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THE ROLE OF THE NARRATOR IN PROSE INTERPRETATION

Mark Stuckey is an Assistant Professor of Communications at Bethel College and Chairman of the Competitive Forensics Program.

The role narration plays in prose interpretation is a question frequently addressed by the forensic community. Rather than explore the narrative potential of a prose selection, students are often encouraged to "find a piece with dialogue." A dialogue laden selection presents few coaching or interpretation problems in that clear dramatic criteria can be used in practice and in performance. Kindly stated, narrative prose is terrain frequently avoided or treated in a sadly superficial manner by many students and coaches. It will be my thesis that the richness of the narrator's perspective in prose must be cultivated, and that students must be challenged to explore the role of narration in interpretative literature.

As a reference point for discussion, it seems appropriate to clarify what narrative prose entails. Narrative prose, according to Maclay and Sloan (1972), is a synthesis of the lyric and the dramatic modes of literature: it is the epic mode. In the lyric mode, the speaker tells his story in his own person (the teller); in the dramatic mode, the speaker shows his story through others (the tale); and in the epic mode, the speaker shows and tells his story by speaking in his own person and by allowing others to speak for him (p. 233). Thus, all narrative prose

should have at least two dimensions: the teller and the tale. Limiting narrative prose to dialogue, or the tale, undermines the key role that narration plays in the epic mode of literature.

What then is the narrative role in prose? Gertrude Stein has said that, "Narrative is what anybody has to say in any way about anything that can happen, has happened, will happen in any way. That is what narrative is and so of course there always is narrative and anybody can stop listening to any way of telling anything. This undoubtedly can and does happen, even if it is exciting enough or has been" (Gertrude Stein, 1969, pp. 31-32). Too often we "stop listening" to narrative, in part because the reader doesn't understand the central role narration plays in the interpretation of prose.

The first key to understanding the narrative role is to determine the narrator's point of view. From whose eyes are events being seen? What is literally the physical point of view of the narration? The narrator may take an involved point of view. An involved or subjective point of view is often in first person narration. Such a narrator may be a major participant in the action and usually is the most fully dramatized. The first person involved narrator is considered very credible in that the

story's events are witnessed first-hand. At the other end of the continuum, the narrator may take an objective point of view and appear to be reporting events from the outside. Typically the objective point of view is expressed in third person narration. Like first person, it is credible because the narrator seems to be reporting what really happened. The third person point of view is unique in that the narration is more peripheral to the story's action and is the least fully dramatized.

Narrative roles, however, are not limited to only subjective or objective postures. In fact, some of the most challenging narrative roles lie somewhere between subjective and objective points of view. For example, the narrator may be involved as a minor participant in the action or he may have limited omniscience wherein the inner workings of a character are known. A narrator might even have general omniscience and know the thoughts of all the characters. Incidentally, general omniscience runs the risk of lacking credibility in that complete omniscience is clearly not a human attribute. But my point is that the narrator's point of view varies with each piece of literature. Furthermore, it determines the reader's relationship with the audience as well as how emphatically the reader is involved with the narration.

A second issue pertinent to the narrator's role is how point of view, or the speaker in the work,

correlates to viewpoint, or the speaker of the work. The author's attitude may or may not be the narrator's attitude; a discrepancy in values may exist between author and narrator. In other words, the narrator's reliability, or degree to which a narrative role reflects or embodies the attitudes and values of the author, must be assessed prior to performance.

Wayne C. Boothe presents the third aspect of a narrator's role when he argues that "the author cannot choose to avoid rhetoric; he can choose only the kind of rhetoric he will employ. He cannot choose whether or not to effect his reader's evaluations by his choice of narrative manner; he can only choose whether to do it well or poorly" (1961, p. 149). Both the narrator's and author's treatment of audience should be in agreement. Such rhetorical analysis will affect both whom the narrator addresses as well as whether the narrator speaks to the audience in an "open manner" (directly out to an audience), or in a "closed manner" (the audience witnesses what's going on).

