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# Impersonation Speaking

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# ST. CLOUD

STATE UNIVERSITY

IMPERSONATION SPEAKING

a paper by  
Dr. Robert D. Kendall

presented for the  
Instructional Resources Division  
of  
Central States Communication Association  
meeting at its  
Annual Convention

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Palmer House, Chicago, IL

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St. Cloud, Minnesota 56301

## IMPERSONATION SPEAKING

(SPC 337 at St. Cloud State University)

Have you ever wished you could design a course that would include almost every subject in your repertoire of professional interest and expertise? I had that opportunity in 1984 when I designed a course in "Impersonation Speaking."

Last winter quarter I taught the course for the fifth time, and continue to be excited about it, reinforced by the positive responses of both students and colleagues. Registration for this course has varied from 14 to 27 students, both "trads" and "non-trads."

"Impersonation Speaking," as a course, was created and developed against my own personal and varied background. As an undergraduate, I was particularly interested in what made people behave as they do, and so majored in psychology, anticipating a future in a branch of the counseling field. Then I attended theological seminary, and was ordained in the church. During my thirteen years in the pastorate, I became increasingly concerned about the diminishing effectiveness of the preaching task and experimented with numerous methods of alternative approaches to "sermonizing." The one method which far and away received the most positive feedback, measured by informal and subjective data, was the "First Person Monolog," in which I preached as a specific Biblical or historical character. When I left the pastorate for additional graduate work, I decided to concentrate on theatre, eventually receiving a Master's Degree in that field. Then, for

reasons too involved to describe here, I shifted to Speech Communication for my doctorate, focusing my dissertation on "drama as a method of sermonizing." When I came to St. Cloud State as a member of the faculty, I found myself in a rapidly growing department which encouraged creative curriculum development. After a few years of "getting my feet on the ground," and concentrating on the more pressing needs of the department and its offerings, I proposed this course as an elective in the public speaking component of our major, and it was accepted. Thus, SPC 337 "Impersonation Speaking," after a lengthy incubation period, was begun, an opportunity to draw together most of my personal interests, experiences, and training into the teaching of one specific course.

The remainder of this paper will be devoted to a description of the course itself, to its general objectives, and to a very brief analysis of its few problems and many benefits.

The catalog description of SPC 337 reads like this: "The study of 'First Person Monologs' as a form of public speaking. Research and development of an historical character/speaker for public presentation." Allow me to expand on this capsulized description. This course attempts to teach students the process of developing and delivering a public speech that some historical character of their choosing could have given at some point in that person's life. Through a series of carefully planned assignments, one building upon the other, each student researches the life, character and times of a historical figure; writes an original speech for that person; and delivers the speech as that person.

Such a course is designed to give the student experience in historical research, writing and speaking style, perception and perspective, speechwriting, character-building, and, of course, public speaking. I approach this not as an acting course, but as a course in public speaking!

In my judgment, the most effective approach to my task in this paper is to provide a chronological overview of the subjects covered and the assignments given, making explanatory comments as appropriate.

Text for the course? It hasn't been written yet. Therefore, I relied on our old friend, Kinko's. I developed a packet of readings to accompany my syllabus and lectures, and as background for assignments (both the table of contents and the syllabus are attached to this paper). For only one of the readings was I denied copyright permission, the Stanislavski text, which necessitated a special lecture on "Building a Character," later on in the course. The students were grateful for a text under ten dollars!

After the wisely obligatory and initial overview session to make certain the registered students know what will be expected of them (in the five times the course has been offered, only one student dropped, and it was after this first session), I show some videotaped examples of selected speeches from past SPC 337 classes, some not-so-good examples along with the more excellent presentations.

By the middle of the second week, each student must choose the historical character to be worked with for the entire quarter.

To aid in this decision, I have developed a couple of lectures on "Choosing a Character," that is, where and how to search for ideas and the parameters within which they must choose: human beings (no animals or spirits), historic figures for whom there is an actual record of their having lived (no composites), the person must be dead (to cut down on the tendency for caricature and easy comparison in the minds of the audience), and the speech must be located at a date prior to 1960. I also suggest that the students will have fewer problems with choosing someone of the same race as they are, as well as the same sex. In addition, except in unusual circumstances, for college-age students it is less fraught with problems to impersonate a speaker in the fifteen to forty-five year age range.

Additional suggestions as they make this all-important choice include: lesser-known characters tend to be more easily believable, especially those never or rarely seen on movie or television screens; choosing someone about whom the student can develop a different slant on the character, thereby enriching the audience's perception, even breaking some widely accepted cultural myth; choosing someone who was concerned with some idea or issue that may still be relevant today.

