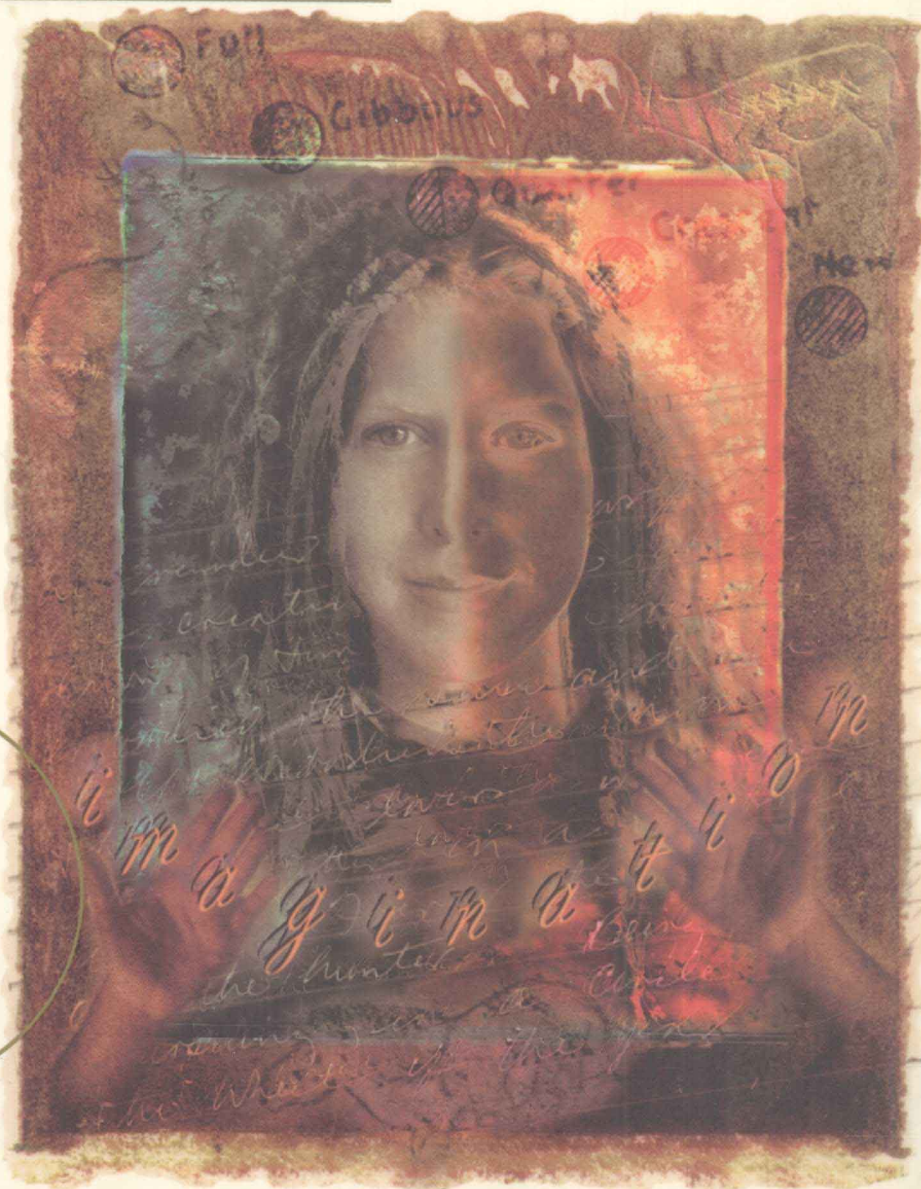


Roles in Interpretation



JUDY
E.
YORDON

Roles in Interpretation Fourth Edition

Judy E. Yordon

Ball State University



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ROLES IN INTERPRETATION

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Preface

Since the second edition of *Roles in Interpretation* was released, much has changed in the field of interpretation. In many colleges and universities throughout the country, interpretation is now called “performance studies” to reflect its expanding horizons and broadened emphasis. The definition of two of our most fundamental components has altered: What is “text,” and what is “performance”? Neither term is easily or universally defined to everyone’s satisfaction.