It would appear that the diverse nature and importance of the narrative role in prose deserves more than a black magic-marker. Rather than cut narration, we must begin to analyze it with all the vigor we put into character analysis. A method of analyzing the narrator's role in a systematic fashion has been outlined by MacLay and Sloan; it is called double dramatic analysis—the analysis of

both the epic and dramatic modes of narrative prose. Double dramatic analysis first poses dramatic questions about the narrator: Who is he? What is his "epic situation?" (temoral and spacial location) Why is he telling the story? To whom is the narrator telling the story? How is the story told? (direct discourse—exact rendering of character's speech; indirect discourse—pronoun and tense changed and often introduced or followed with a narrative tag; free indirect discourse—pronoun and tense changed without a narrative tag) What is the narrator's story?

After an analysis of the narrator (the lyric mode), a similar set of questions are posed with respect to the story (the dramatic mode) and

its action. Placing both sets of dramatic analyses in juxtaposition to each other should result in a better understanding of the tensive relationship between the narrator and his story (the epic mode).

In retrospect, the narrator deserves at least equal time with dialogue in the analysis and interpretation of prose. Such analysis will result in not only more insightful prose performances, but also in more rewarding interpretive experiences.

Endnotes

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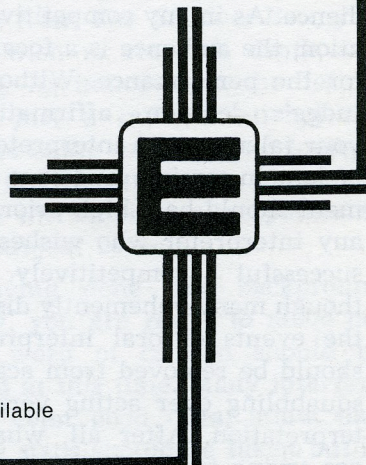
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DEVELOPING THE CHARACTERS FOR DRAMATIC INTERPRETATION

Rita Kirk Willock
Department of Communication
Stephen F. Austin State University

We often act as though the written word were primary in the act of communication, but carefully collected evidence suggests that individuals spend the major part of their lives with the spoken word, as speakers or listeners. Speech is not only concerned with diction, pronunciation, pitch and volume, not only with delivery; it is ultimately concerned with all that is meaningful to the human being as a communicating agent—with his heart, mind, voice, reason and gestures.¹

¹Wallace A. Bacon, *The Art Interpretation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), p.3.

Dramatic interpretation encompasses all the elements that Wallace Bacon itemizes above. The interpreter must analyze the written word, stretch his skills of good delivery, and translate the ultimate values of the selection to the audience. As in any competitive situation, the audience is a focal point for the performance. Without the judge's decision, affirmation of your talents as an interpreter may be long in coming. Audience enjoyment should be a high priority for any interpreter who wishes to be successful competitively. Although many vehemently disagree, the events of oral interpretation should be removed from academic squabbling over acting versus interpretation. After all, what you are trying to accomplish is to sell

the literature, to make it vivid and compelling, to stretch our imaginations and draw us into the lives and plights of others, to stretch our talents as communicators. herefore, anything that impedes that process is merely an academic exercise.

With that philosophy in mind, it is the purpose of this paper to examine the means for developing the characters for dramatic interpretation.

To begin with, oral interpretation is a recreative art in which the performer translates and communicates the ideas, attitudes, and intent of an author to an audience by using reproduction and response, both intellectually and emotionally, by using facial, vocal and bodily gestures. This definition sets the stage for the initial preparation of a selection. Assuming that the interpreter has selected the material, the first task is to analyze the ideas, attitudes and intent of the author. This process requires that you read the entire play, not just the scene that you are performing. Interviews or notes from the author about the play as well as critical reviews provide a great deal of insight into what the author is trying to accomplish. Oral interpretation demands that you take the author's point of view since you are conveying the entire scene instead of the one-dimen-

sional view of a single character. That point of view is often a necessary element for the introduction of the piece as you begin the process to translate the author's intent. Many beginning interpreters make the mistake of providing the audience with information but not translating the information to us. To phrase it academically, they fail to create the proper pathos for the selection. The introduction is the interpreter's one opportunity to prepare us for the scene to follow. In dramatic interpretation, setting those characters for us is critical since we do not have the time for any further expository information.

