## "MISS INTERP" EXPLAINS IT ALL FOR YOU

## INTERPRETATION 101

It seems to me that many of our students have the cart before the horse. They believe that to accurately portray characters in stories (both dramatic and non-hence, allegedly humorous) they must a. sing, b. dance, c. cry real tears, d. caricature the characters in falsetto or vibrato, e. scream (following the age old debate maxim "The verity of a statement is in direct proportion to the loudness of its delivery."), and f. all or some of the above. Nothing could be finer -- or farther from the truth

First of all, what is the nature of the activity that we are engaged in? Are we becoming the characters as we "do" the literature or are we suggesting the characters? The difference is more than just semantics or forensical hair-splitting. If the student is acting the character out as he says his lines, then maybe we had better rename the event.

Alas you say, what's all the hullabaloo? Is this going to be another Old Fogie diatribe by a conservative that refuses to adapt to the times and is bitter that his kids haven't placed at a major tournament in an interpretation event since before the Flood? (O.K. maybe the bitterness part is not a root, may be it's just a germinating seed....) Is this old coach broken down by the relentless cries of students that remind him that student X at E-Z Interp HS does it "that way" and she always wins?

The fundamental issue is that interpretation is the bridge over which we lead the audience to the understanding of the author's literature. In acting we demonstrate, and often the audiwe draw the author's picture in the mind's eye of the audience. Shall we say that we play connectthe-dots with the audience in interpretation, and in acting we

flesh out the pictures with mul- only two characters and rather tiple colors?

ties and nuances of meaning are not endemic to both. Often what is not said or done is just as powerful in acting as what is done or said. But in interpretation we restrict our movement and actions in order to get the audience to see with the mind's eye. When our efforts to communicate the author's meaning become obvious (like the beginning doubles skating couple: he grunts every time he hoists his waif-like partner for a one-and-one-half double axle what-cha-ma-call-it), then the picture is distorted.

But, I believe I have strayed too far from the beaten path and forgotten the tutorial nature of You don't have to go up and down this article. How do we create the musical scale or constantly believable characters in interpretation?

## THE DRAMATIC V

This is the interpreter's best friend. We use it to create multiple characters conversing duringour stories. It is formed as the interpreter stands in the front of the room. Her focus is no wider than the corners of the room. This is to encourage her to front most be on opposite sides of the V. of his action to the audience and to allow the audience to see most of her facial expressions and gestures. Avoiding profile actions is paramount to increasing your audience's understanding of lines that are necessary for clarwhat is transpiring.

The question is raised-How many characters can I have on the V in a story? The only limit on the V is your own ability and Godgiven talents to accurately and distinctly portray them. For each character you should have an assigned place on the wall slightly ence spectates. In interpretation above the audience's head. Characters should be close enough on the V so that you can quickly assume a character when the last character has spoken. Often, we see a scene in which there are

than have them on just either side That is not to say that subtle- of center, the student places them on the outer extreme of the V. Smooth, quick transitions contribute to making this enjoyable to watch and listen. When the character speaks, you should look at that spot as if you are the character talking to the other person. Since no one stares at anyone when they talk to them continuously, you do have the freedom to look around as the character speaks. For clarity, however, you should begin and end with the character's lines in the same spot on the V to avoid confusing your audience. Each character's voice should be different in pitch, rate, and quality to avoid confusion. readjust the metronome. Subtle differences distinguish the painter from the do-it-by-thenumbers guy. Ideally, each character should have some sort of distinctive mannerism to physically distinguish him from the others. A hand on the hip or chin, a particular gesture with the finger or hand, a mannerism like tilting the head or nodding might help. Opposing characters should Lines of attribution (or tag lines) should be omitted when they become redundant. If Dad enters the room we don't need to say "he said after each of his lines. Tag ity should be retained like "she said effortlessly over and over again as he picked her up and carried her over the mantel into wedded bliss" (pardon the maudlin example). These tag lines that are primarily descriptive (like the narration) belong in the middle of the V and are directed toward the audience.

> What about differences in character heights-say, a child talking to a giant? Should I look up until I get a nosebleed? As one of my fine teachers used to say, "Re-

we look up so high that all the aueyes, then either we are looking too high or we are dead. Since the then Eleanor in the same cutting. latter state is almost as undesiraudience and talk to that spot. Remember most of your other characters are on the same level plane (shades of Geometry). Any slight variations in your focus creates a distinction for that character.