Traditional definitions of text consider primarily literary texts: prose, drama, poetry—the three genres of literature primarily covered in this book. But the dimensions of what “text” means have grown. We now define text more broadly and include not just literary texts but oral texts. Personal narratives, stories of all kinds, for example, are possible texts for performance. Aesthetic objects may be considered texts, as well. A quilt may be viewed as a text of a particular family, time period, culture. Rituals may be viewed as social or cultural texts. Demonstrations, rallies, and sit-ins may be viewed as political texts. Everyday conversations may even be analyzed and performed as dialogic texts. Text, then, is a metaphor for all kinds of experiences, and we “read” texts, understand them, through other texts that we have read, seen, experienced.

Contemporary literary theory also challenges our traditional definitions of “text.” As Chapter 3 explains, there are some literary critics who believe we may never know a text—that an interpretation is always subjective and personal—that a text has no definitive interpretation. As Louise M. Rosenblatt tells us, “The reading of any work of literature is, of necessity, an individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and notions of a particular reader” (*The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, p. xii). When we read a text, we constitute it, we create its meaning as a result of the way we interpret language symbols. Since there is no meaning in a text, according to this theory, the only meaning that counts is our own personal interpretation. The text we know is the text we create from our own understanding. Chapter 3 examines this and other recent theories of interpretation, including brief discussions and applications of structuralism, deconstructionism, feminism, reader response theory, and others.

Performance, too, has expanded its meaning. The change in terminology from “oral interpretation” to “performance studies” reflects the field’s new interest in the varied ramifications of “performance.” Performance is a reflection of our humanness, culture, and communication; it is a way of knowing and being. Performance is a part of our daily lives since we “play roles” all the time—deciding how to speak,

what to wear, and how to behave depending on the situation and occasion. Life is a performance. Thus, the title of this text, *Roles in Interpretation*. The roles you play in life and the roles you play while interpreting literature complement, inform, and enrich each other.

Our cultural diversity is a rich resource for performance, and is well represented in this third edition. At the end of each of the genre chapters (Chapters 6, 7, and 8) is an expanded list of selections for performance that includes multicultural texts. At the end of Chapter 2, an updated bibliography is preceded by a discussion of the necessity for appreciating more than just texts of the dominant culture. Throughout the book, selections reflect the diversity of literature in our culture.

It is my desire that this revision of *Roles in Interpretation* help keep the contemporary student up-to-date on the changes both in the field of literature and performance theory. Contemporary literary theory and performance theory have affected revisions throughout the text, but most profoundly in Chapters 1, 2, and 3. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 include more nontraditional and multicultural literature and revised "Selections for Performance" lists. Chapter 9—Assorted Roles—is now a potpourri devoted to the analysis of a variety of literary forms and performance styles. The literary forms include letters, diaries, essays, biographies, autobiographies, histories, children's literature, and postmodern literature. The performance styles explored in Chapter 9 include program performances, media performances, personal narratives, and performance art. This chapter need not be read or assigned in its entirety. It has been written so that only sections relevant to a particular assignment need be read at any one time. The various discussions of each literary form and performance style stand alone and may be read in any order.

Chapter 10 is now a short introduction to group forms of interpretation, including readers theatre and chamber theatre. If time permits, a group activity could be included in a beginning interpretation class—this chapter is included to encourage this type of group involvement.

A new addition to this text is a glossary, which helps students keep the definitions of key terms at their fingertips.

I wish to thank the many people whose comments and suggestions were of great help to me in developing and writing the first edition. They include Arlie Daniel of The University of Nebraska, Beverly Hendricks of California State University, Jeré Veilleux of Rollins College, Marion Kleinau of Southern Illinois University, Leslie Irene Coger of Southwest Missouri State University, Bruce Manchester of George Mason University, David Mrizek of San Antonio College, and Timothy Gura of Brooklyn College.