Following the choice-making comes some lecture and discussion on "creative history," sharing with the students a slightly different view of history than most were taught in elementary and high school, how it was written selectively by people who held an interpretation first then supported it with collected data, and that this must be understood as they research their characters.

Then, even with upper-division students, I find it necessary to be rather specific as to where to go and how to find and gather relevant information. Their first major assignment results from this research: an extensive bibliography of their sources.

If the student is to be an effective impersonation speaker, the impersonator must "get inside the character," to see what that character sees, both about the self and the world at large. To do this, I assign, after background lecture-discussions, a "self-concept" paper, written "by" the character. How does that person see his/her self?--from experiences and relationships during their developing years, from interaction with contemporaries, as a speaker at the located time of the speech. This is followed by a brief unit on historical perception and perspective as viewed by any speaker at the time of the speech. To help the students understand this, they write a paper on the "Worldview" of their character. (References to Burke and Bormann help with this.) To write this paper satisfactorily, the student must include local, national, and world events during their character's lifetime and especially the events of the moment.

At this point in the quarter, I schedule a personal conference with each student, to work one-on-one with their task. Having read and evaluated the three described assignments thus far, I can more easily guide them through the project, and offer more relevant and helpful suggestions. This conference also helps the students prepare for the next assignment: "Quiz the Character" in which each student in turn sits in front of the class to be "interviewed" by the class members as the character. They are to

"stay in character" and answer each query as truthfully as possible with information known to them only up to the time in which they are locating the speech. They are to know nothing after that date, beyond personal conjecture if they wish. Students really "sweat" this assignment, but once it's over indicate that it was the turning point of the quarter for them, in that what they had written in their different assignments finally "came to life" and they could actually see the world and the speaking task as their character.

For the next assignment, the student must get out of character. This is a brief paper on "audience analysis," in which they analyze the class members of SPC 337 as an audience: who are they? what are their interests? their concerns? the issues of this time? what are the contemporary events that attract their attention? who are the important people in their lives? etc. Introducing this assignment through lecture/discussion, I try to impress upon them that even though a historical character is speaking to them, the audience is still a modern class of college students. They must, often in a rather subtle manner, make a connection between the time-location of the speech and the contemporary audience.

By this time in the quarter, the students are ready to start writing the actual speech. Their character has a certain style of both writing and speaking which they are to discover, struggle with, and capture as they write their speeches, limiting any direct quotations of their character's actual words to an occasional few. With their background research on their character



now, coupled with lecture/discussions on "style," they continue building toward their final twelve to fifteen minute presentation. Their speech, in manuscript form, must be handed in prior to their first videotaping experience.

Through lecture and demonstration, they next learn about the aforementioned "character building" task. Either I, or someone from a former SPC 337 class, or, if the budget allows, a professional impersonation speaker, speak to the class as some developed character in history. (I have ten such characters in my own repertoire.)

The students are now ready for videotaping and playback for their own evaluation. This initial videotaping is without costume, and may be only a five-minute selected segment of the entire speech. The class is responsible for critical feedback, with an emphasis on the constructive, noting particularly the voice and delivery. The videotape is placed on reserve in the library so they can view and study it as much as they wish.

After a lecture/discussion on the need for and skills involved in "revising, polishing, and rehearsing," the students are ready for their final, costumed, in-character speeches. One final non-graded assignment remains: the writing of a brief biographical sketch to be used by the audience to identify the speaker, the title of the speech, and the date/location of the speech being delivered. These presentations are open to the public: other students, faculty, and, on occasion, some parents. (A short videotape of segments of six final speeches in recent

years accompanies this CSCA paper: Joan of Arc, Sarah Bernhardt, Amelia Earhart, Georgia O'Keefe, Johnny Torrio, and Lou Gehrig.)

A final examination on the theory presented and its application to their specific characters and speeches concludes the course and the quarter.

"Impersonation Speaking" is an enjoyable course to teach. Fortunate is the instructor who has the opportunity to offer something like this. In some schools, budget restrictions limit new course development, especially a course as multi-disciplined and unproven as this one is. However, there is another possibility which I have not as yet mentioned: including a unit on Impersonation Speaking in a regular public speaking class. Such a possibility would necessitate abbreviation of all I have written here; however, some of the assignments might be incorporated into other public speaking units, in a doubling-up manner. "Impersonation Speaking" also works well as an extra-curricular workshop for churches, schools and camps, or as a CEU methods class for teachers.