Should I do or say the sounds in the script? My general rule is that if you can do it, then you don't need to say it and describe it. subordination like verbal sen-That's redundant and repetitive (get it?). Sounds you might do include creaking doors, baying wolves, bottles popping, etc.

Can I move? While Miss Charlotte Lee (to the uninitiated and unlearned, the veritable goddess of interpretation who for many years has taught and authored many fine texts) might beg to differ with me, I think the current restriction on movement is wise. Turning to the side to exit, the widening of the footbase to suggest male/female distinction, a small step forward to suggest weariness, etc., I find acceptable. Walking, pacing, even excessive turning at the waist can be impediments to our audience understanding. Is interpretation nothing more than acting in one place? To help preserve the distinction that interpreting is a thinking person's activity that is just as rewarding as acting, we need to set clearly defined boundaries to keep our activity from becoming something it is not. When I was learning about interpretation in college both undergraduate and graduate school, it was pounded into my head that restraint is the

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member, Miss Interp, the Rule of key to successful interpretation. the Eyes. The eyes are the My tics, mannerisms, and penwindows to the soul." When chant for travelling as an interpreterdon't allow the audience to dience sees are the whites of our see in their mind's eye Henry in Lion in Winter in one line and

What tools do I have in my able as the former, we suggest a arsenal of emphasis to help the height difference of a child look- audience understand the ing up by elevating our gaze character's lines? Pitch, pause, slightly up - but certainly not and punch are the alliterative higher than the ceiling in the back little three "p" brothers that I of the room. When the adult talks teach my students. Our trouble is to the child, he must look down. that we favor one over the other How far down do we go? Glad and hence become predictable in you asked. Pick a midpoint in the our patterns of emphasis. Variety is the key.

What should I emphasize? Consonants give clarity and vowels give beauty of utterance. Subjects and verbs, negations, conditionals, comparisons and contrasts, and absolutes merit consideration for emphasis. Remind the student that proper stress and tence diagramming are essential for audience understanding.

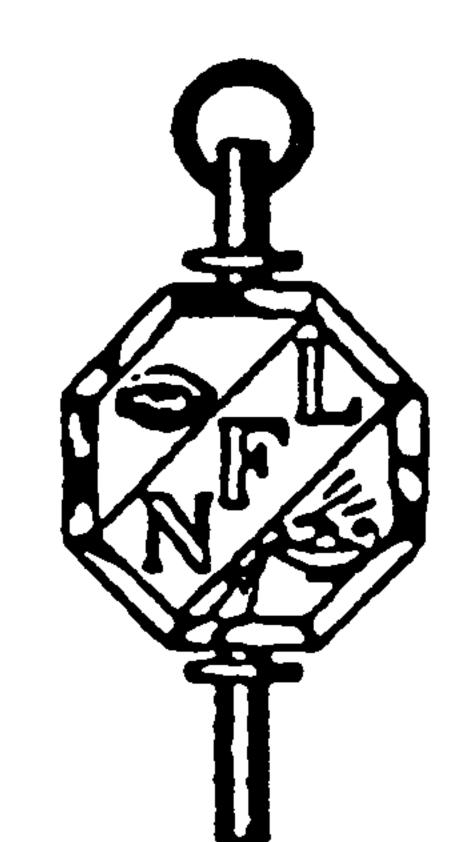
I guess I could go on and on ad infinitum, ad nauseam, but I fear that the restrained subtleties of my postulating have put too many of you to sleep.