The reviewers of the second edition were extremely helpful in improving this text. Second edition reviewers include Annette Mazzaferri and Roberta Crisson of Kutztown University, Frank P. Trimble of The University of North Carolina at Wilmington, and Larry G. Schnoor of Mankato State University. In addition, I would like to thank Carole Tallant (The University of North Carolina at

Wilmington) and Richard L. Lippke (Indiana University Southeast) for their helpful suggestions and Leslie Irene Coger for her continuous support and encouragement.

I received extraordinary help for the third edition from the following kind souls: John Pea, Patti White, Laura Jansen, Debbie Thomas, Sara René Martin, and Ken Dingledine of Ball State University. In addition, I would like especially to thank Ron Shields, whose assistance was beyond the call of duty. Reviewers for the third edition include Frank P. Trimble, University of North Carolina; Bruce B. Manchester, George Mason University; Ronald E. Shields, Bowling Green State University; and Roberta L. Crisson, Kutztown University. Their feedback was essential and much appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank Sam Clemmons for assistance with photography on all three editions, and the following people for allowing me to use their photographs in this book: Gary Simmers, Michael Rhea, Floyd King, Sara René Martin, Laura Sollman, Mark Henry, Cindy Williams, Chien Ping Chen, Kathy Riedman, and Robert Lawrence. It goes without saying that this book would not exist were it not for the inspiration of my students, teachers, and colleagues—past and present.

Judy E. Yordon

Preface for the Fourth Edition

In the new edition of *Roles in Interpretation* I have refined and expanded definitions and discussion of terms (e.g., internal and external modes) that have caused confusion for some readers of the text. Numerous minor changes throughout the text have improved its clarity. The primary emphasis on the interpretation of literature through performance and sharing that performance with an audience remains. We acknowledge the importance of the shift to performance studies in the discipline of interpretation. The book maintains its traditional emphasis while incorporating more discussion of the “roles we play in life” and the relationship between “life and performance.”

The first major change in the fourth edition is the substitution of the terms “speaker” and “audience” modes for external and internal modes. This change alleviates the problem of having to remember that external means speaker and internal means audience—we have just eliminated that “middle step.”

Another change is the addition of a new section in Chapter 4 on memorization techniques. It is a fairly wide-spread convention that solo performers no longer use scripts, therefore techniques to aid the memorization process are necessary. The techniques described in this chapter come from professional performers who shared their memorization methods. It is hoped that this section will aid those students with little performance experience who find memorization particularly difficult. We stress, however, that memorization is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Memorization should probably be the first step in the process of preparing a text for performance. Only once the material is learned are we able to create meaning and make decisions about performance.

There are many new literary selections throughout the book, including a new personal narrative written by a Japanese exchange student in Chapter 9. Our interest in providing a voice for other cultures, minority cultures, and marginalized groups is manifested in the diverse choice of selections throughout.

We stress the importance of the performer’s introduction primarily in Chapters 4 and 5. Defining his or her interpretation of the material in the introduction helps the performer clarify exactly what he or she is attempting to do, and later helps focus the evaluation session on what the performer intended and how well this intention was realized in performance. In Chapter 4, we have made changes in the section on

delivery styles of introductions, and added a clarified discussion of focus, including a new diagram of focus types. Also in Chapter 4, we introduce an alternative to character placement called “dissolve” and in Chapter 6 offer a discussion of second-person texts and the interpretation of the slippery “you” in a text.

This edition spends much more time explaining the importance of making “who is addressed” a fundamental interpretation decision. There is more information in Chapter six on creating implied audiences, and on the temporal element, the rhythm of action, and style in prose fiction.

