successful and was thrilled with his reception by the American public. His biography, The Life and Correspondences of Charles Mathews the Elder, written by his wife, reveals his elation through a letter written following the Baltimore opening:

²⁵ Francis Hodge, Yankee Theatre: The Image of America on Stage, 1825-1850 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 23.

²⁶ Klepac, p. 85.

²⁷ Arthur Hornblow, A History of the Theatre in America (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1919), p. 143.

. . . Nothing could be more enthusiastic and cheering than my reception. I was a little embarrassed at first, as I always am, at great applause. . . . They roared and screeched as if they had never heard anything comical before. . . . I had only to hold up my crooked finger when I wanted them to laugh, and they obeyed my call. I was most agreeably surprised, indeed, at finding them an audience of infinitely more intelligence and quickness than I had expected. . . . The neatest and best points were never better appreciated, even in London. . . .²⁸

Word of Charles Mathews successful American tour had spread across the sea, and upon return to England, he was considered "the comedian of the age." After a short rest, Mathews wrote another show to add to his "At Home" repertoire which was titled "Trip to America." This show is considered by most to have been his most successful.

Mathews first presented "Trip to America" on March 25, 1824, at the English Opera House. Francis Hodge wrote that "while other travelers published journals or lectured about their trips to America, Mathews presented a 'stage travelogue' . . . in anecdotes, colorful imitations, patter songs, and monologues."²⁹

"Trip to America" resembled "Trip to Paris" in style and format. The main difference was this time the Americans were the victims of Mathews' satirical humor. Mathews "took off" on several characters including Jonathon W. Doubikin, a real Yankee; Maximillan and Agamemnon, two American negros; Major Grimston, a stagecoach driver; Colonel Hiram Peglar, a Kentucky shoemaker; Monsieur Capot, a French emigrant tailor; and Miss Mange Wurzel, a Dutch heiress.³⁰

²⁸ Mrs. Charles Mathews, The Life and Correspondence of Charles Mathews the Elder (London: Routledge, Warne, and Routledge, 1860), pp. 262-263.

²⁹ Hodge, pp. 61-62.

³⁰ Hodge, pp. 68-70.

Jonathon W. Doubiken, the Yankee character is especially important to note. Mathews was the first to make the Yankee the central character. This type character soon was "the province of the comic actor or 'specialty performer.'"³¹ Hodge emphasizes Mathews' influence further by saying that he was "the progenitor not only of the Yankee but of all native American dialect comedy."³²

Mathews' pain from his accident worsened until he realized some changes must be made. He first changed the format of the demanding monopolylogue in the third act. This helped somewhat, but in 1829 he was forced to ask Edmund Yates to join him as a partner. The new show "contained only two one-man dramas, both of which were performed by Yates."³³

In 1830, Mathews tried to do the show alone, but could only survive a year until he had to call on Yates again. Mr. Klepac explains the changes that were made:

The form of this entertainment was radically different from any of its predecessors. Although act one remained the same, act two was a monopolylogue performed by Yates, and act three was a "Diapolylogue" performed by Mathews and Yates. Mathews omitted the latter, however, after the opening performance.³⁴

In 1832, Charles Mathews had returned to an arrangement much like his original. He planned another trip to America, and although the audience enjoyed him as much as they did on his previous tour, his

³¹Oscar G. Brockett, History of the Theatre (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1968), p. 490.

³²Hodge, p. 61.

³³Klepac, p. 24.

³⁴Klepac, p. 24.

health was decreasing rapidly. He was able to return to England, however, and on April 7, 1835, he sent the following letter to the Committee of the Covent Garden Theatrical Fund:

I had the satisfaction of concluding as I commenced at New York, to one of the greatest if not the best house of the season. The Americans and I parted friends on that night, I believe now to have been the last upon any stage.³⁵

Charles Mathews died two months later on his fifty-ninth birthday.

The influence Charles Mathews had on the popularity and evolvment of the one-person show is too vast to be measured. He toured the country and was received and made to feel "at home" wherever he went. The audience loved him for his light, comic style, the perfection of his art, and his ability to make them laugh--sometimes at themselves. A writer for the London Times summarizes the feelings of the theatrical world toward Charles Mathews the Elder:

. . . He was on the stage what Hogarth was on the canvas--a moral satirist; he did not imitate, he conceived and created characters. . . . Though his performances professed to be representations of manners and peculiarities, they really abounded in the fine analyses of characters. Mathews did not occupy the highest place in the drama, but he was indisputably, and by the united suffrage of France, England, and America, the first in his peculiar walk. . . . For seventeen years he, by his single avertions, delighted all England--alone he did it!³⁶

Albert Smith

Albert Smith was a novelist, playwright, editor, and miscellaneous writer in the mid-1800's. He was a well-known figure in literary and theatrical circles and was editor and co-publisher of a monthly called

³⁵ Klepac, p. 21.

³⁶ Hornblow, p. 315.

"The Man in the Moon," "Town and Country Miscellany," and "The Month." Smith was also a contributor to Punch for which he earned a reputation as a humorist. In 1850 he started touring his own one-man show and soon earned a great reputation as an entertainer also.

This writer had been unable to find references to Smith's shows with the exception of a description from Raymund Fitzsimon's book, The Charles Dickens Show, which states his shows were travelogues, "illustrated by dioramic views and laced with comic songs and sketches."³⁷ It was Albert Smith who started the "fashion of writers appearing on the public platform. Dickens and Thackeray would later set a higher standard, but Smith had scored the first success."³⁸

Charles Dickens

By the time Charles Dickens was twenty years old, he had earned a great reputation as a newspaper reporter. He had always wanted to become an actor, but his success in the journalism field and his courtship with a young girl named Catherine discouraged his seeking an acting career. In 1836 Dickens published Pickwick Papers which established him as one of the most popular writers in the country. In that same year he married Catherine.

During the early years of his career, Dickens actively participated in amateur theatricals. His marriage was failing, and he searched

³⁷Raymund Fitzsimons, The Charles Dickens Show (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1970), p. 31.

³⁸Fitzsimons, p. 31.

aimlessly for something to fill an inexplicable void. In a letter to John Forster in 1854, Dickens tries to explain his feelings: "Restlessness you will say. Whatever it is it is driving me, and I cannot help it. . . ." ³⁹ Dickens finally faced the truth that he and Catherine were not made for each other and although he would not disgrace her with a divorce, he moved out of her bedroom to remain her husband only in appearance.

Dickens' restlessness continued and he continued searching for happiness. He had given several charity readings of A Christmas Carol and began to consider doing his readings for his own profit. He wrote to Forster: "What do you think of my paying for this place (Gad's Hill, his home) by reviving that old idea of some readings from my books? I am strongly tempted. Think of it." ⁴⁰

Forster was not keen on the idea, but Dickens was persistent and consulted several other people, including Albert Smith. Smith encouraged Dickens and offered the services of his brother, Arthur Smith, as business manager. Although Forster disagreed with the new adventure, Dickens and Smith began making preparations for his first professional appearance.

Raymund Fitzsimons' book, The Charles Dickens Show, has been an excellent source for this writer's research. Fitzsimons deals primarily with the professional career of Charles Dickens, the showman, which began on Thursday, April 29, 1858. Dickens appeared at St. Martin's

³⁹ Fitzsimons, p. 22.

⁴⁰ Fitzsimons, p. 30.

Hall reading Cricket on the Hearth. His first appearance was a total success, and between April 29 and July, 1858, he gave seventeen readings at St. Martin's Hall.⁴¹

Dickens used a variety of texts for his Readings including Nicholas Nickleby, The Chimes, Barbox Brothers, A Christmas Carol, Cricket on the Hearth, David Copperfield, and Trial from Pickwick. His choice of texts for the Readings was dictated by those that gave him the greatest chance to impersonate a wide variety of characters. "In adapting the books as Readings it was the actor, or rather the impersonator, in Dickens which came first, not the writer."⁴²

Dickens' style of presentation changed very little during the twelve years he gave Readings. He was perceptive of audience reaction and through trial and error decided what style and techniques would bring forth the most favorable responses from his listeners. "Early in his reading career Dickens realised that he must free his eyes from the book, because it was impossible for him to achieve the greatest dramatic impact when his eyes were downcast. He therefore set about learning his texts by heart and eventually he held the book merely for effect."⁴³

Dickens often would rehearse a Reading as many as two hundred times. Each rehearsal would bring about new revisions in the written text and manner of presentation. After presentation, he would continue his revisions to adapt to his audience's reactions. Raymund Fitzsimons gives the reader some insight into the way Dickens would mark his script:

⁴¹Fitzsimons, p. 37.

⁴²Fitzsimons, pp. 40-41.

⁴³Fitzsimons, p. 41.

The pages of his prompt copies show lines and sometimes entire passages obliterated in washes of black, blue or red ink. The margins are filled with balloons of writing and cobwebs of lines indicating interpolations and corrections. They also contain directions jotted down for his own guidance such as "Snap your fingers," "Rising action," "Soften very much," "Cheerful," "Tone to mystery," and many others.⁴⁴

He would practice the readings for two or three hours everyday. He never stopped adding new material and revising his current repertoire.

Near the time of his death, he wrote to Forster the following:

You have no idea how I have worked at them. Finding it necessary, as their reputation widened, that they should be better than at first, I have learnt them all, . . . I have tested all the serious passion in them by everything I know. I have made the humorous points more humorous, corrected my utterance in certain words; cultivated a self-possession not to be disturbed and made myself master of the situation.⁴⁵

The audience that attended Dickens' Readings were familiar with the written tests. He was the most popular writer of his time and his works appealed to every class of people. Because of his audience's familiarity, Dickens often eliminated descriptions of characters when he could convey their appearance by acting.⁴⁶

The staging conventions Dickens chose to use were simplistic. His costume consisted of evening wear with a red flower in his buttonhole. The stage was basically bare except for his reading desk which soon became a part of his characterizations, personality, and a kind of trademark. The reading desk was slender, graceful, and had been thought out and designed by Dickens to the most minute detail. In the following passage Fitzsimons describes the Dickens desk:

⁴⁴Fitzsimons, pp. 36-37.

⁴⁵Fitzsimons, p. 41.

⁴⁶Fitzsimons, p. 41.

The top was supported on four slender legs. On the left of the reader, screwed into the flat top, was an oblong block; on the right, a few inches below the top, was a narrow shelf for a water carafe, a tumbler and a handkerchief. . . . He had designed his reading desk with great skill. While holding the book, he could rest his elbow on the oblong block and still maintain an upright position. While standing behind the desk, almost all his body could be seen by the audience and this was essential to the effect of the Readings.⁴⁷

Charles Dickens' readings helped to fulfill his life-long obsession to be an actor. His love for performing and his desire to share his work with the world influenced his decision to take his Readings to America. Despite poor health, Dickens spent the year of 1867-1868 touring predominately the eastern seaboard states. The tour was successful and Dickens was received warmly, but he knew this was to be the first and final time he would thrill the American audience with the voices of the *Dombey*s, Mr. Picksniff, Nicholas Nickleby, David Copperfield, Fagin, and the others who were as dear to Dickens as his own family. He decided that on return to Britain he would deliver a Farewell Tour and then retire from his readings.

The Farewell Tour from 1860-1870 was a painful one for Dickens. He was suffering from stomach pains, heart seizures, and gout of the left foot. With twenty-five more performances left on the tour, Dickens' physician, Dr. Frank Beard, advised him to cancel the tour for fear completion would lead to paralysis and possible apoplexy.

Retirement seemed to do little for Dickens' health or attitude, and when he decided to do twelve Farewell Readings in London, no one could

⁴⁷ Fitzsimons, pp. 36-37.

stop him. The Final Farewell Reading, Dickens 444th professional performance, took place at St. James Hall on Tuesday, March 15, 1870. For the occasion Dickens chose two audience favorites, Christmas Carol and Pickwick Trial. He told the audience that he had hoped to finish another set of readings to present in the near future; "but," he concluded, "from these garish lights I vanish now for evermore, with a heartfelt, grateful, respectful, affectionate farewell."⁴⁸

Although Dickens lived only three more months, his works and contributions will live forever. Raymund Fitzsimons says of Dickens and his readings:

Dickens was the most popular author in the English-speaking world. The names and sayings of his characters were already part of the language. His books had sounded a response in the hearts of his readers and through them countless people had come to love him. No other writer had ever enjoyed such a relationship with his readers. The Readings appealed, as did the books, to all ages and to all tastes, cultivated and simple. . . . For the readings were an entertainment. They were not readings in the literal sense of the word. Dickens was a magnificent actor, with a wonderful talent for mimicry. He seemed able to alter not only the voice, his features and his carriage but also his stature. He disappeared and the audience saw, as the case might be, Fagan, Scrooge, Pickwick, Mrs. Gamp, Squeers, Mrs. Gummidge, Micawber, Bill Sikes, or a host of others. Character after character appeared on the platform, living and breathing in the flesh.⁴⁹

William Makepeace Thackeray

William Makepeace Thackeray was a novelist, caricaturist, editor, journalist and lecturer. In 1846 he published Vanity Fair which sold poorly due to Thackeray's unknown reputation. The public soon began to

⁴⁸Fitzsimons, p. 179.

⁴⁹Fitzsimons, p. 37, p. 15.

recognize him and in 1849 he published Pendennis. Financial problems forced Thackeray to begin lecturing, a job of which he was not particularly fond, however the comfortable income and extra time for leisure made the effort worthwhile.

When Thackeray first decided to start doing lectures many of his friends discouraged him for fear that it would harm his reputation as an author. Despite their opinion, Thackeray began working on his first lecture which was titled "The English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century." He had always been interested in the writers of this period and was writing a novel about the period at that time.

The first lecture was given at Willis's Room on May 22, 1850, and others were given on May 29, June 12, 19, 26 and July 3. The whole experience was painful for Thackeray who suffered terribly from stage fright. Lewis Melville's book, William Makepeace Thackeray, gives the following passage concerning Thackeray's nervousness:

In spite of the nervousness which so affected his voice that his daughter did not recognise it when she heard the opening words, "In treating of the English Humourists of the past age, it is of men and of their lives, rather than of their books, that I ask permission to speak to you," Thackeray gathered courage as he proceeded and was extremely successful."⁵⁰

Thackeray stood during his lectures and had a reading desk placed on the platform "which adapted well to his stature."⁵¹ The audiences attending the lectures were upper class and included many of the most

⁵⁰ Lewis Melville, William Makepeace Thackeray (New York: Doubleday, Doran, & Company, Inc., 1928), p. 333).

⁵¹ Melville, p. 333.

famous persons in London including Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, Lord Carlisle, the Dutchess of Sutherland, Lady Ashburton, and Macaulay. These famous people have left accounts concerning the style of Thackeray's reading which were notably different from the readings of Dickens. Charlotte Brontë wrote to her father the following:

Thackeray got up and spoke with as much simplicity and ease as if he had been speaking to a few friends by his own fireside; the lecture was truly good . . . ; it was finished without being the least studied--a quiet humour and graphic force enlivened it throughout.⁵²

Sir Frank Marzials says the secret of Thackeray's charm "lay in an admirable quiet delivery, that without undue emphasis or pause for effect, gave the hearer the full value of every sentence."⁵³ Caroline Fox commented that he read in "a definite dry manner, but makes you understand what he is about."⁵⁴ J. L. Motley adds further insight into Thackeray's style saying:

. . . He skims lightly over the surface of a long epoch, throwing out a sketch here, exhibiting a characteristic trait there, and sprinkling about a few anecdotes, portraits, and historical allusions, running about from grave to gay, from lively to sincere, moving and mocking the sensibilities in a breath, in a way which I should say was the perfection of lecturing to a high-bred audience.⁵⁵

Despite Thackeray's inhibitions, the lectures were a success, and he was soon traveling over the country. To his surprise, the profits

⁵²George Trevelyan, Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay (London: Oxford University Press, 1893), pp. 334-335.