Among the questions raised by colleagues who are intrigued by such an offering, concerns the likelihood of finding an instructor who is fairly comfortable in teaching public speaking, aspects of interpersonal communication, acting, historical research, and ghostwriting. However, I quickly point out that in our department of twenty-five, there are two, other than myself, who have indicated they might like to "take a stab at it" sometime---and they each have the interest and expertise to do so. I would guess that such instructors also exist in other universities,

particularly since these subjects can all be categorized as Humanities and Liberal Arts.

Whatever the problems might be, or the necessity of a Speech Communication instructor to complement his/her discipline with some education in another discipline, I believe the benefits outweigh any and all. Students receive a fresh look at history through the eyes of those people who made it, as well as develop a deeper appreciation of those people as individuals, as well as practice in the art of speech writing, public speaking, and genuine empathy as they "get inside the skin of another and see the world from that point of view" and effectively communicate that view, rather than their own, to an audience.

SPC 337 IMPERSONATION SPEAKING  
Fall, 1990 -- 12:00 MTRF -- Instructor: Kendall  
Text: Kendall, SPC 337 Readings (available at Kinko's)

Thurs, Sept. 6 Orientation, Overview, and Introductions.  
Fri, 7 Selected Speeches from past SPC 337 classes.

Mon, Sept. 10 Choosing Your Character.  
Tues, 11 Choosing Your Character.  
Thurs, 13 Creative History and Impersonation Speaking.  
Fri, 14 Researching Your Character. NOTE: Commitment to Character Day

Mon, Sept. 17 Researching Your Character.  
Tues, 18 Self-Concept and the Public Speaker.  
Thurs, 20 Presentation of Self from the Public Platform.  
DUE: Bibliography (20 pts.)  
Fri, 21 "The World As I See It."

Mon, Sept. 24 Conferences with the Instructor.  
Tues, 25 Conferences with the Instructor.  
Thurs, 27 Conferences with the Instructor.  
DUE: Self-Concept Paper (20 pts.)  
Fri, 28 Conferences with the Instructor.

Mon, Oct. 1 Quiz the Character Session. (20 pts.)  
Tues, 2 Quiz the Character Session.  
Thurs, 4 Quiz the Character Session.  
DUE: Worldview Paper (20 pts.)  
Fri, 5 Quiz the Character Session.

Mon, Oct. 8 Quiz the Character Session.  
Tues, 9 A Look at Audience Analysis.  
Thurs, 11 Each With a Style: Writing the Speech.  
DUE: Audience Analysis Paper (10 pts.)  
Fri, 12 Each With a Style: Writing the Speech.

Mon, Oct. 15 Each With a Style: Delivering the Speech.  
Tues, 16 Hints on Building a Character.  
Thurs, 18 Demonstration. DUE: Speech in Manuscript Form (20 pts.)  
Fri, 19 "What Happens If...?" -- Some Possible Problems.

Mon, Oct. 22 Videotaping and Class Feedback. (Room 130)  
Tues, 23 Videotaping and Class Feedback. (Room 130)  
Thurs, 25 Videotaping and Class Feedback. (Room 130)  
Fri, 26 Videotaping and Class Feedback. (Room 130)

Mon, Oct. 29 Videotaping and Class Feedback. (Room 130)  
Tues, 30 Revising, Polishing, & Rehearsing. (Room 130)  
Thurs, Nov. 1 Final Presentations. (50 pts.) (Room 130)  
Fri, 2 Final Presentations. (Room 130)

Mon, Nov. 5 Final Presentations. (Room 130)  
Tues, 6 Final Presentations. (Room 130)  
Thurs, 8 Final Presentations. (Room 130)  
Fri, 9 Final Presentations. (Room 130)

Tues, Nov. 13 Final Presentations. (Room 130)

Mon, Nov. 19, 1:00-2:50 PM Final Exam (20 pts.)

\*\*Attendance (20 pts.)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Cordie, Sandy. "Speech class gives license to impersonate famous, little-known figures from history." SCSU Chronicle.

Althoff, Kelly. "Impersonations build confidence for speech students." SCSU Chronicle.

Steinert, Mary. "Medley: A woman worth remembering." Monticello Times, August 15, 1985, p.3.

McCoy, F.N. Researching and Writing in History. U of CA Press, Berkeley, 1974. Chapters 1-4, pp. 1-36.

Nugent, Walter. Creative History. Lippencott, Philadelphia, 1973. Chapter 5, pp. 46-53; Chapter 6, pp. 59-61; Chapter 7. pp. 67-78; Chapter 14, pp. 128-132.