There are also changes in the Appendix: Careers in Interpretation. The Appendix supplies much useful information to help interpretation/performance studies students make future plans, including careers for performance-trained people, names and addresses of people to contact, and discussion of the importance of interpretation and performance studies to many new and growing fields and professions.

The glossary has been expanded and clarified, and the bibliography has been updated.

In this modern age of technology when books are being replaced by computer screens, it seems even more important to focus on literature in performance. We have a responsibility to keep the arts alive!

With this edition comes a new publisher—McGraw-Hill. We humbly thank Wm. C. Brown/Brown and Benchmark for their invaluable assistance with the first three editions of this text, and we look forward to forging a new relationship with McGraw-Hill. We are very grateful to the many reviewers of each edition of this text, and give special thanks to the reviewers of this edition: John S. Gentile, Kennesaw State University; Diane De Franco-Kling, Sterling College; Mary L. Holloway, Messiah College; and Carol H. Grimes, Florida Community College. A special thanks, also, to our new editor, Jennie Katsaros, whose patience and understanding made composing this edition most pleasurable. Again, I thank photographer, Sam Clemmons for his time and extraordinary talent, and the following people who allowed me to use their photographs: Robyn Norris, Jessica Anderson, Ayumi Nakamae, Marcus Weemes, Nicholas Brenner, Dana Nichols, Franklin Gray, Matt Van Curen, and Cassandra Strandin Bolander. Special thanks to Scott Halberstadt for makeup assistance for one of the photos. In addition, I would like to thank John Pea for assistance with Chapter 3, Jared Grohs for help with the focus chart in Chapter 4, and especially Robyn Norris who worked long and hard to obtain the permissions necessary for this edition. As always, I am indebted to my students, teachers, and colleagues—past and present.

Judy E. Yordon

Distinguished Professor of Performance Studies

Contents

PART ONE: INITIAL ROLES

1	Your Role in Interpretation	1
	Introducing Solo Interpretation Performance	3
	The Roles We Play	3
	Literature and Solo Interpretation Performance	4
	Acting and Solo Interpretation Performance	5
	Public Speaking and Solo Interpretation Performance	7
	What Are the Values of Solo Interpretation Performance?	8
	What Is the Difference between Solo Interpretation Performance and Oral Reading?	9
	What Is Intertextuality?	10
	Class Exercises	12
	Is Interpretation Different from Other Literature Courses?	13
	What Is Interpretation?	14
	Interpretation Is an Art	14
	Interpretation Is a Process	15
	Interpretation Is the Study of Literature	18
	Literary Speakers	18
	Literary Audiences	20
	Interpretation Is Sharing Literature with an Audience	20
	What Literary Selection Should I Choose?	21
	Universality	23
	Individuality	23

	Suggestion	24
	Class Exercise	25
	How Do I Prepare a Selection for Performance?	26
	A Sample Analysis and Performance	28
	Suggestions for "The Use of Force"	28
	A Sample Analysis of "The Use of Force"	32
	Performance Suggestions for "The Use of Force"	33
	Composing and Presenting the Introduction	37
	Summary	38
2	Your Role with Literature: Appreciation	40
	What Is Literature?	41
	What Types of Literature Are Available?	47
	Generic Classification	47
	How Do I Find the Right Selection?	48
	Appreciating Literature	52
	An Anthology of Texts for Your Appreciation	52
	Summary	65
	Sources to Check for Selections to Perform	66
3	Your Role with Literature: Analysis	74
	Types of Literary Analyses	75
	The Dramatistic Analysis	80
	A Sample Dramatistic Analysis of "Ring the Bells"	80
	Performance Suggestions for "Ring the Bells"	83
	Class Exercise	84
	The Modal Approach	88
	Speaker Modal Analysis	88
	Audience Modal Analysis	93
	Generic and Modal Classifications Combined	95
	Summary of Lyric, Dramatic, and Epic Mode	
	Characteristics	98
	Class Exercise	102
	A Sample Modal Analysis of "Dover Beach"	103
	Summary	106