⁵³Trevelyan, pp. 334-335.

⁵⁴Trevelyan, p. 552.

⁵⁵Trevelyan, p. 552.

were overwhelming--an hour's reading would be as profitable as a week's work.

Offers soon came from the United States and Thackeray could not refuse. His tour to the U.S. took place in the year 1852-1853. He delivered his lecture "The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century" in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington.

Before leaving America, Thackeray returned to New York on January 31, to give a lecture in the Church of the Messiah. He wrote a new lecture for this occasion titled, "Charity and Humour," in which "he compared the humourists of the eighteenth century with their successors of the nineteenth century."⁵⁶ This second lecture, combined somewhat from the first course of lectures, was met with such success that after returning to London, Thackeray began to prepare his second course of lectures to be delivered in America. The subject chosen was "The Four Georges."

The second American tour was much like the first. Thackeray took "The Four Georges" lecture to New York, Boston and Baltimore. The lectures were once again a success and Thackeray made more money than before. While he was in New York, a young bookseller offered him "a large sum" to repeat the course of lectures on "The English Humourists." Thackeray was reluctant, but finally relented. The lecture was considered a failure due to two factors: "It was too late in the season to do such a thing and the lectures had been printed and everyone was familiar

⁵⁶Melville, p. 364.

with them."⁵⁷ Thackeray wrote home to a friend about the experience, "I don't mind the empty benches; but I cannot bear to see that sad, pale faced young man as I come out, who is losing money on my account."⁵⁸ After Thackeray had returned home, he sent a certificate of deposit in a New York bank for an amount sufficient to make up for the bookseller's loss.

In 1854 Thackeray lectured for an appointment to the legation at Washington. This was his last lecture in America and shortly after its completion he wrote, "It is quite clear neither kings nor lays can do anything so well for me as these jaws and this pen--please God they may be allowed to wag a little longer."⁵⁹

Soon after Thackeray returned home he began making arrangements to deliver the lectures on the "Four Georges." He delivered these lectures in London, George Hodder, Exeter, Plymouth, Clifton, Birmingham, and Oxford "where he was well received by the undergraduate audience."⁶⁰

The last lecture was to be given in Norwick, and here "Thackeray was seized with one of the most violent attacks to which he was subject. . . . In connection with these lectures on the Georges, the charge of disloyalty was brought against the author."⁶¹ Thackeray justified his readings feeling that it was perfectly legitimate to criticize and discuss the failing of "four sovereigns who had been dead respectively

⁵⁷ Melville, p. 364.

⁵⁸ Melville, p. 367.

⁵⁹ Melville, p. 615.

⁶⁰ Melville, p. 367.

⁶¹ Melville, p. 367.

for a hundred and twenty-five, ninety-five, thirty-five, and twenty-five years."⁶² Nevertheless, Thackeray took advantage of the incident as an excuse to retire from his lectures and return to his writing where he always had felt more at home.

Charles Farrar Browne

"A. Ward, Showman" was a popular cartoon in the mid-1800's. The cartoon first appeared in the Plain Dealer, but soon was published by numerous newspapers across the country. The creator of this cartoon character known for his merry adventures, eccentric spelling, and corrupted grammar, was Charles Farrar Browne. Although Browne was becoming a well-known humorist as well as cartoonist, his earnings were meager and he was soon seeking a way to supplement his newspaper income. David S. Hawes, in his article, "Artemus Ward Will Speak A Piece," tells of Ward's choice for a second occupation:

Circus clowns and minstrel men, Browne noted, won hearty response with his comic material. Why not spring the jokes himself? As the notion grew, he decided against black-face and clown make-up, nor would he personate "A. Ward, Showman." He confided "with mock gravity" to his close friend and later agent and manager, Edward P. Hingston, that he could best be a "show" by becoming a "moral lecturer."⁶³

The show was designed to be a "parody of the day's popular lecturers seen frequently during Browne's time."⁶⁴ He strung together

⁶²Melville, p. 370.

⁶³David S. Hawes, "Artemus Ward Will Speak a Piece," Quarterly Journal of Speech 50 (December 1964), p. 422.

⁶⁴Hawes, p. 422.

seemingly unconnected, random material from his writings. Hawes describes Browne's method of compiling his script:

Ward constructed some new eccentric sentences for each lecture; some items . . . he borrowed from his previously published materials; some ideas were gleaned from his notebooks. For each new lecture, then, the best of the audience-tested material was carried over, but new jokes and anecdotes about current events and attitudes kindled fresh laughter. A lecture . . . always lasted for just one hour and twenty minutes, Ward insisting that that was the precise time, in his belief, which people could sit to listen and to laugh without becoming bored.⁶⁵

Edward P. Hingston, Ward's manager, wrote a book titled The Genial Showman. This book primarily deals with the lecture tours and gives insight into audience reactions and the popularity of Browne's shows. Hingston's book discusses the title of the show, "Babes in the Wood."

His title was a characteristic paradox, for having announced it, he said nothing about either babes or woods for an hour and twenty minutes, when he finally remarked: "I now come to my subject--'The Babes in the Wood.'" After looking at his watch with affected surprise, and assuming an air of perplexity which induced roars of laughter from his audience, he gravely concluded: "But I find that I have exceeded my time, and will therefore remark that so far as I know they were good babes . . . I really have not time to go into their history. You will find it all in the storybooks. They died in the woods, listening to the woodpeckers tapping the hollow beech-tree. It was a sad fate for them, and I pity them. So, I hope, do you. Good night!"⁶⁶

Browne, who soon became synonymous with Ward gave his "Babes in the Wood" performance at New London, Connecticut on November 26, 1861. He was well received by the audience and toured several other New England

⁶⁵Hawes, p. 423.

⁶⁶Edward P. Hingston, The Genial Showman (Mass.: Imprint Society, Inc., 1971), p. xii.

towns before opening in New York City on December 23. The New York Times made the following observations in their review of that first lecture at Clinton Hall in Astor Place:

Naturally and justly, those who are acquainted with "Artemus Ward, Showman," through his writings only, pictured him, . . . as a burly, middle-aged person in somewhat seedy apparel, and with an address more or less suggestive of the "side-show" type of character. On the contrary, Mr. Browne is a tall, slim, and gentlemanly-looking young man, rather careful in his dress than otherwise, and gifted with an imperturbable expression of face, which adds very materially to the effect of the droll philosophies that are propounded by him. . . . By the gift of nature, Mr. Browne is a comedian. His delivery is provokingly deliberate, and there is a subdued humor visible in every expression of his face.⁶⁷

After his favorable reception, Ward began traveling with his lectures. When he "spoke a piece," as the handbills announced that he would, his style depended upon his personal charm and his unrehearsed acting rather than upon the words themselves. A reporter for the Golden Era newspaper in San Francisco observed the following concerning Ward's style:

Great is Artemus. . . . His style is neither scientific, didactic, or philosophical. . . . "The Babes in the Wood" is interesting in the extreme. . . . In the first place it is a comic oration; that is it is spoken, is exuberant in fun, felicitious in fancy, teeming with jokes, and sparkling as bright as waters on a sunny day. . . .⁶⁸

After touring the Northeast, Artemus Ward began preparing for his Western tour which had been organized by his new agent, E. P. Hingston. When he opened "The Babes in the Wood" at Platt's Hall in San Francisco

⁶⁷Hingston, p. xii.

⁶⁸Hawes, p. 425.

on November 13, 1863, "more than six hundred people paid one dollar in gold for admission, while almost as many were turned away."⁶⁹

In December 1863, Ward took his lecture to Virginia City and the surrounding towns of Gold Hill, Silver City, Carson, Dayton and Washoe City. Samuel Clemens was in the audience at one of these performances and commented on Ward's lecture:

There are perhaps fifty subjects treated in it, and . . . a passable point in every one of them, and a healthy laugh, also, for any of God's creatures who hath committed no crime, the memory of which debars him from smiling again while he lives. The man who is capable of listening to "The Babes in the Wood" from beginning to end without laughing either inwardly or outwardly must have done murder, or at least meditated it, at some time during his life.⁷⁰

In January, 1864, Ward took his show to Salt Lake City, Utah to visit the Mormons. Two years earlier he had published "A Visit to Brigham Young" in Artemus Ward: His Book. The article was an account of an imaginary visit and contained passages exemplifying Ward's dialect such as: "It takes him six weeks to kiss his wives," "He don't pretend to know his children, there is so many of um, tho they all know him. He sez about every child he meats call him Par, & he takes it for grantid it is so."⁷¹ Needless to say, Ward was apprehensive about the tour, but was greeted by Brigham Young upon arrival who was "peculiarly affable, gracious, and conversational."⁷²

⁶⁹Hingston, p. xix.

⁷⁰Paul Fatout, Mark Twain on the Lecture Circuit (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1960), p. 29.

⁷¹Hingston, p. xx.

⁷²Hingston, p. xx.

On Monday, February 8, 1864, Artemus Ward presented "The Babes in the Wood" at the Salt Lake City Theatre. Mr. Hingston notes the profits for the evening, "There was a large audience, but the price of admission was low, and many of the chief saints were admitted free. The receipts amounted to no more than four hundred and ninety dollars."⁷³

Ward's western tour included lectures in Denver, Nebraska, and Kansas to St. Joseph, Missouri. While traveling from state to state Ward developed a new lecture based on his stay in Salt Lake City which he appropriately titled, "Artemus Ward among the Mormons." In preparation for his new lecture, Ward framed scenes from the stagecoach window of the scenery and designed a kind of panorama. By illustrating the Mormon lecture, he was able to give a "sly, satiric poke at popular (and often vacuous 'illustrated travel lectures.'"⁷⁴

"Artemus Ward among the Mormons" presented, in lecture form with panorama, "information about Mormonism, slightly tinged with satire, (which) was thoughtful and worthwhile."⁷⁵ The show opened in Dodworth Hall, New York City, on October 17, 1864. On opening night when "most of the literate of the City were present, the complimentary tickets slyly stated: 'Admit the bearer and ONE wife.'"⁷⁶

The success of Artemus Ward in America was unquestionable, but Charles F. Browne desired to take his show to London. Despite poor health due to consumption, he arrived in England on June 13, 1866.

⁷³Hingston, p. xxii.

⁷⁴Hawes, p. 427.

⁷⁵Hawes, p. 427.

⁷⁶Hawes, p. 427.

After spending the summer sight-seeing, Ward opened at the Egyptian Hall on November 13, 1866. The audience cheered the satirical view of "English institutions, customs, and Anglo-American relations."⁷⁷ Reverend Moncure D. Conway recalled of the London performances, ". . . There was something magical about it. Every sentence was a surprise. He played on his audience as Liszt did on a piano. . . . His tricks have been attempted in many theatres, but Artemus Ward was inimitable. And all the time the man was dying."⁷⁸

By January 24, 1867, Browne's consumption became worse and he was forced to suspend performances. On March 6, 1867, he died a few weeks before his thirty-third birthday.

Mark Twain

The mid-1800's was a popular time for lecturers and no one was as well-known as Mark Twain. Like previous writers mentioned, Twain turned to lecturing due to financial problems. After visiting for some time in the Sandwich Islands spending freely beyond his income, Twain left for San Francisco jobless and penniless. Searching for a "get rich quick" scheme, he entertained the idea of lecturing.

Twain worked on a compilation of letters he had written about the Sandwich Islands. Although his friends offered little encouragement, Twain took his script to a San Francisco editor where the following dialogue occurred:

⁷⁷Hawes, p. 428.

⁷⁸Hingston, p. xiv.

I've been to Bowman and I've been to Harte and Stoddard, and the rest of the fellows, and they say, "Don't do it, Mark; it will hurt your literary reputation."

"Mark" the editor replied, "which do you need most at present, money or literary reputation?"

Twain's decision was made; he finished his script and prepared for his first lecture at Macquire's Academy of Music on October 2, 1866. As the day of the performance grew near, Twain became restless, upset, and nervous. In his own words he was "the most distressed and frightened creature on the Pacific coast."⁷⁹ His nervousness continued and he remarked that "For days he moped around in a slough of misgiving, losing sleep, losing appetite, losing heart. . . ."⁸⁰

The time finally arrived and the auditorium was full. The exact number of people attending is unknown, but Fatout suggests a good estimate would be between 1,500 and 2,000. The press reported of the audience, "Well represented were 'our best people,' the regular opera 'set.'"⁸¹

When Twain walked onto the stage, he was greeted with thunderous applause and was so overwhelmed by the reception "that for a full minute he could not gain control of himself." He began his lecture with "an ingratiating impromptu: Ladies and gentlemen . . . this is the first time I have attempted to speak in public, and if I know myself as well when the lecture is over as I do now, it will be the last."⁸²

⁷⁹Fatout, p. 35.

⁸⁰Fatout, p. 38.

⁸¹Fatout, p. 38.

⁸²Fatout, p. 42.

The reviews of that first lecture were enthusiastically favorable. "Almost unanimously papers praised 'one of the most interesting and amusing lectures ever given in this city,' 'valuable information and eloquent description,' 'shrewd observation,' 'side-splitting similes, grotesque imagery, and fearfully ludicrous stories,' 'a hit, a great hit.'" ⁸³

Probably one of the highest compliments given to Twain came from Bret Harte who had originally been opposed to the idea of Twain lecturing. Harte commented that Mark Twain:

established his reputation as an eccentric lecturer whose humor surpassed Artemus Ward's with the advantage of being of a more legitimate quality. . . . His humor has more motive than that of Artemus Ward; he is something of a satirist, although his satire is not always subtle or refined. . . . ⁸⁴

The comparison Harte makes with Artemus Ward was a common one among the reviewers. This is not surprising due to the fact that Ward's style of presentation greatly influenced Twain. Paul Fatout, in his book, Mark Twain on the Lecture Circuit, tells some of these influences which were a result of Twain's studying Ward's "Babes in the Wood" lecture:

Ward's way of shifting swiftly and incoherently from subject to subject, his audacious exaggeration, irrelevant and absurd anti-climax, pseudo-serious concentration on humor without "message." These devices, refined and elaborated upon, became part of the standard platform equipment of Mark Twain. ⁸⁵

Another technique of Ward's which Twain perfected was the anticlimactic climax. He did so often times by mixing the solemn with the gay.

⁸³Fatout, p. 40.

⁸⁴Fatout, p. 41.

⁸⁵Fatout, p. 29.

When both were in the same sentence, the abrupt shift momentarily stalled the emotional machinery of his audience. A statement that began seriously slid off to an absurd conclusion so unobtrusively that the explosive response came only after a confused delay.⁸⁶

Once developed, Twain's speaking style was very similar to his writing style. He was very comfortable and natural in his lectures and sometimes even appeared negligent. Often he was compared to "loafers on the courthouse square." The Sacramento Union commented on his low voice saying:

his address is not very good and his voice is low and sometimes aggravating to listeners. His use of adjectives . . . something marvelous, especially in piling up invective.⁸⁷

Mark Twain believed that a lecture should be spoken, as if spontaneously, not read. He memorized his manuscript, disposed of it, and relied on brief notes. He gave the impression of speaking impromptu and one reporter remarked, "The jokes are uttered as if he had just thought of them a minute before, and didn't perceive the point of them quite as soon as the audience."⁸⁸

From the financial success of the first lecture, the most obvious move would be a tour. Twain did not waste time in preparation. Within a week after the Academy of Music performance he set out for the first stop, Sacramento.

Characteristic of Twain's tours was his outlandish advertising schemes which preceded his arrival in each town. Newspaper advertisements announced Twain's lectures, "For Only One Night! And Only a

⁸⁶Fatout, p. 47.

