

REVIEW OF PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

Jack Kay, Editor

Communicating Literature: An Introduction to Oral Interpretation, by Todd V. Lewis, Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1991.

If you are searching for a new text to use in the basic oral interpretation/performance studies course or are seeking a text well-suited for training forensic competitors in the interpretation events, *Communicating Literature* just may end your quest. To my knowledge, this text is the only one devoted exclusively to oral interpretation written by an active member of the forensic community. Dr. Todd Lewis combines his academic training in oral interpretation and rhetoric and public address (Ohio State University and Louisiana State University) with his practical experience as a successful teacher and forensic educator (Biola University). The result is a text that effectively bridges the gap between the competitive and non-competitive spheres. For those who view the interpreter's task as one of identifying a literary selection's communicative center and making performance choices which justify that message, this text comes as a welcome addition to the field.

The text is divided into twelve compact chapters. Chapter 1 provides the reader with an interesting historical perspective on the discipline and offers a communication-based definition of oral interpretation. Chapter 2 expands this notion using the author's own model of the process to illustrate the relationship among literature, interpreter, and audience. While Lewis effectively makes the case for viewing the process as a persuasive one, this chapter also reminds the reader to avoid altering the inherent textual message in the adaptation and performance of literature. Chapters 3 and 4 focus primarily on the nonverbal aspects (both vocal and nonvocal) of performance, including suggested exercises for skill development. Chapter 5 outlines the essential elements necessary to analyze a literary work, and Chapter 6 provides valuable practical direction in such matters as cutting and editing, selecting focus, composing the introduction, and making a strong initial impression.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 focus exclusively on the three basic categories of literature—namely, prose, drama, and poetry. These three chapters not only provide an expanded view of each genre's characteristics, but also provide invaluable suggestions concerning performance choices and decisions relevant to each type of literature. Unique to the text (and particularly valuable to those in the forensic community) is the

inclusion of duo performance in the chapter on drama. For those especially interested in group forms of interpretation, Chapter 10 provides an overview of readers theatre, chamber theatre, and choral reading including material on script preparation, staging, and blocking.

Chapter 11 focuses on oral interpretation performance evaluation; Lewis suggests appropriate listening behaviors and specific questions that can be used to provide constructive criticism. This chapter should be most helpful to both teachers and students, since it discusses key elements of the evaluation process including introductions and transitions, literary choices, portrayal of personae, delivery techniques, nonverbal aspects of communication, and concluding comments. Chapter 12 addresses some specialized performance formats, including program oral interpretation and religious scripture interpretation as well as various performance formats available outside the classroom setting. Finally, the text's Appendix contains 15 different perforated evaluation sheets that can be adapted to in-class as well as out-of-class assignments and/or observations.

When these twelve chapters are viewed as a complete entity, several major strengths emerge. First, the author presents a very *balanced* perspective on oral interpretation that combines textual analysis, theory, and practice. Since discussion of theory and concepts are continually linked to practical application, the text is well-suited to the needs of both the four-year institution and the community college. Second, the author's writing style is clear and concise. While Lewis provides a thorough treatment of the subject matter, he clearly does not attempt to impress the elite in the discipline. Instead, the language choice in this text reflects a genuine concern for students who desire a basic foundation in the performance of literature. Finally, in contrast to most texts in the field, Lewis does not cram excessive literary examples between the covers. The result is a text that not only appears less threatening, but one that is less expensive to purchase because the publisher didn't have to dole out large sums to writers' agents and estates for permission to reproduce entire works. Since my experiences mirror those of the author when he writes in his preface that "experience shows that most students skip over samples of literature if they become excessive or lengthy," I believe Lewis made a wise choice. Instead, the text employs excerpts of works for illustrative purposes as well as lists of suggested works for performance at the conclusion of the appropriate chapters.

So, is *Communicating Literature* the "perfect" text? One might argue that the information on paralanguage (pitch, volume, rate, etc.) presented in Chapter 4 actually belongs more appropriately in Chapter 3 entitled "Nonverbal Communication and Oral Interpretation" or that

Chapter 11 on evaluation might better be placed before or after the chapters on readers theatre and specialized forms (Chapters 10 and 12) rather than sandwiched between them. Or, one might wish that the lists of suggested literature for performance include more women writers, minority writers, and non-Western writers rather than such a heavy dose of Western, white male writers. Yet, such concerns are indeed minor if not simply a matter of personal preference and, as such, do not detract from the quality and value of the text. In short, *Communicating Literature* should be given serious consideration when seeking a new text for the classroom course in oral interpretation or performance studies. Additionally, this book should provide invaluable assistance to forensic educators who desire to increase their competency as critic-judges in oral interpretation or who wish to provide their forensic students who are potentially interested in competing in any of the interpretation events with the fundamental principles. I, for one, intend to use *Communicating Literature* to assist in the education of *all* my students—both those in my college oral interpretation classroom and those on my forensic team.

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