4	Your Role in Rehearsal and Performance	108
	The Introduction	110
	Styles of Delivery	111
	Content	112
	Using the Script/Memorization Techniques	114
	Memorization Techniques	118
	Class Exercise	121
	Using the Lectern	121
	Cutting	122
	Imagery and Sensory Showing	123
	Imagery	123
	Sensory Imagery	124
	Sensory Showing	125
	Aesthetic Distance	126
	Empathy and Sympathy	127
	Focus	129
	Projection	129
	Shifts in Audience Mode	130
	Class Exercise	133
	Character Placement	137
	Dissolve Technique	139
	Class Exercise	140
	Time and Place Changes	140
	Tensiveness	141
	Meeting the Audience	143
	Summary	145
5	Your Role as Audience and Evaluator	146
	Your Responsibilities as an Audience Member	147
	Your Role as Audience: To Listen	147
	Your Role as Audience: To Constitute	149
	Your Role as Audience: To Accept	150
	Your Role as Audience: To Respond	151
	Your Responsibilities as an Evaluator	151
	General Guidelines for Evaluation	152
	Specific Guidelines for Evaluation	155
	Summary	157

PART TWO: LITERARY ROLES

6	Your Role with Prose Fiction	160
	A Sample Analysis of "The Open Window"	161
	Who Is Speaking?	164
	Point of View	165
	Point of View and "The Open Window"	166
	First-Person Point of View	167
	Third-Person Point of View	169
	Second-Person Point of View	171
	Performance and Point of View	171
	Class Exercise	174
	Whom Is the Narrator Speaking To?	179
	What Does the Narrator Speak About?	181
	Where Does the Narrator Tell the Story From?	183
	When Does the Narrator Tell the Story?	184
	Rhythm of Action	185
	Actual Time and Virtual Time	189
	How Is the Story Told?	190
	Tone and Style	190
	Mood	191
	Direct and Indirect Discourse	192
	Tag Lines	193
	Why Is the Story Told?	194
	Modal Analysis of Prose Fiction	195
	Putting It All Together	197
	Selected Prose Fiction Texts Appropriate for Performance	199
	Summary	201
7	Your Role with Drama	202
	Drama and Prose Fiction	203
	What Are the Basic Characteristics of Drama?	204
	Who Is Speaking?	204
	Character	204
	Body Fact and Body Act	210
	Structural and Transactional Analysis	217
	Class Exercise	224
	Who Is Being Addressed: Audience Mode	225
	What Do the Characters Speak About?	230
	Plot	230

Where and When Does the Play Take Place?	232
How Do the Characters Speak?	233
Diction and Music	233
Why Are the Characters Speaking?	237
Character Motivations and Intentions	237
Thought	238
Spectacle: The Visual and Auditory Dimensions	239
Spectacle Fact and Spectacle Act	239
A Sample Analysis of "Constantinople Smith"	240
Analysis of Constantinople Smith	248
Analysis of Christina	248
Analysis of Reality	249
Performance Suggestions for "Constantinople Smith"	250
Speaker and Audience Mode and Drama	253
Putting It All Together	254
Selected Plays Appropriate for Performance	255
Summary	257

8 | Your Role with Poetry 258

Begin Analysis with the Poem's Title	260
Who Is Speaking? and Who Is Being Addressed?	261
Mode	261
Genres of Poetry	261
Class Exercise	263
Class Exercise	266
Class Exercise	269
Class Exercise	272
What Is the Speaker Speaking About?	273
When and Where Does the Speaker Speak?	277
How Does the Speaker Speak?	279
Sensory Imagery	280
Class Exercise	281
Literary Imagery	281
Class Exercise	285
Tone Color	286
Meter	291
The Most Common Types of Metrical Feet	295
Rhythmic Variety	296
Class Exercise	300
Conventional Verse and Free Verse	301
Metrical Prosody Types	301