⁸⁷Fatout, p. 91.

⁸⁸Fatout, p. 91.

Portion of That!"; "THE CELEBRATED BEARDED WOMAN! Is not with this Circus"; "THE WONDERFUL COW WITH SIX LEGS! Is not attached to this menagerie"; "THE IRISH GIANT! Who stands 9 feet 6 inches . . . will not be present and need not be expected."⁸⁹

The advertisements generated excitement and Twain was greeted by an enthusiastic audience described as "containing a liberal share of the beauty, intelligence and fine clothes of Sacramento."⁹⁰ From Sacramento, Twain toured to Marysville, Nevada City, Virginia City, Dayton, Silver City and Washoe City. After six weeks on the road he returned to San Francisco for a "farewell benefit" on November 8 at Platt's Hall.

The critics were not as complimentary of Twain's second San Francisco lecture. The Chronicle said that he apparently had been "alkalied . . . in the savage wilds of Washoe, and . . . had become a little demoralized. . . . Some jokes were so nearly improper--not to say coarse--that they could not be heartily laughed at by the ladies."⁹¹

These reviews did not discourage Twain who put little stock in critic's opinion, but he did feel the need to reevaluate his script and performance techniques. He had planned to sail for the East, but for unknown reasons did not leave immediately, and San Francisco requested he give another lecture December 10, at Congress Hall.

⁸⁹Fatout, p. 46.

⁹⁰Fatout, p. 47.

⁹¹Fatout, p. 60.

The lecture was advertised as "positively the last 'farewell benefit,'" 'Much entertaining information will be furnished, and many uncommonly bad jokes indulged in,' 'IMPROMPTU FAREWELL ADDRESS, gotten up last week, especially for this occassion.'"92

The third San Francisco lecture consisted of the same format as the others. Twain would begin with the Sandwich Islands lecture and then add several pieces especially prepared for this audience. No records are left to reveal if Twain changed anything for this third lecture, but the reviewers seemed more pleased. The Evening Bulletin stated Twain "departs with a brilliant reputation . . . Men of this sort . . . never overstock the market, and Mark will find room for an honorable career in the field to which he is going." The Daily Times further remarked, "This popular lecturer has struck a new lead in literary research"93

After this "final farewell benefit," Twain left for New York to begin a trip around the world, but instead signed up for the Grand Holy Land Pleasure Excursion. The trip would offer new lecture material and a chance "to assault the cultural bastions of the eastern seaboard."94 The trip did offer the new material Twain needed and after he returned to New York he took some time off to work on his new script. There he heard Charles Dickens read in Steinway Hall. Mr. Fatout reveals Twain's impressions of the lecture:

⁹²Fatout, p. 64.

⁹³Fatout, p. 66.

⁹⁴Fatout, p. 67.

He thought that the performance was only fair because the reader did not enunciate clearly, and his British accent was confusing . . . Yet he was impressed by the animation of this clever actor, who made the process look easy. But when Mark Twain tried to imitate it some years later, he was amazed to discover that the apparently simple pastime of reading from a book required careful preparation.⁹⁵

For the next few months Twain turned down any lecture engagements and worked on preparing copy for his new lecture titled "The Innocents Abroad." He returned to San Francisco and on April 14, 1868, delivered the new lecture to a full house. According to one reporter:

People . . . became suspended from hooks, clung tenaciously to the walls, grouped upon window sills, grappled at gas fixtures, mounted the plug hats and well covered shoulders of strangers, crushed and ruined a legion of waterfalls, chignons and curls.⁹⁶

For two hours work, Twain pocketed over \$1,600 in gold and silver.

The reviewers were, for the most part, shocked and disappointed at Twain's new lecture. The California Weekly stated, "the discourse . . . was foul with sacriligious allusions, impotent humor, and malignant distortion of history and truth. . . . a man so lost to every sense of decency and shame should better be allowed to expire in obscurity. . . ." ⁹⁷ The critics were also shocked over Twain's impious treatment of his visit to the Holy Land. The Marian County Journal condemned the lecture saying, "The miserable scribbler, whose letters . . . sickened everyone who read them . . . has the audacity and impudence to attempt to lecture to an intelligent people." The reporters were not the only

⁹⁵ Fatout, p. 85.

⁹⁶ Fatout, p. 88.

⁹⁷ Fatout, p. 90.

ones outraged by the lecture. From the pulpit the following Sunday, one clergyman denounced "this son of the Devil, Mark Twain."⁹⁸

Twain took his new lecture to the same towns he had visited on his first tour--Marysville, Nevada City, Dutch Flat, Sacramento, Virginia City and back to San Francisco. In San Francisco Twain delivered a new lecture titled "The Oldest of the Republics, Venice, Past and Present." Although he did not realize it at the time, this lecture was the last he was to give in this city. Twain toured "The Innocents Abroad" and "Venice" lecture to the eastern states and then decided to take time off to write.

By Spring, 1871, Mark Twain's writing was at a standstill, his bills were collecting on his desk, and a return to lecturing was the only solution to this financial setback. When he decided to return to the lecture circuit, he spelled out the following conditions to Redpath, his tour organizer:

no engagements west of St. Louis; short hops, mainly in New England, and a fee of \$125 for all places elsewhere; the best hotel in every town. . . . He wanted to start the tour with eclat in the Boston Music Hall; he did not care to speak in a church because the pious hush made people afraid to laugh there; he refused to appear in Buffalo because he "mortally" hated that lyceum society.⁹⁹

Once the terms had been agreed upon, Twain began his tour which would last sixteen weeks and would include seventy-six performances in fifteen states and Washington, D.C. The tour was a strain for Twain who gave at least five performances a week. He would later call the tour

⁹⁸ Fatout, p. 90.

⁹⁹ Fatout, p. 149.

"the most detestable lecture campain [sic] that ever was. . . . a fatiguing, sleepy, crusade."¹⁰⁰

While traveling Twain worked on a new lecture titled "Reminiscences of Some Pleasant Characters Whom I Have Met," which was later revised to "Reminiscences of Some Uncommonplace Characters I have Chanced to Meet." He was most pleased with his script which was a medley about his acquaintance with "kings, lunatics, idiots and all."¹⁰¹

Although Twain was pleased with the lectures, the reviewers were not. After three unsuccessful lectures, Twain realized some changes must be made so he blocked out a new talk on Artemus Ward. This new "Artemus Ward" lecture included biographical material on Ward's life interspersed with jokes by both Ward and Twain. The jokes were woven so neatly that Twain once introduced himself as Charles F. Clemens (after Charles Farrar Browne), and led one reporter to call the mixture "Mark Ward in Artemus Twain."

Twain owed a great deal to Ward, and perhaps the lecture was a tribute to the man from whom Twain had borrowed speaking style techniques as well as material. Paul Fatout notes that "there were overtones of condescension, if not malice" apparent in the speech. Fatout attributes this possibly to jealousy because "plenty of people still believed he (Ward) was the better humorist."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰Fatout, p. 151.

¹⁰¹Fatout, p. 151.

¹⁰²Fatout, p. 153.

The lecture was delivered in Washington, D.C. on October 23, "before an audience of two thousand crammed into a hall built for four-teen hundred." Twain's hurried preparation caused him to have to read the speech from the manuscript. Perhaps because of his uneasiness with the new script, Twain was not surprised at the critic's comments on "this highly concentrated compound of old jokes." They called him "a lamentable failure who wearied everybody with threadbare witticisms."¹⁰³

Despite less than average reviews, Twain took the lecture to Wilmington and next to Norristown. The Independent reviewed the Norristown performance and harshly remarked the following:

his principal object seemed to be to pocket the fee, and palm off anything upon us. . . . MARK TWAIN you are a fraud as a lecturer, or . . . you concluded that anything would do for a country town.¹⁰⁴

The tour did not improve with time. Twain traveled to New England, Great Barrington, and Milford where "people did no more than politely smile and faintly titter." At Battleboro, the Phoenix fumed that "any man . . . who peddled stale anecdotes and secondhand jokes, and called it 'lecturing' was an insult to the public, and a disgrace to the 'bureau' that endorses it."¹⁰⁵

On November 1, at Boston, it appeared that the lecture might be taking a turn for the better. The reviews were not enthusiastic, but they were not malicious either. The tour continued to Manchester, Haverhill, Portland, Philadelphia, Brooklyn, and other eastern cities.

¹⁰³Fatout, p. 154.

¹⁰⁴Fatout, p. 154.

¹⁰⁵Fatout, p. 156.

The audience at Portland on November 16, were "highly entertained" by the lecture and one reviewer stated that he told the stories in such a droll way that they never failed to excite laughter."¹⁰⁶

Twain was pleased by the reviews of the past month, but in December bad luck once again came to the tour. After a lecture at Kalamazoo in mid-December, The Daily Telegraph had the following comment:

Mr. Clemens had no right to impose . . . such desulatory trash. . . . He should have . . . not put us off with a disconnected talk about a hackneyed subject, sans wit, sans information, sans sense.¹⁰⁷

On January 24, 1872, Twain returned after a five year absence to lecture in New York City in Steinway Hall. This appearance was the last one of his "most detestable lecture campaign," and final reviews were favorable. The Herald stated Twain was "exceptionally funny, the audience shaken with uproarious mirth." The Times added that the lecture was "meteorological, historical, topographical, geological, zoological, and comical."¹⁰⁸

Once again Twain made the decision to retire from lecturing and tour Europe. The vacation was good for Twain and he had plenty of leisure time to write, but the requests poured in for a lecture appearance. Twain's fascination with the people in Europe influenced his decision to lay his writing by the wayside and book some appearances.

¹⁰⁶ Fatout, p. 164.

¹⁰⁷ Fatout, p. 165.

¹⁰⁸ Fatout, p. 172.

Mark Twain debuted on October 13, 1873, at the Queen's Concert Room in Hanover Square. He performed his Sandwich Islands lecture the week of October 13 to 18, to full houses of the "notables of London . . . men and women of rank, people famous in the arts and sciences, and a sprinkling of Americans, including P. T. Barnum."¹⁰⁹

The London reviewers compared Twain's performance with Artemus Ward saying the "'perfect calm and assumed earnestness of manner' were common to both, but that Ward was 'much more comically child-like.'"¹¹⁰ Fatout remarks in his book that the Spectator reviewer wrote "as perceptive a comment on Mark Twain's lecturing technique as any critic ever wrote."¹¹¹ The critic observed that Twain's humor

consists of the unconscious, matter-of-fact way in which he habitually strikes false intellectual notes, the steady simplicity with which he puts the emphasis of feeling in the wrong place, with which he classifies in the most unassuming way, as families of the same tribe of things, the most irrec-
oncilable of common nouns, and so glides into sarcasm or caricature, while seeming to pursue . . . the even tenor of his way.¹¹²

All critics were not as enthusiastic about the lecture and Twain once again was the victim of harsh reviews. The Liverpool Journal "remarked upon his 'air of improvisation,' 'lack of elocution,' 'strong American accent,' and

low, rather droning monotone. He never, even in burlesque, raises his voice or gives himself any trouble to do more than talk, and does nothing for effect except to pause and deliver

¹⁰⁹ Fatout, p. 179.

¹¹⁰ Fatout, p. 181.

¹¹¹ Fatout, p. 181.

¹¹² Fatout, p. 181.

the real point of his jokes after the audience has stopped laughing at them.¹¹³

On January 13, Twain sailed for home and once again took time off from lecturing. During the winter of 1875-76 he gave a reading in Philadelphia which "marked a change in his platform technique." Twain began using quotes from his own books and relied entirely upon anecdotes. With the new format, Twain was frequently called upon to give after-dinner speeches which were less strenuous than the two hour lectures and helped pay the bills.¹¹⁴

In late 1887 Mark Twain was ready for another tour, but wanted to try something different. He decided to hire George W. Cable, one of the first local colorists who had published a collection of stories, Old Creole Days; a novel, The Grandissimes; and a novelette, Madam Delphine, to join him on the tour.

Cable considered himself the lesser man of the two, but Mark Twain praised his partner. The addition of Cable rejuvenated new interest on the part of the audiences and the critics enjoyed comparing the two. One reviewer observed that Cable was

the dapper sort . . . polite as a dancing master . . . precise, alert, brisk . . . his voice full of quavers and graceful turns of enunciation; Mark Twain, the man from way back, who has sat down by the stove at the corner grocery . . . and is telling a story as only he can tell it.¹¹⁵

Fatout states that many critics agreed that "Cable gave tone to a

¹¹³ Fatout, p. 182.

¹¹⁴ Fatout, p. 189.

¹¹⁵ Fatout, p. 206.

performance that otherwise might have suffered from an overdose of Twainian nonsense."¹¹⁶

On November 5, 1884, the duo opened at New Haven, then traveled to eastern towns including Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Washington, and Baltimore. The critics seemed pleased with the combination and filled their reviews with debates over who was the "star" of the show.

Mark Twain retired once again from lecturing from 1885-1896. He had become such a public figure that he hardly had time even to write. By 1895 he was faced with an enormous debt to his publishing company and signed a contract for a six to nine months speaking tour around the world to the Sandwich Islands, Australia, New Zealand, Ceylon, India, South Africa and England. Twain was almost sixty when the tour was completed and the debt paid. He returned home to New York and although he had finished delivering his popular lectures, he had not given up speaking in public completely. "He spoke in behalf of charitable causes, for organizations, schools and churches. 'I shan't,' he said, 'retire from the gratis-platform until after I am dead and courtesy requires me to keep still and not disturb the others.'"¹¹⁷

Will Rogers

When Will Rogers was a young boy the hired help on his father's ranch taught him how to do rope tricks. He practiced fervently on the

¹¹⁶ Fatout, p. 206.

¹¹⁷ Fatout, p. 228.

tricks which would later become his trademark and means to success. Young Will never made it past the fourth grade and although he had fallen in love by age twenty-one, he felt the urge to travel and see the world before settling down. An education or a wife were not in his immediate plans, but excitement, fame, and fortune were.

Rogers traveled to South America where he earned his keep taking care of mules. Although he found neither fame or fortune, the next year when he went to South Africa, he met a man who would introduce him to the excitement of show business. The man's name was Texas Jack and he was the owner and principal star of a Wild West Show. Will found he could do all the tricks Texas Jack did nightly and more. He was hired as the new roping star for \$20 a week and billed as the "Cherokee kid."¹¹⁸

From South Africa, Will went to Australia and joined the Wirth Brothers' Circus. When the company moved to New Zealand, Will went along and at the end of the tour had saved enough money to return to America.

Although Rogers had spent three years touring the world, he still was not ready to settle down. When Colonel Zack Mulhall formed a Wild West group to perform at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, Will joined him. The following year Will went with the Colonel to perform at

¹¹⁸ Bryan B. Sterling, The Best of Will Rogers (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1979), p. 7.

Madison Square Gardens in New York and decided to stay there and try to break into vaudeville.¹¹⁹

Will Rogers knocked on doors until the manager of Keith's Union Square Theatre hired him for a single performance. Roger's show consisted of his rope tricks and the audience enjoyed this unusual performance so much the contract was extended to fill out the week. At the weeks end Will signed another contract for the summer with the Hammerstein's Theatre.¹²⁰

Will Rogers' first shows consisted of Will's simply performing his rope tricks either by himself or by having a horse and rider gallop across the stage. Although they enjoyed the performance, the audience did not realize the skill and practice involved. A friend suggested to Rogers that he introduce and explain each trick. Although he was extremely shy, Will began talking with the audience and then prepared a few ad libs that he used on the rare occasions when he missed a trick. "'Swinging a rope is all right,' he would say, 'provided your neck ain't in it!,'" was one example of the asides he used. The audiences laughed so heartily at the ad libs that Will started missing his throws on purpose just so he could use them.¹²¹

The success of Rogers' ad libs influenced changes in his act. He began looking for material that would make his audience laugh. First he would make references to other performers, and soon he began adding jokes about topics he felt would be of interest to theatre patrons.

