

# Sev's Memory: More Mark Twain in BNS?

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 24 Nov 1999

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Mitchell A. Bailey — 24 Nov 1999, 13:37

Well, forget Borges, forget Proust - it would appear Mr. Wolfe's mentor is the late Samuel Clemens!<g> Now that we've spotted a possible source for the "eclipse trick" in UNS, and the first-person narrative style (lifted from \_Huckleberry Finn\_<g>) we can go back to \_Life on the Mississippi\_ and extracted excerpts of description of a person the young "cub" pilot Sam Clemens allegedly encountered during his early career:

[I served] for a while under a pilot whose feats of memory were a constant marvel to me. However, his memory was born in him ...  
He could NOT forget any thing. ...  
The most trivial details remained as distinct and luminous in his head, after they had lain there for years, as the most memorable events. ...  
Such a memory as that is a great misfortune. To it, all occurrences are of the same size. Its possessor cannot distinguish an interesting circumstance from an uninteresting one. As a talker, he is bound to clog his narrative with tiresome details .... Moreover, he cannot stick to his subject. He picks up every little grain of memory he discerns in his way, and so is led aside. Mr. Brown would start out with the honest intention of telling you a vastly funny anecdote about a dog. ...his memory would start with the dog's breed and personal appearance; drift into a history of his owner; of his owner's family, ... and at the end of three or four hours' tedious jaw, the watch would change, and Brown would go ... muttering extracts from sermons he had heard years before ...  
And the original first mention would be all you had learned about that dog, after all this waiting and hungering.

Sound familiar? Compare that to Sev's complaint that the "eidolons" of his memory were so real and absorbing they sometimes prevented him from acting when he needed to. I think he complained somewhat along the lines of "all occurrences are the same size", too.