	Fulcrum	303
	Climaxes	307
	Why Does the Speaker Speak?	307
	Putting It All Together	308
	Selected Poems Appropriate for Performance	309
	Summary	311
9	Assorted Roles	314
	Your Role with Additional Literary Forms and Performance Styles	315
	Literary Forms	315
	Letters	317
	Diaries	321
	Essays	325
	Biographies, Autobiographies, Histories	331
	Children's Literature	326
	Postmodern Literature	344
	Performance Styles	349
	The Program Performance	349
	The Media Performance	354
	Personal Narratives	359
	Class Exercise	362
	Performance Art	362
	Class Exercise	365
	Summary	365
10	Your Role as Group Performer: Readers Theatre and Chamber Theatre	368
	Experimental Group Performance Possibilities	370
	Readers Theatre	371
	Chamber Theatre	382
	Summary	390
	Selected Texts on (or Including Information on) Group Interpretation	390
	Appendix: Career Opportunities in Interpretation	393
	Glossary	407
	Bibliography	417
	Author-Title Index	425
	Subject Index	433

Initial Roles

MILY DICKINSON

Because I Could Not Stop for Death

Because I could not stop for Death—
He kindly stopped for me—
The Carriage held but just Ourselves—
And Immortality.

We slowly drove—He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility—

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess—in the Ring—
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain—
We passed the Setting Sun—

Or rather—He passed Us—
The Dews drew quivering and chill—
For only Gossamer,⁸ my Gown²—
My Tippet⁹—only Tulle¹—

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground—
The Roof was scarcely visible—
The Cornice—in the Ground—

Since then—'tis Centuries—and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity—

INTRODUCING SOLO INTERPRETATION PERFORMANCE

The Roles We Play

Interpretation is an artistic process of studying literature through performance and sharing that study with an audience. When we study interpretation, we are primarily interested in the relationship between you and a text, in this case, literary texts, through the medium of performance. But are texts only “literary,” and what do we mean by “performance”? The meanings of both these terms have greatly expanded since the discipline of interpretation was incorporated into an academic field entitled performance studies. Performance studies is an interdisciplinary field of knowledge that focuses on elements of texts, performers, and audiences, individually or in groups, to advance understanding of the aesthetic, historical, psychological, political, and sociocultural dimensions of performance and performative events.¹

When we consider “text,” we include literary texts (prose, drama, poetry), as well as aesthetic objects (a quilt, for example, is a “text” of a particular family, time period, culture), oral texts (personal narratives, everyday conversations), and ethnographic studies of a particular culture or minority group, for example. Rituals are social or cultural texts; demonstrations, rallies, and sit-ins are political texts; drawings and dance are texts of self-expression. Text, then, is a metaphor for all kinds of experience, and we “read” texts, we understand them, through other texts that we have read, seen, experienced.

By “performing” we mean the traditional notion of performance as in theatrical productions, but we also include performances in a more general sense—including the roles you play on a daily basis. Performance is a human activity involving fixed texts such as literary texts and those used in stage, film, and television and more spontaneous texts, including everyday conversation, cultural rituals, and storytelling. Human beings always act or play roles—throughout childhood, for example, we often rehearse being adults. Your everyday behavior (actions), appearance (costume), and language (dialogue) alter depending on the situation you are in and the role you assume. For example, try starting a conversation about what you did last night with a close friend. Then discuss the same subject with a teacher, a boss, a grandparent. How did the conversation change? How did you adjust or modify your behavior, your language—your “performance”? How does your behavior differ at job interviews or formal dinners or holiday gatherings or religious services or political rallies or dances? How do you “act” with your friends as opposed to your mother, or your lover, or the president of a large corporation? Our daily lives are filled with performance events. Richard Schechner includes a wide spectrum of events in his discussion of performance, including “theatre, dance, music, sacred ritual, secular ritual, sports, social drama, . . . a bar