¹¹⁹ Sterling, p. 8.

¹²⁰ Sterling, p. 8.

¹²¹ Sterling, p. 8.

On November 25, 1908, Rogers married Betty Blake and their honeymoon started with a two week booking in New York and continued all along the Orpheum Circuit. From 1908 to 1915 Rogers appeared in a Broadway show, toured briefly in Europe, periodically appeared in vaudeville, and became the father of three children.

The summer of 1915 was spent by the Rogers family in Amityville, Long Island vacationing. While swimming one morning, Will dived into shallow water and his head struck a rock. As a result of the accident his right arm was paralyzed. Despite this misfortune, Roger's persistence prevailed and after many long hours of practice and concentration, he taught himself to perform his entire act with his left arm. In time Rogers regained the full use of his right arm, but by then he was completely ambidextrous and could perform his rope tricks with equal ease with either arm.¹²²

Will returned to Broadway for two short-lived shows, Hands Up and Town Topics. Gene Buck, Florenz Ziegfield's right-hand man saw Will in Hands Up and asked him to perform at the New Amsterdam Theatre in the Midnight Frolic show. Will accepted but appearing nightly proposed a new problem for him. Midnight Frolics audiences were filled with repeaters and the same show would not satisfy them. New material was needed nightly and Betty suggested that Will talk about the news. Bryan B. Sterling, in his book The Best of Will Rogers, discusses Will's shows:

¹²² Sterling, p. 8.

Nightly he kidded public figures, their actions and inactions, the events of the moment. Because of the war in Europe, Americans suddenly became aware of the importance of times and the men who were forging their present and their future. Will was sure that the war would eventually involve America and he joked about her unpreparedness: "We are the only nation in the world that waits till they get into a war before we start getting ready for it."¹²³

Rogers was lecturing at a special performance for President Wilson and he tried his thoughts on him saying, "There is some talk of getting a machine gun--if we can borrow one." Pushing further when he saw that the President was amused he added, "We're going to have an army of 250,000 men--Mr. Ford makes 300,000 cars a year--I think, Mr. President, we ought to at least have a man to every car."¹²⁴

In January 1916, Mr. Ziegfield contacted Rogers and asked if he could perform in the Follies as well as Frolic. Rogers agreed although it would mean preparing two different shows daily. The work, however, was rewarding to Rogers and the critics loved him. He soon became Ziegfield's greatest star. He also became an important voice across the nation and was even quoted by President Wilson. When Rogers spoke, the people listened. On America's involvement in the war, his style of humor provided comments such as "the guy who makes the bullets was paid \$5 a day, and the man who stopped them \$15 a month. . . . Of course, stopping bullets comes under the heading of unskilled labor."¹²⁵

The American people needed Will Rogers' humor and his perspective on the war. Rogers aided the cause by contributing to the Red Cross

¹²³ Sterling, p. 11.

¹²⁴ Sterling, p. 11.

¹²⁵ Sterling, p. 12.

and Salvation Army and participating in benefits, as well as giving the families of servicemen a break from their worry. When the war was finally over, Will remarked, "If we really want to honor our Boys, . . . why don't we let them sit in the reviewing stands and have the people march by?"¹²⁶

From 1918 to 1922 Rogers appeared in motion pictures, performed nightly in the Follies, wrote weekly articles for the McNaught syndicate, held weekly radio talks, and gave many after-dinner speeches.

Rogers decided to tour America on the lecture circuit in 1925. He spoke at conventions, banquets, school auditoriums and theatres. The audiences loved his frank honesty because he told them things that no other speaker would have dared.

"Loan Sharks and Interest Hounds" was his opening salutation to the National Bankers' Convention. "The Robbing Hoods of America" were the advertising men, and when he spoke to the automobile dealers he called them "The Old-Time Horse Trading Gyps with White Collars On."¹²⁷

Will contracted to write a series of articles for the Saturday Evening Post from Europe. While abroad he sent telegrams of certain thoughts he felt should be expressed immediately. The telegrams appeared in well over four hundred daily newspapers all across the country under the title "Will Rogers Says." After touring Europe and Russia, Will returned to California to discover that in his absence he had been elected mayor of Beverly Hills. Thus, Rogers ventured into another field, politics.

¹²⁶ Sterling, p. 13.

¹²⁷ Sterling, p. 16.

Will Rogers is noted for many things and made vast numbers of contributions to the fields of radio, film, journalism, acting, and lecturing. He was called by many "All-American" and that description fits him perfectly. His concern for his family, his friends, the issues of the day in his country and around the world were apparent in every letter, telegram, column, radio show, after-dinner speech, and lecture to which he contributed. Will Rogers' comic wit and casual style have influenced many people who have come after him in many fields.

The Chautauqua Performers

The Chautauqua Movement which began in 1874, grew to its peak in 1924, and suddenly vanished was one of the most fascinating social-cultural movements in our history. The theme of the movement encompassed a desire for change, without revolution. Those drawn to Chautauqua were searching for improvement and growth in morality, education, and culture, and were motivated and talented people. Characteristic of these years in the early 1900's was the oral tradition that was established. Children and adults were educated by lecturers who traveled from city to city on the "circuit" teaching in tents. Communities would come together for five or six days to be "culturized" by the Chautauquan leaders. Although the terms Chautauqua and Lyceum are used interchangeably, there is a distinction between the two. "The Lyceums consisted of a series of programs lasting about one week during the winter. Chautauquas were the summer counterpart of the Lyceum."¹²⁸

¹²⁸Nydia Jean Reynolds, "It Wasn't 'Elocution': Five Professional Oral Interpreters, 1900-1925," QJS (1961), p. 244.

The Chautauqua Movement had strong religious roots which hindered the acceptance of theatrical art. Music was widely accepted, but drama was treated with some reservation. Two books have been helpful in researching the history of the one-person entertainers during the Chautauqua years. These were Victoria and Raymond Case's book We Called it Culture and H. P. Harrison and Karl Detzer's Culture under Canvas. Nydia Jean Reynold's article, "It Wasn't Elocution: Five Professional Oral Interpreters, 1900-1925" was the main source used in research of this era.

Chautauqua seemed to fulfill every need of its enduring, strong members, but some were beginning to feel a void as far as the arts were concerned, especially theatre. They certainly could not condone bringing the painted women and worldly men into their world and searched for another outlet. Once again the one-person show, because it was not considered "legitimate" theatre, flourished.

The leaders of the movement chose to bring the theatre to the circuit slowly by emphasizing the difference between "good drama and the brass and tinsel of the theatre."¹²⁹ The elocutionists, impersonators, and dramatic readers came first. This type of entertainment was easily justified because it did not call for make-up or costumes, but allowed people to appear in their street clothes and simply talk to their audience.

¹²⁹ Victoria Case and Robert Case, We Called It Culture (New York: Doubleday, 1948), p. 51.

The elocutionists at this time can be considered a form of one-person entertainment. According to Harrison, the Chautauqua leaders discreetly hired Broadway actors and actresses in search of summer employment. These performers brought something new to elocution--original material and innovative methods.¹³⁰

The list of successful oral interpreters of the Chautauqua era includes: Elias Day, Jesse Rae Taylor, Benjamin Chapin, William Sterling Battis, and Sidney W. Landon.¹³¹ Reynold's article discusses these five entertainers whose talents also were manifested in their one-person shows.

Elias Day referred to himself as a "characterist" and many other impersonators were soon borrowing the term. Day was famous for his burlesque of Poe's "The Raven" which he recited as he imitated Poe.¹³² The recitation was satirical in nature and left the audience laughing aloud. Day wrote many of his own impersonations which depicted "typical Americans such as Colonel Fayerweather, a Kentucky gentleman. Ms. Reynolds quotes Paul M. Pearson of Swarthmore College who leaves the following impression of Day's shows:

Though there is a wide range in the characters presented in his program, they are all individuals. . . . The characters do not suggest each other, nor do they show any trace of the personality of the artist presenting them. This distinction is not produced by the common resort of the unskillful, an

¹³⁰ Harry P. Harrison and Karl Dexter, Culture under Canvas (New York: Hastings House, 1958), p. 142.

¹³¹ Reynolds, p. 241.

¹³² Harrison, p. 295.

exaggeration that shocks the common sense, but by means of the nicest distinction.¹³³

A second interpreter of the day was Jessie Rae Taylor. Ms. Taylor, like Day, used wigs and grease paint in her shows. She usually spent at least six months on a script before presenting it. Although her characters were based on works of other authors, she wrote the final draft herself. Many of her characters were men, therefore she felt the need to use costumes. Unlike Elias Day, Ms. Taylor claims she never gave a performance for the sole purpose of entertaining. "She said that the underlying purpose of every character sketch is to stimulate thought. . . ."¹³⁴

The third performer Reynolds discusses in her article is Benjamin Chapin. Chapin is known most for his impersonation of Lincoln. He began his Lincoln "monodrama" in 1902 and not only mastered the character of Lincoln, but also Mrs. Lincoln, Tad, General Hooker, and Stanton. Reynolds quotes Chapin in her article as saying:

The art of impersonation is more than looking like a character, or imitating the voice and manner--it is getting into the spirit, it is doing and saying just what the character would do and say under the same condition . . . True art is about price or people. It must stand for itself.¹³⁵

It is interesting to mention that Chapin extended his Lincoln show into a four-act play, but chose to go back to the monologue form for his Chautauqua audiences.

¹³³Reynolds, p. 246.

¹³⁴Reynolds, p. 247.

¹³⁵Reynolds, p. 249.

Reynolds provides us with each entertainer's purpose. Chapin's purpose was to actuate his audience "to change their behavior to a higher plane of nobility . . . , and he found Lincoln to be the best choice to help him reach that goal."¹³⁶

The fourth outstanding interpreter was William Sterling Battis, commonly known as "the Dickens man." As his nickname suggests, Battis impersonated Dicken's characters with the aid of costume and make-up. Battis' work was not original, but served his purpose of oral interpretation--to try to "interest people in good literature."¹³⁷

Sidney W. Landon's show was different from the shows previously discussed. His two-hour program involved impersonations of five or six well-known authors including: Victor Hugo, Mark Twain, Poe, Bill Nye, and Longfellow. Like Battis, Landon wished to bring good literature to his audience. "One must be a student of his characters to such an extent that he forgets his own personality."¹³⁸

Victoria and Robert Case make a distinction between the "impersonators" and the "one-man troupes," which they consider Chautauqua's specialty.¹³⁹ Little information can be found on these one-man troupes although they were a favorite of the managers because they were cheaper than hiring an entire company.

Probably the best known one-man troupe was Willis Watson Ginn (Harrison and Detzer name him Wells Watson Ginn) who performed a

¹³⁶Reynolds, p. 250.

¹³⁷Reynolds, p. 251.

¹³⁸Reynolds, pp. 251-252.

¹³⁹Case, p. 54.

four-act play, Man from Home. Ginn portrayed the ten characters in the show and could "deliver dialogue, shift costumes, and change his walk, gestures and voice from one character to another . . ."¹⁴⁰

Mrs. M. C. Hutchinson also delighted audiences with full length plays. What Every Woman Knows, The Importance of Being Ernest, and Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm were among the plays in Ms. Hutchinson's repertoire.

This agile little woman astounded the audience by changing her voice, making love to herself, responding, resuming as a mild shrinking maid, creating and maintaining the illusion to the last curtain--and finally taking her bow, alone, on behalf of the "entire cast."¹⁴¹

Other one-person troupes listed by Case and Case include Margaret Stahl who presented Madame Butterfly and Enoch Arden, Mary B. Roberts with Blue Bird and Peter Pan, Beryl Buckley's Shepherd of the Hills, and Maude Mills in If I Were King.¹⁴²

The dedication and determination of these Chautauqua performers is evident in their work and perseverance. Eventually, the one-person troupes became two-person troupes and soon plays with full casts were being accepted by the Chautauquans.

¹⁴⁰Case, p. 54.

¹⁴¹Case, p. 54.

¹⁴²Case, p. 55.

CHAPTER III

PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES OF CONTEMPORARY

ONE-PERSON SHOWS

Contemporary one-person shows have become a popular form of entertainment in the twentieth century. These exciting and educational shows are springing up all across the country on the college circuits and many one-person shows have been made accessible to every household via television. Whatever audience the shows are directed toward, one-person shows have been successful and hold many advantages for both entertainer and audience. Seventeen contemporary shows will be discussed in this chapter. The analyzation of these shows will fulfill the second purpose of this thesis. The shows will be presented alphabetically by performer's last name. As stated in Chapter I, each show will be analyzed in terms of motivational aspects, selection of material, adaptation process and preparation, staging conventions, presentation styles, and overall effectiveness.

Pat Carroll

Pat Carroll began touring her one-woman show, "Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein," in 1979. The script, "a wonderful compilation of anecdotes that illumine Stein's complex life," was written by Marty Martin.¹ The script has been compiled to reveal, in

¹Howard Kissel, rev. of "Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein," by Pat Carroll, Women's Wear Daily, 5 June 1979.

the first half, Stein's relationships with the famous artists of her day--Picasso, Matisse, Hemingway, and Joyce among others. The second part of the show is more personal, discussing her feelings for Alice B. Toklas and what it is like to be "young and painfully different."²

The setting of the performance is the flat Stein and Toklas shared on the Rue de Fleuris in 1938. The two are about to be evicted, it is raining outside, Toklas is napping, and Stein invites the audience in to chat. Marilyn Stassio, writing for The New York Post says:

She welcomes the audience that has crept into her legendary salon, and generously shares the turbulent thoughts and feelings that bubble up as she prepares to close an era in international arts and letters.³

Pat Carroll effectively allows the audience to feel a part of the cerebral life Gertrude Stein lived. Occasionally she will talk to imaginary characters onstage, but for the most part she has taken the audience into her confidence to discuss her loves and her hates, her experiences and thoughts in a blunt, yet honestly refreshing way.

Walter Kerr adds this:

More, we fell confided in, extended the real compliment of candor. I don't know precisely how Miss Carroll is able to do it, but she manages--without any effort at all--to make us share Gertrude Stein's attitude toward herself. . . . Miss Carroll is so deep within her borrowed skin that we find ourselves sharing the woman's very prejudices, surprised at ourselves for not arguing more.⁴

²Marilyn Stassio, rev. of "Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein," by Pat Carroll, New York Post, 5 Sept. 1979.

³Pat Carroll, "Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein," Caedmon, TRS 367, 1980.

⁴Walter Kerr, rev. of "Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein," by Pat Carroll, The New York Times, 3 Oct. 1979.

Don Nelson, critic for Daily News, adds, "She captures Stein's snobbery, pettiness, perception, loyalty and wit and at the same time tells the story of an artistic revolution."⁵

Jane Curry

For the past two years Jane Curry has been touring her one-woman show on the northeast Chautauqua circuit and to college campuses throughout the eastern United States. The show is titled "Samantha" and is a compilation of the writings of Marietta Halley concerning the character Samantha Smith Allen. Samantha was created by Ms. Holly whose works popularized the suffrage issues of her day. The character is a late nineteenth century humorous feminist and appears in most of Ms. Holley's books including Samantha at the Centennial, Samantha on the Race Problem, My opinions and Betsy Bobbet's, Samantha at Saratoga, Round the World with Josiah Allen's Wife, and Josiah Allen on the Woman Question.