Once the scene has been determined, the interpreter should also evaluate what information the audience needs in order to understand the scene. We often make the mistake of assuming that the audience knows the play as well as we do. In order to really know and understand the play the interpreter must know some basic information. To begin with, you must know the structural elements of the play including identifying the conflict, rising action, crisis, climax, and denouement (or resolution of the scene). Know the basic plot structure of the play in order to know the playwright's direction. Armed with this background information you are ready to begin the serious analysis of the selection.

The first element of a good interpretation is that the interpreter understand the intricate working

of the scene. Therefore, take the scene apart character by character. Know everything you can about each character as if you were preparing to play the role on stage. Know how each character lives, thinks, feels, behaves and, most importantly, discover *why*. What is the relationship between the characters? How can you convey that to the audience? Are there words or phrases that suggest that relationship? Can you convey that relationship by nonverbal communication? Take extensive notes as you analyze these areas. Many of them will be forgotten as you begin to work on the whole piece. Next, analyze what devices the author has used to make the play work—such as the period, social customs, manners and place. At this point, the interpreter should research any areas that he does not understand. Often audiences will pick up on the fact that the performer does not understand a particular word or allusion to history. Other areas may also require research. If you are performing a scene from *The Shadow Box*, you may wish to research death and dying. As indicated in the definition, just a pure emotional response to the subject is not enough. The interpreter needs to understand the intellectual responses to the subject as well.

Having done this background study, you are ready to move on. One word of caution should be noted at this time. Many interpreters, even good ones, know that these steps should be taken but in

the rush of preparing five events for next week's tournament the temptation is there to pick a scene from the files and fake it. With a few notable exceptions most judges can spot this quickly and respond with cynical ballots that often hurt feelings. The extra effort of doing your job thoroughly is well worth the investment of time and the payoff is in receiving consistently high ratings.

The next step in preparation is to read the selection aloud several times just to get a feel for the sound of the language and to begin to play with the characters. Try to make each reading as different from the others as you can. This will help you try to explore all the different ways of conveying the information. Each character will begin to become different from the others. Note the specific qualities of each character. What kind of personality does the character have? How can that be translated in terms of rate, pitch, diction and volume? If we were to tape a conversation of five people having coffee, a reasonable person would know that without ever having seen these people, you would be able to make a lot of evaluations about each of them. Except on rare occasions you would be able to identify each of the characters by his or her voice pattern. The same is true of oral interpretation. Make each character's voice distinctive, appropriate and consistent with everything else that you know about that character. Begin your study of the characters by

noting what is different about them. Then break down the characters one at a time.

As you focus on a single character, examine how others perceive him and how he perceives himself. Determine what the author's attitude is toward this character. What kind of mannerisms would this character have? Broad gestures or timid ones? Good or poor posture? How would the character walk, sit, eat? What makes us like this person? Professor George Kernodle, famous Shakespearean scholar, once noted that even the villains must have something that draws the audience to them. We must see that there is something redeemable in every character. If we don't (and the character is without even one virtue) then we cease to care what happens to that person. We must understand the hopes of Aldonza to become a Ducinea or we are glad that her dreams are destroyed and thus subvert the author's intent.

After each character has been thoroughly analyzed, begin to put the scene together again. Discover the dominant mood of the selection. Then discover the minor mood changes. Students are often surprised when we speak of laughing at a funeral and yet often we exchange pleasantries about moments we shared with the deceased or funny things that happened to us along the way. Each of these minor mood changes still has to be discovered and portrayed clearly to the audience.

After several runs through, you will be able to determine what contributes most to the audience's pleasure. Note those and work to highlight that in your performance. My coaching philosophy is for the student to sell that selection through any means available within the limitations of the contest rules as long as you are faithful to the author.

Your selection should now be in presentable condition. Yet there is still much work to be done. The polishing touches of a performance raises the rating points and often accounts for a student advancing into the elimination rounds. This polish requires coaching as much as any play requires a director. You need an outside eye who can tell you if what you are doing works, and can help you find other techniques that will.