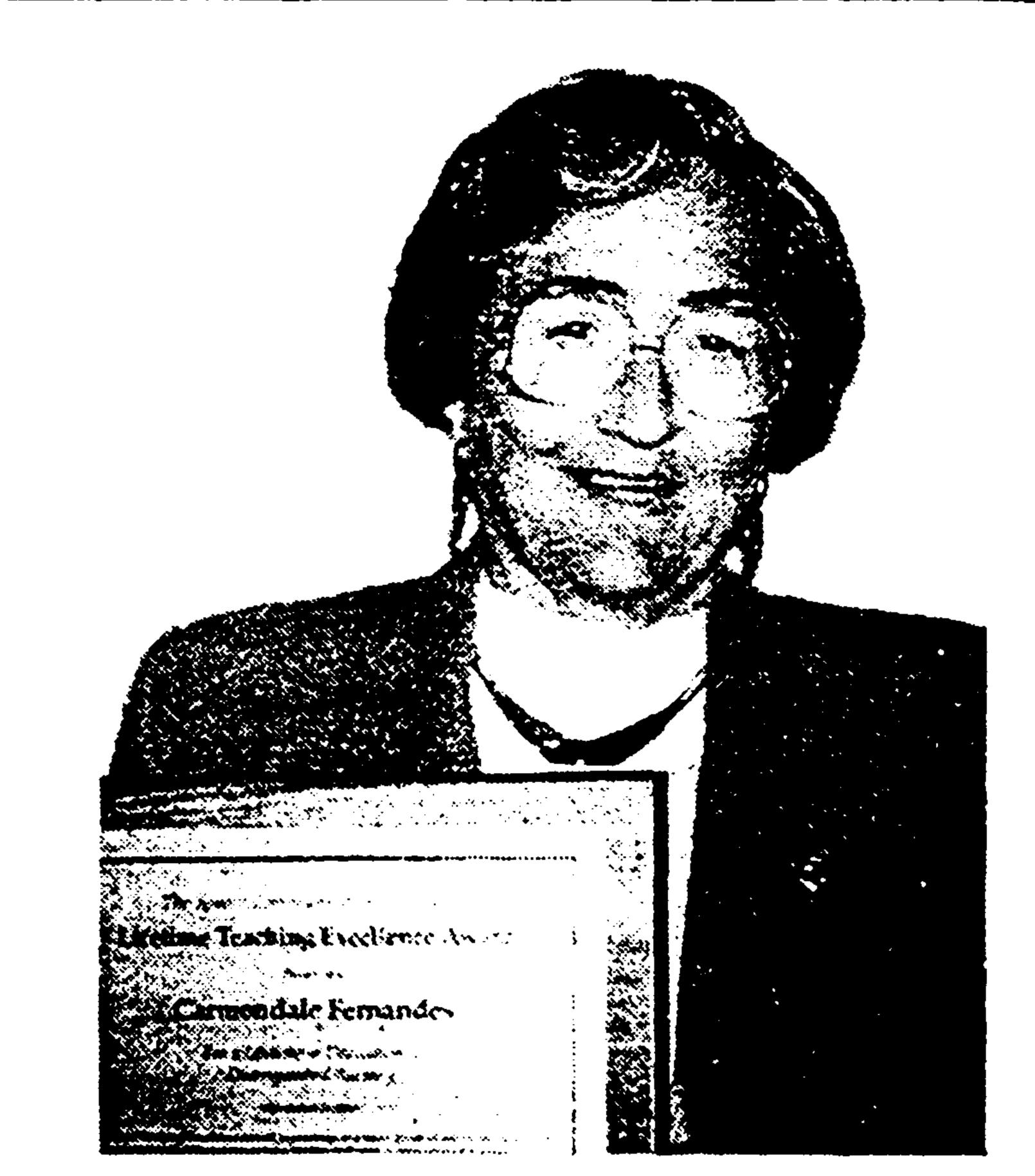
Forensically Yours,

I am Miss Interp

(MissInterpisafalsename. Any references to real, imaginary, fictional, or video characters is purely intentional. She did go to some school and geta Masters in Interpretative Speech after a boring recital on Joyce Kilmer's Treesina forest setting. I guess I had better cut it out before you get board-er bored.)

"Miss Interp" is a nom de plume of South Carolina Chair Chuck Nicholas.





## SCA CHOOSES FERNANDES FOR LIFETIME TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARD

NFL Past Presiden Carmendale Fernandes was awarded the SCA Lifetime Teaching Excellence Award by the Speech Communication As sociation.

The SCA Lifetime Teach ing Excellence Award was cre ated by the SCA Legislativ Council in 1991 to recognize: lifetime of outstanding te ing by SCA members from and grade level.

Presenter Robert Stockto: noted, "Fernandes was selecte for this award because she ha exhibited a lifetime of dedica tion to distinguished teaching She has demonstrated out standing instruction in the cos nitive, motivational, and ski developments of students; th development of the intellectua independence, growth, and do velopment of students; and th ability to impart knowledg about a course of study, with th specific ability to create an ui derstanding and appreciatio of the full scope and meanin of the discipline of communic tion."

Carmendale served on th NFL Council in 4 different d cades as well as Vice-Preside1 and President. She was co-ho to three national tournamen and was selected by Brunni Jacob as a charter memt the NFL Hall of Fame.