Jane Curry became acquainted with Samantha when she was working on her dissertation. Her interest grew and she later compiled an anthology of Marietta Holley's works to be used as an auxiliary textbook in the university classroom. Ms. Curry was surprised that few had heard of the author and felt she had something to say that was unique for a nineteenth century humorist. A friend suggested that a monologue as Samantha would provide a medium to tell people about Ms. Holley's contributions and Jane Curry decided to take her advice.

⁵ Don Nelson, rev. of "Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein," by Pat Carroll, Daily News, 3 July 1979.

Jane Curry has read and studied all of Marietta Holley's works and states the following about adapting the script:

I've scripted it in the sense that I've chosen certain bits to use that I do in a similar way, but nothing has to be memorized--it's all faithful to the text and to her character. . . . I've looked at and gone over and written out some things that I kind of learn, but I never do it the same way twice and I never do it in the same order. I know the first thing I'm going to do and I know the last thing I'm going to do. What happens in between is always a little different--and I put in new things. I am really familiar with the material and I keep adding. It's always evolving and changing . . . and that's what's real exciting for me.⁶

The decision was made to portray Samantha in her fifties. This would allow most of the experiences expressed in the books to have already taken place, but Ms. Curry would not have to affect old age. She appears in nineteenth century rural American housewife dress complete with apron, stuffed to a jolly, plump size, grey hair loosely bunned, and small wire-rimmed glasses. There is no set and no props. Visual variety is provided by changing positions and facial expressions and adjusting her eyeglasses. Ms. Curry never uses a microphone because her voice "will always fill up whatever room it is."⁷

Due to Samantha's personality, Curry has chosen a very informal presentation style. "This character is chatty and you want to get the sense that she's just talking to everybody individually just like she's in her own kitchen."⁸ Ms. Curry enjoys moving around and including her audience through eye contact. Because of the closeness she tries to

⁶Personal interview with Jane Curry, 21 January 1983.

⁷Curry interview.

⁸Curry interview.

maintain, Ms. Curry feels her show adapts best to classrooms and small lecture rooms and states, "the worst situation is when I have an actual proscenium stage . . . and Samantha is separated from the audience."⁹

At the conclusion of her performance, Ms. Curry encourages the audience to ask questions--either to Jane or to Samantha. She enjoys the question period because she never knows what people will ask and it helps "to keep the show fresh and exciting" for her. In answering the questions, Ms. Curry uses information and anecdotes from the books as much as possible, but occasionally Samantha has to prophesy.

Sometimes they ask questions about Samantha's future, such as her feelings on the ERA. So what I have to do when they ask these questions is remember that Jane knows what has happened between Samantha's present and her future, but Samantha doesn't. So Jane has to decide whether Samantha is going to prophesy correctly or incorrectly, be funny or ironic, or simply not understand the question. There are some things that she wouldn't understand the terminology and sometimes Samantha can give a lesson in historical anachronism.¹⁰

The books were originally written for a "popular, rural, general audience at the time and the material shouldn't be reserved now just for university people." Ms. Curry feels part of the success of her show and her anthology is the universal appeal of the character of Samantha:

All spectrums of the audience from women's studies scholars to extension homemakers can enjoy and relate to Samantha, and people react differently. She's a literary character in a historical time period. So what you're doing is re-creating that set of social mores and the response to those social mores. . . . Because she's humorous, she's accessible to a lot of people.¹¹

⁹Curry interview.

¹⁰Curry interview.

¹¹Curry interview.

Although Jane Curry admits to having a deficient acting background, her knowledge of Ms. Holley's works and enthusiasm for the character, Samantha, combine to give a polished, entertaining, educational one-woman show.

Henry Fonda

Henry Fonda brought his one-person show to the stage in 1974. "Clarence Darrow for the Defense" was based on the biography of Darrow by Irving Stone. Fonda portrays Darrow, one of America's greatest defense lawyers. He is a perfect choice for a one-man presentation because he wrote, debated, and toured the country lecturing on the Chautauqua Circuit. The script was adapted by David W. Rintels who calls it a solo play. It reveals Darrow as both a lecturer and a writer. ". . . We get first-hand accounts of his two marriages, flashes of homespun humor and a great many statements of principle. We also get an account of the Haymarket riot, his defenses of Eugene Debs and Samuel Gompers and his interrogation of William Jennings Bryan."¹²

The set, by H. R. Poindexter, suggests Darrow's court with worn-wood judge's bench and jury rail, study with rolltop desk, and his home. There was no attempt on Mr. Fonda's part to favor Clarence Darrow through make-up or costume. Richard Watts states in his review for the New York Post that although Fonda does not try to resemble Darrow in appearance, he has given one of the "magnificent characterizations of

¹²Douglas Watt, rev. of "Clarence Darrow for the Defense," by Henry Fonda, Daily News, 27 March 1974.

the years playgoing," and adds, "Mr. Fonda clearly believes in the man he is depicting . . . he lets you see, understand, and appreciate his rare quality."¹³

Several reviewers commented on the style of the presentation. Richard Watts states, "The play--and it never appears to be merely a monologue--represents Darrow in a reminiscent mood. In his years of retirement, he is brooding over his distinguished career and meditating on the philosophy that has carried him through."¹⁴ Edwin Wilson observes that Fonda uses "both narration and dramatization" speaking to imaginary characters, usually one of his two wives.¹⁵

The reviews were primarily concerned with Fonda's acting. Clive Barnes explains what to look for in Fonda's performance from his observations of the show:

Watch the way he visibly ages as the evening wears on, the way he snakes out Darrow's sly and country humor, the way he never shrinks from sentiment and yet never stretches it. Listen to the voice--never too much inflected, never coarsely characterized yet always easy and lyrical. And the face, too quizzical to be heroic, too self-aware to be smug, and with the laughter lines of a man who rated compassion higher than justice--if Clarence Darrow was not like this, he should have been.¹⁶

¹³Richard Watts, rev. of "Clarence Darrow for the Defense," by Henry Fonda, New York Post, 27 March 1974.

¹⁴Watts.

¹⁵Edwin Wilson, rev. of "Clarence Darrow for the Defense," by Henry Fonda, The Wall Street Journal, 29 March 1974.

¹⁶Clive Barnes, rev. of "Clarence Darrow for the Defense," by Henry Fonda, The New York Times, 27 March 1974.

Edwin Wilson describes Fonda's performance as a merging of personalities: Fonda and Darrow.¹⁷

Overall, the performance was a success. Clive Barnes felt the one-man presentation was well-done and effective. He urges everyone "interested in justice and America" to see the show. He felt the show was well performed "as if Darrow himself were . . . reminiscing about his life and career with urbanity, compassion and wit."¹⁸

John Beaufort, writing for the Christian Science Monitor, best describes the success of "Clarence Darrow for the Defense":

"Clarence Darrow" is an ingenious and fascinating theatre piece, by turns moving, reflective, comic, and highly dramatic. Like all successful one-man shows, it not only presents a vivid and detailed picture of its principal subject but also evokes the images of some of the people who figured in his life, and suggests the time and temper of the world in which he functioned.¹⁹

John Geilgud

In December 1958, John Geilgud opened his one-man show. The show, titled "Ages of Man," was a compilation of Shakespeare's works. Geilgud delivers in a lecture-type situation over 40 characters from the speeches of Shakespeare's plays interspersed with sonnets.

Mr. Geilgud has effectively chosen to condense the seven ages of man into three: youth, manhood, and old age. In this manner he thematically organizes his script which begins with the naive love of

¹⁷Wilson.

¹⁸Barnes.

¹⁹John Beaufort, rev. of "Clarence Darrow for the Defense," by Henry Fonda, Christian Science Monitor, 29 March 1974.

the young boy, progresses through the soldier's sudden growth into the responsibilities of manhood, and ends with the ever-present realization of the nearness of death in the aged.

Geilgud enters a stage containing only a lecturn and table. He wears an old-fashioned double-breasted dinner suit. At the beginning of his presentation, Geilgud notes that Shakespeare presented his plays without set, with the exception of the one created through dialogue in the imaginative minds of the audience. Perhaps this is the reason he has chosen simple staging and costume.

Geilgud begins his program with Jaques speech from As You Like It:

All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women are
merely players; / They have their exits and their entrances;
/ And one man in his time plays many parts / His acts being
seven ages.²⁰

In the first part of his show, concerning youth, Geilgud has chosen the speeches from the Merchant of Venice where Lorenzo is professing his love for Jessica; Caliban's love speech from The Tempest; Mercutio and Romeo's discussion of love; and several sonnets concerning love, married love, cynical love and unlawful love. The maturity and manhood section includes the soldier, Henry Pency, defending himself before Henry IV and the long speech in which Richard VI surrenders his crown. The final section dealing with old age and death shows King Henry IV being haunted in sickness and old age; Clarence's prison speech in Richard III; Claudio's speech after he has been condemned to death in Measure for Measure; Julius Caesar's response to Calpurnia's dreams, and Hamlet's

²⁰ John Geilgud, "Ages of Man," Columbia, DL5390, 1959.

"To be or not to be . . ." speech. Especially effective was the pathos conveyed by Geilgud's interpretation of King Lear's final speech in which he grieves over the death of his daughter, Cordelia. The presentation ends with three speeches from The Tempest.²¹

Geilgud introduces each selection by giving the title of the play, the character speaking, and the background situation. He changes his pitch and rate somewhat to distinguish characters. Brooks Atkinson, writing for The New York Times, states, ". . . the pitch is high, but volume isn't unlimited. It is a superb instrument because he knows how to use it."²²

The reviewers were intrigued by Geilgud's performance. Atkinson states that he has "mastered Shakespeare as man as well as writer."²³ Frank Aston adds, "Mr. Geilgud worked all by himself, but the lines he chose and the manner of his delivery caused the stage to seem fully peopled with Danes and thanes, with kings and young men hopelessly in love."²⁴

Atkinson expresses the educational values and overall effectiveness of the show in the following passage:

²¹Geilgud audiotape.

²²Brooks Atkinson, rev. of "Ages of Man," by John Geilgud, The New York Times, 29 Dec. 1958.

²³Atkinson.

²⁴Frank Aston, rev. of "Ages of Man," by John Geilgud, New York Herald Tribune, 29 Dec. 1958.

In the first place, it renews an old wonder about the range of Shakespeare's knowledge of life and people. . . . In the second place, the program renews wonder over the glory of the English language. . . . In the third place, Mr. Geilgud proves that the office of actor is an illustrious one. Reading lines, acting parts, are only two of the actor's duties. He can enrich the lives of the audience. That is what Mr. Geilgud does in "Ages of Man."²⁵

Julie Harris

At age 14, Emily Dickenson wrote to a school friend the following: "I expect I shall be the belle of Amherst when I reach my 17th year. I don't doubt that I shall have perfect crowds of admirers at that age." Dickenson did not become the "belle of Amherst," but a great 19th century poet who "never stopped studying nature and man and expressing her emotions."²⁶ Her life and works have provided a wonderful script performed by Julie Harris and directed by Charles Nelson Reilly. This one-woman show, appropriately titled "The Belle of Amherst," opened April 28, 1976, at the Longacre Theatre.

Julie Harris had the challenge of presenting a very private, reclusive woman. Dickenson was not well-known during her lifetime. She published only seven poems, all anonymously, but "after her death 1,775 poems were discovered in her room in tight little pockets."²⁷ Her life still remains a mystery.

²⁵ Atkinson.

²⁶ Mel Gussow, rev. of "The Belle of Amherst," by Julie Harris, The New York Times, 29 April 1976.

²⁷ Gassow.

The play takes the view that Emily Dickenson was self-created. She was a role-player and an actress of sorts. Therefore, instead of Miss Harris "leaping into the skin of Miss Dickenson, the poet becomes the actress. . . . This allows the character to mimic her father, teacher, and friends. It allows her to lead us backwards and forwards through her life, telling us family anecdotes and offering, partially, a portrait of Amherst."²⁸

William Luce and Timothy Helgeson compiled and adapted the script which is "filtered and intermingled with letters and recreated conversations."²⁹ John Beaufort, critic for The Christian Science Monitor, describes the play as constructed

in the form of an intimate conversation in which the poet takes the playhouse audience into her confidence. . . . The monologue moves in and out of the poems with an ease and fluidity which gain their naturalness from the art of Miss Harris and the staging by Charles Nelson Reilly.

Most of the dialogue is directed to the audience, although occasionally she pretends there are other characters onstage--relatives, friends, visitors, and "even a cat that Miss Harris so vividly evokes."³⁰

H. R. Poindexter re-created Miss Dickenson's father's house where she lived most of her life with desk, piano, bed, "all floating in the open space."³¹ The props include books, writing materials, and a trunk which holds the poems. Miss Harris resembles Emily Dickenson dressed in

²⁸Gussow.

²⁹John Beaufort, rev. of "The Belle of Amherst," by Julie Harris, The Christian Science Monitor, 5 March 1976.

³⁰Beaufort.

³¹Gussow.

"bridal white," the color of her later years, with her hair neatly parted and tied in a tight bun.

The reviewers agreed that the show was a success. Mel Gussow felt that at times there was too much happening around the Dickenson household and the effort to make things dramatic detracts. He went on to say, however, that ". . . the author and the actress have used the poetry to great advantage. The character leaps into verse when the emotion carries her there. . . . the poetry emerges with character and performance."³²

Hal Holbrook

Hal Holbrook has been doing his Mark Twain one-person show for over 21 years. He opened in April of 1959 after twelve years of research. Atkinson states in his review that "Holbrook based the style and details of his show on an early film of Mark Twain and a recording of his voice."³³ Mr. Holbrook prepared several dozen excerpts from novels, short stories, notebook speeches, sketches, and various other sources. In molding his character, Holbrook gained his knowledge "through an intensely researched study of Sam Clemens--interviews with surviving relatives and friends, newspaper reviews, visits to Hannibal . . . and the total absorption of his writings."³⁴ Another method which Holbrook

³²Gussow.

³³Brooks Atkinson, rev. of "Mark Twain Tonight!," by Hal Holbrook, The New York Times, 19 April 1959.

³⁴Linda Daniell, "Hal Holbrook: A Private Victory Over Time," The Saturday Evening Post, July/August 1975.

employed to perfect his character was to stroll across the deck of a docked Mississippi riverboat, and he "concluded that reports of the author's wildly lurching gait could not have been exaggerated."³⁵

To keep his show fresh, Holbrook draws from his collection to compile a different show for each performance. "I never know how I'm going to start a performance until I actually hear myself speaking."³⁶ One of the playbills from "Mark Twain Tonight!" states "While Mr. Twain's selections will come from the list below, we have been unable to pin him down as to which of them he will do. He claims this would cripple his inspirations."³⁷ Linda Daniell states in her article, "Hal Holbrook: A Private Victory Over Time," that "Holbrooks' memory holds a full ten hour repertoire of 99 percent pure Twain humor. The rest is imagination."³⁸

After three hours of applying make-up, Holbrook enters the stage "a 70 year old Mark Twain, white maned, tiger mustachioed, clad in white linen and maroon caravat. . . ." Arthur Gelb further observes that "after the first few minutes Holbrook and Twain are synonymous. The acting is superb. Every gesture and movement natural. The entire effort appears effortless."³⁹

³⁵Harry F. Waters, "One-Man Showmanship," Newsweek, 85 (May 12, 1975), pp. 89-90.

³⁶Waters, pp. 89-90.

³⁷Arthur Gelb, rev. of "Mark Twain Tonight!," by Hal Holbrook, The New York Times, 7 April 1959.

³⁸Daniell.

³⁹Gelb.