Coaches can specifically work on several things. One of the rudiments of interpretation of course, is to stay within the 45 degree angle. The coach can help you to place your characters in order to tell the audience how tall the other character is and how far apart he is standing from the other characters. The coach should also help the performer to figure out how to make smooth transitions when the dialogue switches from one character to another. The performer has a difficult task in picking up the cues so that the piece flows and yet makes the characters distinct. The key to this is obviously practice and criticism. Conversely, the interpreter also needs to note

where pauses need to be and how long to wait in order for them to be effective. Too many interpreters fail to use the pause effectively. Remember that the pause is not just dead air time. The pause is filled with meaningful silence. The coach should also be able to help the performer establish an appropriate aesthetic distance to the audience.

Each time that the interpreter performs from this point one should be as if there were an audience. Sloppy preparation and disclaimers before the notebook is even opened can forecast negative comments on the ballot. Performers should spend time learning how to set up for the performance as well as how to gracefully end the selection. A wealth of information has supported the notion that first and last impressions do make a difference.

Practice your selection before your friends (or your enemies if they are more honest with you). Listen to their comments. Note those things that you could do to improve. Practice. Practice. Practice.

At the heart of the dramatic interpretation is that the scene says something to the audience that both the interpreter and the author feel is important. The interpreter must strive to say it in a distinctive manner, to bring personal experiences to join those of the character, to make this selection belong to him. The author probably wrote words that she/he hoped would stimulate the audience's imagina-

tion. The interpreter has the task of bringing those images to life. Contained in a ten minute presentation, the cutting must provide a story for the interpreter to tell. With such a small amount of time, it is important that each word and weight. This involves an internal energy that comes from the author, the character and the interpreter.

Interpretation skills used in competition are not merely academic exercises. They are applicable anytime the teacher lectures, the lawyer goes to trial, or the business person presents his case. As Charlie Chaplain said in his *Memoirs of a Millionaire Tramp*:

“If only someone had used salesmanship, had read a stimulating preface to each study that could have titillated my mind, infused me with a fancy instead of facts, amused and intrigued me with the legerdemain of numbers, romanticized maps, given me a point of view about history and taught me the music of poetry, I might have become a scholar.”

TOWARDS A PEDAGOGICAL ETHIC OF INDIVIDUAL EVENTS

*Terry W. Cole, Ph.D.
Appalachian State University*

Many motives guide the practices of individual events; contestants, coaches and judges as they compete and interact with others in the forensics forum. Any of us who have been involved in this activity know what there are — some are honorable and some are not as honorable. It is unfortunate that the discipline has not generated the same degree of ethical examination of individual events as has its counterpart forensics activity, academic debating. Yet, there is a significant absence of such ethical considerations in our journals.

There are concerns though. Both the American Forensics Association and the National Forensics Association have promulgated statements concerning acceptable practices of individual events contestants' These statements, characterized by both organizations as "guidelines," are predicated on concerns for fair play and equitable competition. While they have partially filled the void in ethical analyses, they are limited in that they have promulgated standards in an ill-defined ethical environment. While such statements are worthwhile in that they articulate long felt concerns for questionable practices in individual events competition, provide some guidance for both students and coaches, and affirm an allegiance to right practice, they fall short of viable ethic-

al guidance because they do not proceed from any clearly identifiable rationale. Unless such guidelines are premised upon a generally accepted rationale, they offer little meaning beyond mere obedience or as simple standards of evaluation. It shall be the purpose of this paper to explore a possible rationale for an ethic of individual events.