Atkinson in his review speaks about Holbrook's style. He "speaks without animation a flat drawl . . . he's always moving about, lighting his cigar or occasionally lounging in the chair. . . . The manner seems extemporaneous."⁴⁰ Martin Gottfried adds ". . . there is Holbrooks' characterization, through body control, vocal inflection, timing and intelligence. This is character acting on the highest level, complete impersonation and interpretation."⁴¹

Because Holbrook is constantly drawing from his memory to combine his script, the organizational format of each show may be different from its predecessor. One of the performances this writer experienced began with a casual discussion of introductions and compliments with Holbrook as Twain stating, "We all like compliments--humorists, burglars, congressmen--all of us in the trade." He then lights a cigar and discusses smoking and drinking. He states, "I can give it up if I want to--I've given it up at least a thousand times." He tells the audience of Twain's move west to seek fame and fortune in Virginia City. Describing the booming town he mentions the benefits of "wide open gambling, a half dozen jails and some talk of building a church." He next tells of Twain's move to San Francisco where he was given a post on the Sacramento Union and sent as a correspondent to the Sandwich Islands. Twain's most memorable experience was riding his horse along the beach and spying many "nude, young local ladies bathing in the

⁴⁰ Atkinson.

⁴¹ Martin Gottfried, rev. of "Mark Twain Tonight," by Hal Holbrook, New York Post, 16 March 1977.

sea--the sort of local color he was after--for his newspaper." After returning to the continent Twain hired a hall in which to give a lecture and states, "I've never had to do a day's work since." The first half ends with a satirical look at interviewers on the lecture circuit. Twain states, "It's a terrible death to be talked to death" and offers the opportunity during a ten minute intermission "to let some people escape."⁴²

The second half of the show consists of a selection from Huckleberry Finn. Twain introduces his audience to the "ignorant, unwashed, insufficiently fed Huck, who had a good heart and was continuously happy." Holbrook manifests pitch variety and dialect as he transforms into Huck. He incorporates different tonalities for his teacher, Aunt Polly, and Pap. The selection chosen concerns Huck's friendship with Jim and the conflict of conscience when he realizes he is helping a slave become a free man. Twain empathizes with Huck, and the pathos of this initiation experience is conveyed in a powerful, emotional style of delivery and presentation. After the story, Twain offers the audience his rules for living to age 70 and states, "If you can't make 70 by a comfortable road, don't go." He talks of swearing and the possibility of going to hell concluding, "Heaven is for climate, Hell for society."⁴³ Holbrook effectively employs the anticlimax just as Twain did. He waits patiently for the audience to cease laughter and

⁴²Hal Holbrook, "Mark Twain Tonight!," Columbia, DS2019, 2030, 1959-61.

⁴³Twain audiotape.

then throws the final punch line at them. Harry Gilroy observes the following of the total performance: "Hal Holbrook has chosen his material with great skill to present a rounded portrayal of the great humorist, and he plays the role as finely as he has shaped it."⁴⁴

Rob Ingles

Rob Ingles is a British actor who has taken his one-man shows all over the world including Britain, Belgium, Holland, Scandinavia and the United States. His repertoire includes three shows: "The Canterbury Tales," a show about Shakespeare's life, and "The Lord of the Rings." This writer had the pleasure of seeing "The Lord of the Rings" which Mr. Ingles states he chose for two reasons: "One I like him and two there's a market for him."⁴⁵

After deciding what material he would use, Mr. Ingles set out to seek permission. He laughs about the process, "I had to write lots of letters and by the time I got permission to do it I had such a thick bundle of correspondence I felt I should just walk on the stage and read the correspondence."⁴⁶

Having obtained permission, Ingles spent twelve months doing extensive adapting. His task included adapting one thousand and eighteen pages to a two hour performance. Ingles offers his philosophy concerning adapting and preparing a script:

⁴⁴Harry Gilroy, rev. of "Mark Twain Tonight!," by Hal Holbrook The New York Times, 24 March 1966.

⁴⁵Personal interview with Rob Ingles.

⁴⁶Ingles interview.

It's vital I find to get a pracy on paper. I had a pracy for each chapter. Then comes analyzing and planning . . . deciding what loops in the story, what streams feed into the main thread and then dip down again and then dispose of what is unnecessary. . . . Then I usually read it to a couple of friends a couple of times, and get response back and then I'll do a preview somewhere and invite some people whose judgment I respect.⁴⁷

Ingles adds that "instead of working with a director, he uses a production assistant who has common sense and taste. . . . But beyond that it's feedback from the audience."⁴⁸

Rob Ingles enters the stage in a basic hobbit's costume to which he adds and deletes from throughout the show to distinguish characters. He expresses his reasoning behind the slight costume deviation:

I believe you can overdo robing and disrobing in a show. It could get ridiculous after awhile, putting on fancy hats and taking them off. so I like to first present a character in a slightly different garb, having presented him, any dialogue after that, the character will be accepted by the audience. With one-man shows eye heights and directions of eyes are terribly important to dialogue for establishing an imaginary scene or something that I might be looking at now that I want the audience to accept. And with Hobbitt's that applies perfectly.⁴⁹

Ingles stimulates the audience's imagination with his use of props. By placing a chair on top of a table and riding on it, he becomes a horse at one time and a huge flying monster another. The table and chairs provide many settings and different levels which help to make the show more interesting visually. Ingles also uses a tape recorder for sound effects.

⁴⁷Ingles interview.

⁴⁸Ingles interview.

⁴⁹Ingles interview.

The audience's imagination plays a vital role in the success of the performance. Mr. Ingles feels that "it's not one person doing all the talking if you use the text right and you suggest efficiency sufficiently and consistently. Then the audience will play along with it."⁵⁰

Rob Ingles has talked to people in all walks of life concerning the oral presentation of literature and its importance and role in educating an audience about an author's life or work. He concludes the interview with the following comments:

. . . one very important thing is to bring excitement into the realm of communication, that doesn't necessarily depend on blue words. And the sense of the compression and intensity that exists in literature is the yeast of life, it isn't just another slab of dirt. Literature is intensity that is drawn from life and it's quite valid in one-man shows to use literary sources for the final theatrical product. It's a treat to be told a story anyway. Isn't it?⁵¹

Jack MacGowran

Jack MacGowran combined some of the works of Samuel Beckett to present a one-man show appropriately titled, "Jack MacGowran in the works of Samuel Beckett." The show, which was produced by Joseph Papp, opened November 19, 1970, at the New York Shakespeare Festival's Newman Theatre. MacGowran's show encompassed passages from Beckett's novels, poems and plays including "Waiting for Godot," "Endgame," and "Knapps Last Tape." He has formulated the selections into a complete entity. Instead of presenting individual scenes separately, MacGowran has combined the words into "a continuous narrative, and while it makes an

⁵⁰Ingles interview.

⁵¹Ingles interview.

impressive whole, it is often difficult to recall just what a speech comes from. It can be tantalizing."⁵² Martin Gottfried observes, "Rather than reading selections from individual works, pausing between for titles or at least indicating where one ends and another starts, he continues from one work to another continuously."⁵³ Mel Gussow states that MacGowran has "weaved a tapestry of Beckett,"⁵⁴ and Clive Barnes adds, "He has written a play about Beckett, using Beckett's own words."⁵⁵ Not only was the script Beckett's words, but the production also strongly manifested Beckett's influence as he approved each selection and advised MacGowran through the adaptation and rehearsal process.

MacGowran appeared onstage in a long, stained coat, with bare ankles, sandals, shaven head, sepulcher-grey face and red-rimmed eyes. He was a "Beckett tramp--a man reduced by life and forced to go on living."⁵⁶ The stage was bare except for one rock and subtle swirls painted on the floor. These swirls suggested the "circular, timeless quality of the world of Beckett."⁵⁷

⁵² Richard Watts, rev. of "MacGowran in the Works of Samuel Beckett," New York Post, 20 November 1970.

⁵³ Martin Gottfried, rev. of "MacGowran in the Works of Samuel Beckett," Women's Wear Daily, 20 November 1970.

⁵⁴ Mel Gussow, rev. of "MacGowran in the Works of Samuel Beckett," The New York Times, 20 November 1970.

⁵⁵ Clive Barnes, rev. of "MacGowran in the Words of Samuel Beckett."

⁵⁶ Gussow.

⁵⁷ Barnes.

Mel Gussow states the following concerning MacGowran's performance:

One is amazed to hear Jack MacGowran bring Beckett's difficult novels to life. With effortless, exactitude and understanding, he transmits them. . . . Author and actor are so commonly rooted in spirit that if Beckett were an actor he would be MacGowran, if MacGowran were a writer, he would be Beckett. . . . It is an evening in the presence of two consummate artists exactly in tune with each other.⁵⁸

Gussow further states that "This is not just a reading or an impersonation, but an incarnation of the work and of the man."⁵⁹ Walter Kerr concludes, "Interestingly, Mr. MacGowran's success suggests . . . that Beckett seems more vigorous read solus than when he is acted out."⁶⁰

Alec McCowen

On September 7, 1978, at the Marymount Manhattan Theatre, Alec McCowen performed his one-man show titled "St. Mark's Gospel." The show was given excellent reviews by the New York critics who seemed surprised that such a "reading" would be so effective.

McCowen chose to present St. Mark's gospel as opposed to the other three because it was the first of the gospels to be written and the closest in time and spirit to the events themselves.⁶¹ Christopher Porterfield, critic for Time adds to this that McCowen

makes it clear there are no theological reasons for choosing Mark . . . his concern is the words, not the Word. Mark happens to be the shortest (two hours, ten minutes in this

⁵⁸Gussow.

⁵⁹Gussow.

⁶⁰Walter Kerr, Rev. of "MacGowran in the Works of Samuel Beckett," The New York Times, 29 November 1970.

⁶¹Howard Kissel, rev. of "St. Mark's Gospel," by Alec McCowen, Women's Wear Daily, 8 Sept. 1978.

performance, with one intermission) and "the easiest one to tell aloud!"⁶²

Jack Kroll, reviewer for Newsweek, quotes McCowen as saying, "John was too difficult, Matthew needed editing, I didn't care for the style of Luke. But I got hooked after three chapters of Mark. It's a great script. Mark is blunt, bold, and witty."⁶³

McCowen chose to use simple staging conventions which are described in John Beaufort's article, "Gospel Brought to Stage":

An authentically trim stage figure, Mr. McCowen dresses informally: open-necked shirt, light tweed jacket, brown slacks and oxfords. The stage, rectangle enclosed in gold-bronze curtains, contains a table (with water pitcher and glass) and three straight-backed chairs. Occasionally, the chairs are brought into visual play to suggest the stern of a boat, the top of a mountain, the seats of the temple moneychangers.⁶⁴

One of the most surprising elements of the production was the style of McCowen's presentation. The reviewers were in awe of the man who could make the gospel come alive onstage. McCowen memorized the gospel verbatim and performed it in its entirety with no deletions and no interpolations. Jack Kroll discusses McCowen's preparation: "Every day for sixteen months, McCowen would get up at 7 a.m. to study." He

⁶²Christopher Porterfield, rev. of "St. Mark's Gospel," by Alec McCowen, Time, 18 Sept. 1978.

⁶³Jack Kroll, rev. of "St. Mark's Gospel," by Alec McCowen, Newsweek, 28 Sept. 1978.

⁶⁴John Beaufort, rev. of "St. Mark's Gospel," by Alec McCowen, The Christian Science Monitor, 8 Sept. 1978.

stated, "If I learned three verses a morning, I felt good."⁶⁵ Although McCowen interpreted the entire book of Mark, he "deliberately avoids the temptation (if such it was) for rhetorical effect or ecclesiastical artifice."⁶⁶ Bob Lape, in a newsclip for WABC-TV expressed his surprise in this manner, "If you've only heard Mark intoned with great solemnity from a pulpit, each word given equal weight . . . here, then, is a marvelous typhoon of fresh interpretation, bringing Mark to life as human and humorous"⁶⁷ Walter Kerr, reviewer for The New York Times, states:

. . . though it is all memorized, it seems the report of someone who has actually stumbled upon Jesus in his travels and comes back boyishly bursting with stories to tell.⁶⁸

The reviewers were not only pleasantly surprised about his treatment of the literature, but also remarked concerning his interpretative abilities. John Beaufort says of the presentation:

. . . The spectator sees Simon and Andrew "straightway" forsake their nets; shares in the amazement over the healing of the palsied man let down through the roof, . . . considering the more than 30 individual characters encountered in the gospel, Mr. McCowen keeps explicit characterizations to a minimum. Herod, Salome, Legion, the father of the epileptic boy, and the young man at the tomb of Jesus are some of the exceptions.⁶⁹

⁶⁵Kroll.

⁶⁶Beaufort.

⁶⁷Bob Lape, rev. of "St. Mark's Gospel," by Alec McCowen, WABC newsclip, 8 Sept. 1978.

⁶⁸Walter Kerr, rev. of "St. Mark's Gospel," by Alec McCowen, The New York Times, 8 Sept. 1978.

⁶⁹Beaufort.

The selection of material, simplicity of set, style of interpretation by McCowen, and overall effectiveness of the reading combined to make "St. Mark's Gospel" one of the most unusual and successful one-person shows of all time.

Vincent Price

On April 12, 1978, Vincent Price opened at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre in a one-man show about Oscar Wilde titled, "Diversions and Delights." The script, assembled and adapted by John Gay, includes "excerpts from Wilde's critical essays, poems, stories, plays and conversational sallies with biographical material."⁷⁰ The script is Price as Wilde giving a lecture in a Paris concert hall a year before his death. The date of the lecture is November 28, 1899. The time of the play is after the "broken, exiled Wilde" has spent two years in a jail for his affair with Lord Alfred Douglas.⁷¹

All reviewers mentioned H. R. Poindexter's lighting as being subtle and well-done. It is interesting that although they all agreed on the adequacy of the lighting design, they disagree with the color of the jacket Mr. Price is wearing. Some color it light grey, some dark-green velvet, and one described him as wearing a brown velvet smoking jacket. They did agree that he was costumed to look the part of a homosexual

⁷⁰Holly Hill, rev. of "Diversions and Delights," by Vincent Price, The Wall Street Journal, 14 April 1978.

⁷¹Richard Eder, rev. of "Diversions and Delights," by Vincent Price, The New York Times, 13 April 1978.

writer. There was also no dispute concerning the set. It consisted of a lecturn, an armchair, and a side table.

Price's show was met with mixed reviews. Richard Eder was disappointed in the show, and he was not alone. Elder felt the script "weakened and undermined" Wilde. He elaborates further concerning the adaptation:

The format of a lecture serves very well as long as Wilde is making his wounds with quips. Mr. Gay was less wise in using it for the kind of direct anguish and self-revelation that Wilde reserved for material not to be published during his life. . . . To put these deeply private writings into the mouth of a Wilde entertaining a lecture audience cheapens the man's intellectual gallantry. . . . The first half has scenes which are the beginning of self-indulgence for Wilde and that self-indulgence turns into self-pity in the second-half.⁷²

Although Douglas Watt praised Price's performance, he agreed with Eder concerning the script:

Price . . . gives a thoroughly professional performance . . . But a performance of what? No real figure emerges from this outpouring of epigrams, other writings and recollections. . . . There is no drama in a painted ghost, and this one, having nothing to tell us we do not already know, is all too obviously hollow to be pathetic.⁷³

Holly Hill and Clive Barnes were two reviewers who felt the performance was very effective. Barnes describes the show as "an amusing, witty, at times moving one-man show."⁷⁴ Ms. Hill describes the script as being woven into a "compact and vigorous portrait."⁷⁵

⁷²Eder.

⁷³Douglas Watt, rev. of "Diversions and Delights," by Vincent Price, Daily News, 13 April 1978.

⁷⁴Clive Barnes, rev. of "Diversions and Delights," by Vincent Price, New York Post, 13 April 1978.

⁷⁵Hill.

James Whitmore

In 1970 and again in 1974, James Whitmore brought to the stage his first one-person show. Whitmore is one of the three most well-known one-person show personalities along with Williams and Holbrook. His first show was titled "Will Rogers, U.S.A.," and opened at the Helen Hayes Theatre.

The script was adapted by Paul Shyre who also directed Whitmore's performance. Shyre describes the show as a "character analogy." It is a recreation of a Roger's performance on the lecture circuit close to the end of his career. The material was drawn from the period around 1935--the Depression years. The script was compiled from several sources including Roger's syndicated newspaper column.

Whitmore appears on the "book cluttered, three area set which suggests the homework Rogers put into his "unstudied wit," and captures the physical persona of the cowboy lecturer.⁷⁶ Clive Barnes describes Whitmore's transformation:

First he comes on as himself--provides a brief introduction to his hero . . . He relaxes, he slumps. He lurches across the stage, puts a cowboy hat on his head, . . . he slips a wad of chewing gum in his mouth, picks up a rope and starts talking about his Cherokee background--and suddenly, yes, there in the flesh is Will Rogers.⁷⁷

Whitmore is dressed in cowboy boots and hat, a red neckerchief, and carries several coiled lariats.

⁷⁶ John Beaufort, rev. of "Will Rogers, U.S.A.," by James Whitmore, The Christian Science Monitor, 7 May 1974.

⁷⁷ Clive Barnes, rev. of "Will Rogers, U.S.A.," by James Whitmore, The New York Times, 7 May 1974.

Whitmore maintains a lecture-type, open-focused presentation. Barnes discusses his style which is probably the most entertaining part of the show:

Mr. Whitmore is beautifully relaxed with his audience. He plays with it like a master craftsman, greeting latecomers, addressing certain remarks straight at the grandstand audience, and generally behaving as if he were Rogers at the "Follies."⁷⁸

Whitmore relied on bibliographical information about Rogers to serve as a stepping stone into discussions about current events. This format was similar to that used by Rogers in the 1930's. He begins his show with the birth of Rogers who was three-fourths Indian. This paves the way for a discussion about the treatment of early Americans toward the Indian people as well as current Indian affairs.⁷⁹ Rogers was born on November 4th which was election day. This fact provides the opportunity for editorializing on current (1930) politics. Rogers' educational career was short and he quit school after the fourth grade, preferring roping to reading. Whitmore takes this opportunity to discuss education, particularly college and collegiate sports. Talk of college spreads to law schools and once more Whitmore talks of politics (Rogers' favorite subject for witty sarcasm) and political conventions. The first half of the lecture concludes with a comparison of the United States and Russia with several comments on Warren G. Harding, then a presidential candidate. Rogers' humor is revealed when Whitmore states,

⁷⁸ Barnes.

⁷⁹ James Whitmore, "Will Rogers, U.S.A.," Columbia, SG30546, 1971.

"We'll send marines to any nation that can get ten people to say they want us. We're in the humanity business."⁸⁰

Whitmore begins the second half of the lecture with a discussion of war: "No nation should be able to enter a war until they've paid for the first one." The organization of the second part seems a bit more haphazard, but is still easy to follow. Whitmore chooses birth certificates and passports, Rogers' trip to Rome meeting the Prince of Wales, and George Bernard Shaw, and then breaks for rope tricks. After the brief break, Whitmore picks up a newspaper and states that he "doesn't make up his lectures, the news tells it all." His solution to the traffic in New York City is that "no car should be allowed on the road until it's paid for." The paper serves to guide him into his last discussion on doctors and his gall stone operation.

The chronological guide through the life of Will Rogers was both appropriate and effective. Martin Gottfried states, "He has pieced together various preserved monologues so smoothly that there are fewer awkward changes of subject than you would find in the best of comic routines."⁸¹

All who reviewed the show were pleasantly surprised at the immediacy of the material. Although the wit was reflective of the 1930's, the humor easily adapted to current politics with the present audience still feeling the sting of Watergate. Of the overall effectiveness, Martin Gottfried states the following:

⁸⁰ Whitmore audiotape.

⁸¹ Martin Gottfried, rev. of "Will Rogers, U.S.A.," by James Whitmore, Women's Wear Daily, 10 May 1974.

. . . it is more mentally amusing than hysterical It is still pertinent, dealing as it does with crooked politicians, pointless and senseless social crimes, but touchingly innocent. The scale of things has so multiplied that Roger's benign attitude makes Vietnam and Nixon seem all the more appalling.⁸²

In 1975, Whitmore returned to the stage with his second one-person show, "Give 'Em Hell, Harry!" Harry F. Waters in his article, "One-Man Showmanship," discusses the content and preparation of Whitmore's show:

[Whitmore] spent a month with Gallu's 104 page script and a stack of Truman's biographies. He listened to recordings and watched films. He drew up a list of 60 words that Truman pronounced in a special way. ("Karreeah" for Korea) . . . He pared 30 pounds. . . . He distilled from a dozen different books, innumerable newsreels and recordings, and a talent for impersonation. . . .⁸³

Whitmore dressed and looked like the 33rd president when he walked onto the stage, "buttressed only by a pair of steel rimmed glasses and a baggy double-breasted suit."⁸⁴

T. E. Kalem, reviewing for Time, describes Whitmore's performance at Washington, D.C.'s Ford's Theatre. He felt that this one-man show is unique because Harry S. Truman is so "close to us in time" and the audience would demand a more realistic performance. Kalem praises Mr. Whitmore's ability to please his audience:

Whitmore seems uncannily like Truman. As the curtain goes up, the first impulse is to gasp. Whitmore gets all the personal gestures right: the cock of the head, the grin as big as the American flag, and the brisk, soldierly movements of the arms and body. . . . Amazingly, Whitmore captures the

⁸²Gottfried.

⁸³Harry F. Waters, "One-Man Showmanship," Newsweek, 12 May 1975, pp. 89-90.

⁸⁴Waters, p. 90.

mystique of the presidency and the rock-hard reality of making final decisions. He reminds us almost too vividly of a time when both the individual and the country had a better grip on their destinies than they have had since.⁸⁵

"Give 'Em Hell, Harry!" toured Memphis, Kansas City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle. Whitmore chose the show in celebration of our nation's Bicentennial.

On November 2, 1977, James Whitmore brought his third one-man show to the 46 Street Theatre. The show was titled, "Bully," and encompassed the life of Theodore Roosevelt. The performance was met with mixed reviews tending to be more unfavorable than favorable. Martin Gottfried, writing for The New York Post, questions the selection calling Roosevelt "a pompous bore."⁸⁶ Thor Eckert, Jr., on the other hand, states that "Theodore Roosevelt is as complex a figure as one could ask for and his story is ideal for the stage."⁸⁷

The script, researched and written by Jerome Alden, begins late in Roosevelt's career, "an outdoorsman and naturalist who is also an amateur taxidermist . . . and politician supporting minimum wage and female suffrage. Whitmore manages to convey "a real physical impression of Roosevelt without actually trying to look like him (a moustache,

⁸⁵T. E. Kalem, rev. of "Give 'Em Hell Harry!," by James Whitmore, Time, 12 May 1975.

⁸⁶Martin Gottfried, rev. of "Bully," by James Whitmore, New York Post, 2 November 1977.

⁸⁷Thor Eckert, Jr., rev. of "Bully," by James Whitmore, Christian Science Monitor, 2 November 1977.

spectacles, no more)."⁸⁸ From time to time he changes costume from two coat racks. The set is evocative of Mr. Roosevelt's Sagamore Hill home. Richard Eder states it is "possibly too wide for a one-man performance . . . (with) a fine array of buffalo and elk heads jutting out at crazy angles."⁸⁹

In the first half titled, "The Adventures of Theodore Roosevelt," and the second half, "The Further Adventures of Theodore Roosevelt," Whitmore "recounts tales somewhat to the audience and somewhat to some 22 invisible characters who figured largely in the life on the 25th U.S. president."⁹⁰

The life of Theodore Roosevelt does not lend itself to the thrilling script material of Dickens or the romantic engaging biography of Truman. Richard Eder states the following concerning the success of the script in performance:

The figure of the first President Roosevelt has historical interest, of course, but not enough to seize us across a stage. And although he had a good mind, made some good speeches, and produced some vivid phrases, his words are not remarkable enough to fight his old battle for us.⁹¹

Emlyn Williams

Emlyn Williams is the most prolific contemporary one-person showman, with four shows to his credit. His first show, in 1952, was a

⁸⁸ Gottfried.

⁸⁹ Gottfried.

⁹⁰ Richard Eder, rev. of "Bully," by James Whitmore, The New York Times, 2 November 1977.

⁹¹ Eder.

reproduction of Dicken's lectures as originally presented. Williams searched old records and compiled his findings as close to the original readings of Dicken's last twelve years as possible. According to Benard Darwin, Williams found the "happy mean" in selecting materials for presentation:

It would have been too unkind to his audience to resist such irresistible scenes as the trial from *Pickwick* or Mrs. Gamp. At the same time he has broken new and delightful ground
 . . .⁹²

Williams chose many of the same books which Dickens had used in his lectures including, "*Pickwick*, *Domby*, *Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and, of course, of the Christmas stories, *Mr. Chops*." To this list Williams has added several selections which Dickens never read including "*Bleak House*, the Veneerings from *Our Mutual Friend*, *Battle of Life*, "*The Fall of Midas*" from *Little Dorrit*, the collapse of Mr. Merdle's fortune and his suicide."⁹³

In his book, *The Dickens Readings*, Mr. Williams discusses the motivating influence behind his adapting decisions. He desired to present a "self-contained story which could stand quite independent of the rest of the work from which it was taken."⁹⁴ Charles Dickens took for granted that his audience knew his works backwards and forwards and could, therefore, present excerpts effectively. Emlyn Williams, however, adapted under the assumption that his audience was totally unfamiliar with the British author's works. Williams states:

⁹² Benard Darwin, Introduction to *Readings from Dickens*, by Emlyn Williams (London: Folio Society, 1953), n.p.

⁹³ Darwin.

⁹⁴ Darwin.

I approached my task of adapting Dickens for the reading-desk with a double sense of responsibility to the original. Before every alteration which I thought of making--however trifling it seemed--I imagined the Master facing me scrutinizing me with keen and piercing eyes, while I explain to him why I want to make the change. And I did not make the change until I felt he would nod his head in assent.⁹⁵

Williams admits openly to changing the text but states, "I have looked into my heart, and know that I can add with conviction--but not changed it so much as to be guilty of the crime of 'Tampering.'"⁹⁶ He also says he has frequently been accused of modernizing the script due to the fact that certain lines of dialogue sound surprisingly contemporary such as, "I say, old boy, where do you hang out?" Williams denies this accusation and further swears "in the name of my Celtic forefathers and of the Dickens fellowship" that he has not "presumed to add one 'embellishment' of his own words to Dicken's wit and humor"⁹⁷

Williams appears onstage wearing Victorian evening dress, chin whiskers, and a red geranium in his lapel. The stage contained "an odd little reading stand with its polite arm-rest, water glass, and a vase of flowers (which) is a replica of the one Dickens designed and trundled around the British Isles and America."⁹⁸ Williams opens his show reading from a letter beginning, "I, Charles Dickens, . . ." and this establishes himself as the author. The introduction serves to convey some biographical information about Dickens and guide the audience into the readings.

⁹⁵ Darwin.

⁹⁷ Darwin.

⁹⁶ Darwin.

⁹⁸ Darwin.

As he presents the material, Williams as Dickens takes on the vocal characteristics of various speakers in the literature--accents, voice inflections, tonal qualities and rate--each distinctly different for each character presented.⁹⁹ Brooks Atkinson, writing for The New York Times, observes:

Taking a hint from the records of original readings, he acts not only as the characters but the costumes, the rooms, the furniture, the decor, the weather and the landscape. . . . he draws living portraits in words, finds the humor or the pathos in every phrase and gives us a magnificent solo performance.¹⁰⁰

Emlyn Williams' recreation of a Charles Dickens' lecture of readings was, according to the reviewers, both entertaining and educational. Mr. Darwin discussed the overall effectiveness stating:

Emlyn Williams has shown that the art of reading is not a lost one. He has shown too that Dickens, so interpreted, can today gain many readers who would otherwise have dismissed his books as "old fashioned," whereas now they have been admitted to a new kingdom of happiness.¹⁰¹

The next year, Williams decided to try something new with his Dickens' material. He chose one of Dickens' novels, Bleak House, and adapted it for a one-person show. He reduced the novel to 1/25 of its original size and opened at the Bijou on April 20, 1953. John McClain reviewed the show, and although he commended Williams' talents as an impersonator, he questioned the selection. The presentation was divided into three acts with the first mainly concerned with exposition and the introduction of characters. McClain states, "One must love Dickens to

⁹⁹William's audiotape.

¹⁰⁰Atkinson.

¹⁰¹Darwin.

enjoy the performance. At times the action seems to stand still. . . . It is trying to sit through this long condensation of the novel with its many characters and sub-plots."¹⁰²

In 1955, Williams began doing another one-person show in London. The show was titled "A Boy Growing Up" and consisted of twelve stories covering the life of Dylan Thomas from boyhood to age eighteen. Williams presented the show twice more in 1957 and 1976. Helpful reviews on the production of this show are concerned with the 1976 performance.

Williams enters a bare stage with a few props. He is dressed in a blue suit. There is no attempt to impersonate Thomas as he did Dickens. "He begins as a separate person but soon transforms into Thomas and they become one."¹⁰³ Patricia O'Haire comments that Williams keeps his distance from Thomas and "his own personality remains subjected."¹⁰⁴ Williams presents himself simplistically, yet effectively as a reader of poetry.

In November 1978, Emyln Williams opened his fourth one-person show on Broadway. "The Playboy of the Weekend World" was a show of the works of Edwardian writer, Hector Hugo Munro, who used the pen name Saki.

¹⁰² John McClain, rev. of "Bleak House," by Emyln Williams, Journal American, 21 April, 1953.

¹⁰³ Clive Barnes, rev. of "Dylan Thomas Growing Up," by Emyln Williams, The New York Times, 13 Oct. 1976.

¹⁰⁴ Patricia O'Haire, rev. of "Dylan Thomas Growing Up," by Emyln Williams, Daily News, 13 Oct. 1976.

The reviews for Williams' fourth show were not as enthusiastic as they had been for "Dickens" and "Thomas." The reviewer for the New York Magazine summarizes a consensus view of most reviewers, "Technique is what Emlyn Williams has in superabundance, but not always in the service of a dramatically viable cause."¹⁰⁵ They praise Williams' performance, but it does not outweigh their criticism of his selection of material. Brendan Gill, writing for The New Yorker, says of Williams:

Mr. Williams puts us at our ease . . . by seeming to take us into his confidence. . . . His voice assumes just the right weight of ironic detachment whenever he must get past a famous witticism without doing harm to the natural rhythm of his delivery.¹⁰⁶

Richard Eder, reviewer for The New York Times feels Williams has chosen an author who does not adapt well to interpretation on the stage. "Much of the material just doesn't work. More than half of the 15 stories and sketches have faded past recovery."¹⁰⁷ The reviewer for New York Magazine agrees with Eder saying, "'The Playboy of the Weekend World' suffers . . . from the strain of stretching thin, non-theatrical material to the limits of its and our endurance."¹⁰⁸

Clive Barnes, however, disagrees with the other reviewers. He titles his review, "Williams offers a Dazzling Weekend," and states, "of

¹⁰⁵Rev. of "The Playboy of the Weekend World," by Emlyn Williams, New York Magazine, 18 Dec. 1978.

¹⁰⁶Brendan Gill, rev. of "The Playboy of the Weekend World," by Emlyn Williams, New Yorker, 4 Dece. 1978.