Where does one search for a rationale for an ethic of individual events? Several scholarly examinations and explications of ethical systems offer assistance. Wayne Minnick argues that ethics derive from a consensus about enduring social values.² Karl Wallace observed that ethical standards "... are derived from the function of an art." He goes on to note that "The function of any art takes its ultimate meaning from what it tries to accomplish in its social setting." Upon examining the function of public persuasion, Wallace concludes that it is essentially political and thus inherently implies those values basic to our democratic system. His resulting ethic is premised upon and drawn from commonly agreed upon democratic values.³ In a recent examination of "Debate Ethics and Morality," Carolyn Keefe focuses upon the function of debate in terms of goals and means—"observable behaviors . . . related to ethics and goal achievement." Keefe sees

value consensus as basic to the goal-means relationship in her ethic of academic debate. She asks: "That what extent do all of us who subscribe to the position taken in this chapter *enact* our values of diligence, fairness, honesty, and concern for individuals and society?"⁴

These ethical inquiries into public persuasion and academic debate yield a heuristic for an examination of an ethic of individual events. They affirm the importance of function, goals, and means of goal attainment to any ethical system. More specifically, they reveal that an ethic is drawn from those agreed upon values which, in turn, shape and are shaped by the function and goals of the enterprise to which the ethic is applied.

Our enterprise is individual events competition-forensics competition which, for the purposes of this inquiry is distinct from debate. What then best defines the function and guides the goals of forensics?

Any realistic examination of forensics activities would conclude that the objective is not persuasion, exposition, or aesthetic appreciation of literature *per se*. A competitive persuader no more influences public decision making or private attitudes than a policy debater convincingly alters the course of public policy. Admittedly, those attending rounds of persuasive speaking, informative speaking, or literary interpretation might well be persuaded, informed, or aesthetically enhanced.

These results, though, are accidental and incidental to the real function and objective of the activity—education.

Through his or her individual event preparation and presentation, the forensics competitor is engaged in an educational experience. Ever since Quintilian employed the *declamatio*, "the most important item in his teaching technique,"⁵ as a specific means to his educational ends, the laboratory experience has been a basic element of the educational enterprise. Individual events competition is but one modern manifestation of this educational tool. We conclude, then, that the essential element common to both the function and goals of forensics is education.

As one examines affirmation of those actively involved in the forensics enterprise, it seems abundantly clear that their perceptions about the activity are shaped by a pedagogical orientation. The National Development Conference's "Definitional Statement" illustrates the point.

Forensics is an educational activity primarily concerned with using an argumentative perspective in examining problems and communicating with people From this perspective, forensics activities, including debate and individual events, [emphasis is mine] are laboratories for helping students to understand and communicate various forms of argument more effectively in a

variety of contexts with a variety of audiences.⁶

Later, in its body of recommendations, the Conference affirmed: "Accordingly, the primary function of the forensics educator is to teach students"

While the affirmation is not as striking, performance of forensics programs as revealed in statistical surveys also illustrate an educational function. In a 1973 survey of college forensics programs it was revealed that of the 449 schools reporting, 45.7% were generally independent of their speech-communication curriculum, only 14.5% of the schools required forensics participation of speech-communication majors and only 19.6% sent students to forensics from speech-communication classes as a laboratory experience.⁸ Yet, 93.1% of the coaches surveyed were full-time speech-communication faculty and 65% of the programs awarded some academic credit for forensics. While not all programs of forensics were intimately tied to an academic program, the fact remains that forensics is still a part of academic institutions; that for almost 2000 years declamation-forensics type activities have been used as pedagogical tools; that those in the forensics community continue to affirm that forensics is an educational activity. All of this tends to provide sufficient foundation for affirming a pedagogical function for individual events.

In the process of affirming an educational function for forensics,

the literature advanced a number of goals that were consistent with that function. It will not be the objective of this inquiry to set forth an exhaustive or even a complete list of the educational goals of individual events. It is sufficient only to highlight some of the goals for illustrative purposes.

The 1973 survey previously cited affirms the following educational goals of forensics programs:

Improvement in critical thinking, analysis of issues, analysis of arguments (all rated very important by at least 72% of the respondents).

Improvement in decision-making ability, ability to research, ability to present and defend a case, improved sense of ethical responsibility (all rated very important by at least 45% of the respondents).

Improved public speaking ability (rated very important by 39.2% of the respondents).

Among the goals sought through "education in forensics" by the reports of the previously cited National Development Conference were:

To understand and communicate various forms of argument effectively.

To learn theories that seek to explain the process of communicating arguments with people. To analyze controversies, select and evaluate evidence.

To participate effectively as advocates or critics in situations where decisions must be made.

To promote respect for the in-