¹⁰⁷Richard Eder, rev. of "The Playboy of the Weekend World," by Emlyn Williams, The New York Times, 17 Nov. 1978.

¹⁰⁸New York Magazine, 18 Dec. 1978.

all three of Williams personifications this one is the most personal and sensitive."¹⁰⁹

William Windom

William Windom has been touring the college circuit for eleven years doing one-man shows. He began in 1972 with a show titled "Thurber" which was a compilation of the writings of James Thurber. In 1975 he compiled "Thurber II" and in 1976 added "Ernie Pyle" to his repertoire.

The idea of doing a one-man show came to Windom in between acting jobs and James Thurber's works seemed the likely choice due to his television show, "My World and Welcome to It." The show transformed Thurber's drawings into 28 minute situation comedy episodes weekly. Windom wrote Hal Holbrook for advice concerning how to get started and Mr. Holbrook responded with two pieces of advice: (1) Get a good agent, and (2) Don't wear any make-up.¹¹⁰

William Windom spent four months reading the works of Thurber. He read through 27 books and chose whatever material pleased him. In a personal interview on January 26, 1983, Mr. Windom discussed how he selected his material:

If it grabbed me right away either as funny or touching I put it aside and I ended up with about five hours of material. I wrote Mrs. Thurber for permission. She took away one hour and gave me back four hours and that's the two shows I put together.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹Clive Barnes, rev. of "The Playboy of the Weekend World," by Emlyn Williams, New York Post, 17 Nov. 1978.

¹¹⁰Personal interview with William Windom, 26 January 1983.

¹¹¹Windom interview.

The show comes verbatim from Mr. Thurber's works. Windom says he sometimes is guilty of cutting, but he never adds.

After reading, adapting, and rehearsing, Windom received his first contract in October 1975. The thought then struck him, "What if it's not funny?" To test the material he offered the show gratis to five colleges in the Los Angeles area. He states that "Ten seconds into the show, I knew it was going to be alright."¹¹² Windom held an informal discussion session after each performance and asked the students what worked and what material needed improvement. After the rehearsal period, Windom's shows remain consistent--they contain the same stories in the same format.

Windom, who directed his own show, chose to use little costume and few props stating, "I can put all four shows that I do onto the seat of an airplane." He appears casually dressed wearing a visor, which was characteristic of Thurber, but stated in the interview, "I have no intention of imitating Thurber or Pyle, none whatsoever." The stage is void of props with the exception of a table and chairs. Windom feels "the less you help these two authors the better. Minimal props and scenery make for a cheaper show so small schools can afford it." Windom uses a slide show of Thurber's cartoons as transitions between works. He has effectively supplied music to underscore the slide presentation. In choosing the music he would use, Windom consulted Mrs. Thurber who suggested some of the songs James used to sing in the shower. The show

¹¹²Personal interview.

starts with "Maria," one of Mr. Thurber's favorites. Windom prefers a proscenium stage setting and complete darkness except for a spot light. He prefers not to see the audience and feels the material needs aesthetic distance in order to create the necessary magic.

Windom's one-man shows have become his primary source of income supplemented with guest television appearances. He enjoys his work and says his "driving force is to try to get the right reactions from an audience any age as distinct and sharp and often as I can. . . . to know that the actual inflection got the best reaction it could get at that particular moment."¹¹³ Windom further feels that Thurber's work is highly autobiographical and therefore his show brings education to the college audience in an entertaining way about the man and his work.

¹¹³Windom interview.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to explore the history of the one-person show as well as explain the production techniques of contemporary one-person shows. From Samuel Foote in the 1740's to William Windom in the present, the one-person show has remained a constant form of pleasurable entertainment for both the actor and the audience. The men and women of this mode of theatre have been motivated by different factors, the most common being a source of income. Many came from acting backgrounds: Samuel Foote, Charles Dibdin, Will Rogers, the Chautauqua performers, Rob Ingles, and William Windom saw one-person shows as a means by which to pay the bills in between acting jobs. To Albert Smith, Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, and Mark Twain, popular authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, touring their one-man shows on the lecture circuit provided a steady flow of income and also familiarized the country with their works and expanded the market for their short stories and novels. Once the decision to perform a one-person show has been made, these artists are faced with other decisions concerning selection of material, adaptation, staging conventions, and performance styles. These decisions form the basis for the analysis of contemporary one-person shows. Some of the questions raised in this exploration and the answers found will follow.

1. What factors influence the selection of material?

There is little information available concerning the selection of material for presentation for the early one-person shows. From the books and articles studied by this writer, it appears that the scripts were combined extemporaneously from the current events of the day. George Alexander Stevens and Charles Mathews combined their scripts with nightly additions to adapt each show to the particular audience.

Contemporary one-person show performers select their material based on personal preference and marketability. Jane Curry chose Samanth Smith Allen because of the interest generated while working on her Ph.D. Samantha was humorous and marketable due to her opinions on suffrage issues and the current concern with female equality. Geilgud is renowned for his Shakespearean roles and experience combined with a love of Shakespeare and mastery of the language influenced his choice of material. Rob Ingles decided on Tolkein because of his (Tolkein's) growing popularity among college audiences. Pat Carroll commissioned Marty Martin to write a script about Gertrude Stein's life because of Carroll's personal interest; and due to the success of "My World and Welcome to It" William Windom chose Thurber.

2. How much preparation time is generally spent on one-person shows?

Contemporary one-person shows lend themselves more to the form of a complete script incorporating an introduction, body, and conclusion woven together thematically. It is for this reason this writer has chosen to discuss the current shows to answer this question. The artist must maintain enough enthusiasm for his/her subject to sustain interest

through many works of intense preparation and months of performance. Rob Ingles spent twelve months in preparation; McCowen spent 16 months memorizing and studying St. Mark's Gospel, and William Windom, who was already familiar with Thurber's work, studied and adapted for four months. The preparation time depends, of course, greatly upon whether the performer compiles and adapts his/her own script or simply performs another's adaptation, as do Price, Carroll, and Harris. The artists go through various channels to perfect their performances. Jack MacGowran worked closely with Samuel Beckett during rehearsals; Pat Carroll listened to tapes of Gertrude Stein as James Whitmore listened to Will Rogers and Harry Truman to perfect dialect, timing and inflection; Whitmore, Holbrook and Williams studied lecture notes which had been saved from the scripts of Rogers, Twain, and Dickens. Holbrook and Whitmore studied the mannerisms of Twain, Truman, and Roosevelt from various films. All artists studied the works of their authors or the lives of their subjects to gain total familiarity with style, form, and physical characteristics in order to aid in adapting and staging decisions.

3. What type staging conventions are used?

The early one-person shows employed very austere staging conventions. The stage was generally adorned with a lecturn and piano for the musical skits. The performers chose to present their shows without the aid of make-up or costume, and props were kept to a minimum. More information is available concerning the staging decisions of the contemporary one-person shows and each show reflects the individual

artist's personal preference. Hal Holbrook chose to present Mark Twain in full costume and make-up. He becomes the character he is portraying as Jane Curry becomes Samantha. James Whitmore chose to lose 30 pounds to look like Harry Truman; Henry Fonda resembled Clarence Darrow; Pat Carroll transforms herself into Gertrude Stein, and Emlyn Williams' physical appearance onstage is comparable to Charles Dickens. John Geilgud, Alec McCowen, Williams doing Thomas' poetry, and Windom have chosen to illuminate the works rather than the author. Decisions concerning the amount of theatrical devices to be incorporated are dictated by the literature to be interpreted. Jane Curry prefers a well lighted, small playing area to establish cohesiveness between "chatty" Samantha and her audience. On the other hand, William Windom strives to maintain the "magic of the theatre" through aesthetic distance.

The number of props to be used is also an important decision to be made. For the most part, the artists feel it is better to use as little as possible. Jane Curry and Jack MacGowran have chosen to do their entire presentations without the aid of props. Some of the performers use simply a desk and a chair or a lecturn to simulate a lecture type setting. Performers employing this type set include Geilgud, Ingles, McCowen, Price, Whitmore as Rogers and Truman, Williams in all three shows, and Windom. Other artists have used suggestive sets. Henry Fonda's set suggested the three places Darrow spent the most time: the courtroom, his study, and his living room. H. R. Poindexter recreated Emily Dickenson's father's house for Julie Harris's one-woman show, and James Whitmore chose to use a replica of Roosevelt's home for the set of

"Bully." Mobility is one of the advantages of a one-person show, and most performers who have chosen to tour their shows prefer to pack and carry as little as possible.

4. What are the differences in styles of performance?

Samuel Foote, Charles Dibdin, George Alexander Stevens, Charles Mathews and other early one-man performers chose to use a very informal presentational style. Due to the light nature of their shows and dependence on interaction with their audiences, the lecture-type performances were effective for this mode of entertainment. In contemporary one-person shows the artist's preferences combined with the literature helps dictate performance styles. Whitmore as Will Rogers and Jane Curry choose to keep their shows light and conversational. They employ off-stage focus which means they maintain eye contact with the audience and occasionally make extemporaneous references to them. Hal Holbrook, Vincent Price, and Emlyn Williams as Dickens are recreating a lecture environment. Although they also use offstage direct focus, their manner of presentation is more formal. Some of the one-person shows incorporate both offstage direct and offstage indirect focus. Offstage indirect is used when the actor is speaking to imaginary characters placed in the audience. Shows using a combination of the two include "Clarence Darrow for the Defense," "The Lord of the Rings," "MacGowran in the Works of Samuel Beckett," "St. Mark's Gospel," and "Thurber II." Three of the shows studied combined offstage direct focus with onstage focus talking to imaginary characters they pretend are present in their living room, courtroom, or other onstage environment created. These

three shows are "Bully," "Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein, Gertrude Stein," and "The Belle of Amherst."

5. What is the overall effectiveness of contemporary one-person shows?

The effectiveness of the performance of the one-person shows was ascertained from the multiple reviews studied. Critics, in reviewing the shows, focus primarily on the acting of the performers and how well the script adapts for the stage. Although most critics praise the acting of the performers, some find fault in the material chosen. The subject of Oscar Wilde for a one-person show was questioned due to the revelation of his personal life conveyed in a recreated lecture-type situation. Richard Eder in his review of "Bully," gives his criteria for a successful script stating:

Success in re-creating an eminent figure onstage from his or her words depends heavily upon the subject chosen. It should be a man or woman of words, or at least one who uses words well ¹

Mr. Eder felt that although Theodore Roosevelt was a great historical figure, his life did not provide an exciting or interesting script needed to maintain audience attention. Overall, the choice of contemporary scripts have adapted well to oral stage presentation. For the best results, the script should be adapted thematically. The artist must decide what his purpose or goals are before the adaptation process begins. If presenting a public figure the artist must decide if he wants

¹Richard Eder, rev. of "Bully," by James Whitmore, The New York Times, 2 Nov. 1977.

to choose a particular time in their life, as Whitmore did with Truman and Roosevelt, or does he want to provide a general biographical overview, like Fonda as Darrow and Harris as Dickens? The theme may be based on "a day in the life" in which the character reminiscences. Examples of this choice are "Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein" and "Diversions and Delights." Whatever choice the performer makes concerning the compilation of material for a script, the end result must be a fluid, cohesive, complete work in order for the audience to follow the purpose of the performance.

6. What are the different types of shows addressed in this study?

The early one-man show performers combined short skits, songs, and chaffing of public officials to delight and amuse their audiences. The content of these early productions held little value except pure light entertainment. Smith, Thackeray, Dickens, and Twain chose to present their own work and found their written manuscripts adapted well to oral interpretation. Some showpersons have chosen to present an illumination of a historical figure providing the audience with a biography of these famous men and women as well as a peek into the era in which they lived. Henry Fonda recreates for his audience the character of Clarence Darrow and Darrow's influences on the pedagogical issue addressed in the famous Scopes Trial; Vincent Price offers a broken-down, pathetic Oscar Wilde and the audience becomes aware of a man whose life was dictated by the norms and social mores of his day; James Whitmore's impersonation of Will Rogers presents satirical hindsight into the political decisions

and state of affairs of America during the Depression and first world war; "Give 'Em Hell, Harry!" and "Bully" by Whitmore, provide insight into the trials and painful decision-making that accompanies the office of President of the United States.

Other artists have chosen to convey an author's work as their primary emphasis. Jane Curry introduces the general public to Samantha Smith Allen and the works of Marietta Holley. John Geilgud offers various scenes from Shakespeare's great heroes chosen to formulate the thematic development of the "ages of man"; Julie Harris conveys the life of Emily Dickenson through her poetry and letters; Hal Holbrook delights his audience with the stories of Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer; Rob Ingles becomes the hobbits in Tolkein's work; Jack MacGowran brings a compilation of Beckett's plays and novels; Alec McCowen offers an exciting interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel; Emlyn Williams recreates the lectures of Dickens, poetry of Dylan Thomas, and works of Saki; and William Windom entertains the audience with the cartoons and stories of James Thurber.

7. What general conclusions may be drawn from the study of early and contemporary one-person shows?

One of the main conclusions this writer has drawn concerning the comparison of the initial one-person shows to the contemporary regards the script itself. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the scripts adhered to no set form and manifested light, comic sketches, songs and monologues. In the late nineteenth century, Dickens, Thackeray, and Twain began providing literary worth to their shows

through readings of their own works. Contemporary artists select material with literary value to adapt to a more sophisticated audience. The performances provide a learning experience as well as an evening's entertainment.

The selection of material, adaptation processes, and style of presentation follow no fixed form. Each show is different due to the performer's attitudes and the type literature selected. Most scripts chosen for oral presentation have been successful, and from the reviews, it seems that more emphasis is placed on the acting abilities of the performer than on the content or organization of script.

This thesis has attempted to fill the void in the historical evolution of the one-person show. It has further sought to study and analyze some contemporary one-person shows. In striving to assimilate the historical materials on this mode of entertainment, this writer has become aware of the possibilities for investigating other one-person shows not addressed in this thesis. Some examples are Joanna MacLay as Anne Sexton, Dan Haughey as Ulysses S. Grant, David Hawes impersonating Artemus Ward, Jim Stubbs interpreting the works of Edgar Allen Poe, Michale MacLiammoir reading selections of Irish literature, Kenneth Crannell's "Flowers for Algernon," and James Brewster as Henry David Thoreau. From the shows which have been discussed in this thesis, oral interpretation students can see different approaches to selection of material, adaptation processes, and presentation styles. The thesis could also serve as a tool for those wishing to compile a one-person show.

Further research could be conducted concerning the one-person show as a pedagogical tool for the secondary school or college classroom. Study is open in the evolvement of the audience from the mid-1700's to the present. The audiences to which Samuel Foote and Charles Dibdin played were more bawdy and less sophisticated than those of Charles Mathews through Mark Twain. Chautauqua artists performed primarily for rural, relatively uneducated audiences and contemporary artists seem interested in performing for college groups. It would be interesting to see how the audience influences the selection of material and how the audience influences the overall emergence of the contemporary form.

Another study for which this thesis has laid some groundwork is research into the political aspects prevalent in some of the shows, "Will Rogers U.S.A.," "Give 'Em Hell, Harry," and "Bully" are three examples which provide insight into the historical and political events of the day. Other questions arise from this study:

1. Have the changes in history from Samuel Foote's day to the present influenced the shaping of the one-person show?
2. How is the era in which these characters lived reflected in their shows?
3. What social mores are prevalent in the one-person shows presented in this thesis as well as other one-person shows?
4. What can be learned through the literature concerning social values in the lifetime of Gertrude Stein, Oscar Wilde, and Samantha Smith Allen?

These are just a few of the questions which have become evident from this writer's research. As with any study these questions will lead to others. Although it is impossible to answer all the questions concerning one-person shows, this thesis has provided one step in a long investigation to be continued by future researchers.

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