Goffman, Erving. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Anchor Books, Garden City, NY; 1959. "Introduction," pp. 1-16.

Bormann, Ernest G. "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality." Quarterly Journal of Speech, Vol. 58, Dec. 1972, No.4, pp. 396-407.

Vohs and Mohrmann. Audiences, Messages, Speakers. Harcourt, Brace, Janovich; NY, 1975. Chapter 2, pp. 20-35; Chapter 3. pp. 36-47.

Blankenship, Jane. A Sense of Style. Dickenson, Belmont, CA: 1968. Chapter 1, pp. 1-11; Chapter 3, pp. 43-52; Chapter 5, pp. 112-121.

Stanislavski, Constantin. Building a Character. Theatre Arts Books, NY; 1949, 1977. Chapter I, pp. 3-8; Chapter X, pp. 167-176.

Kendall, Robert D. "Assignment Guidelines."

SPC 337 "IMPERSONATION SPEAKING"

ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

Bibliography (For help with this assignment, read McCoy and Nuqent chapters.)

You are to develop a working bibliography on the subject of your chosen character. Include not only autobiographies, biographies, historical references, and encyclopedia entries on the character, but also descriptions and analyses of the time in which your character lived. Books, magazine articles, journals, newspaper articles. Peruse the various indices to periodicals and reference materials.

This bibliography should be written in Standard Academic form (e.g., Turabian).

Frost, Jack. Jesse Lee, Friend of the Aleuts. Anchorage: Winter Press, 1963.

Flowers, Spring. "Barbara Heck, 18th Century Feminist." Ms., November 1984.

Blight, Summer. "The Rhetoric of John Wesley." Journal of Public Speaking 13 (December 1934); 94-109.

"Sojourner Truth Speaks Up," Akron Free Press, 31 May 1851, p.1.

The number of entries will vary from character to character; however, if your choice is an historical figure who is known to have spoken publicly, or could have done so, though the record on just where and what might be a bit cloudy, there will be a number of references to her/him available to you. There should be absolutely no problem whatsoever finding material about the time in which s/he lived. It will be an exception to have less than 20 bibliographical entries. The more you locate, the more data you'll have on which to build a character and a speech.

(My Character's) Self-Concept (As theoretical background, read Goffman's "Introduction.")

In this paper, you are to describe your character's self-concept: how does s/he view her/himself as a person living in the time, place, and circumstances of that day?

How does s/he view her/himself?

How does s/he think other people see her/him?

What do others think s/he thinks about her/himself?

In your analysis, include how s/he arrived at this view of self. What personal experiences might have contributed to or reinforced this view? Who might have influenced this self-concept, and how might it have been done?

(My Character's) Worldview (The Bormann article will help in understanding this task.)

In this paper, you are to describe how your character views the world in which s/he lives. If it is (or was) a rapidly changing world during the span of your character's life, choose the moment in time the speech is given, after which your character would have no knowledge of events---what kind of a world did s/he see when delivering the speech?

Who and what were the most influential people and events in the world at that time? How did your character feel about them? What was his/her view of history and his/her place in it? What responsibility, if any, did s/he feel for ensuing generations?

Did your character have any relationship with local or regional or national or international power figures? Was s/he involved in any social/religious/political causes or movements? Did any Deity have a prominent place in his/her worldview? Was the world inherently good or bad? comedic or tragic?

Did your character have a personal relationship with anyone? What kind of responsibility did s/he accept for that person or people? How did s/he balance the personal with the public aspects of his/her life?

Audience Analysis (Vohs & Mohrmann chapters will help in your writing this paper.)

In this brief paper, you are to describe the audience to whom your character will speak: a 1990 audience of SCSU students, faculty, staff, and guests.

Who are they? What are their main interests? How much do they know about your character and the years and world in which s/he lived? What things are they concerned about today that your character was then? What is happening in their lives at this time that occupies their minds? What are they anxious about? What "images" are they willing and able to share with your character?

How serious are they willing to be? How much will you need to prepare them to accept your character's message? How will they react to a relational style of speaking? to an oratorical one? to occasional bursts of emotion or flights of imagination? --- with laughter? with appreciation? with blank faces and dull wits? Why did they come to hear you?

What will "turn them on" to your character? What can your character do and say that will enhance the relationship you desire, promote the message you want to share, and get your audience to appreciate your character as much as you do?

Which (one or more) of the goals (positive effects) which Vohs and Mohrmann describe in their chapter "Influencing Listeners" is (are) your character's goal(s) in the speech you are writing for him/her? How do you plan on achieving it (them)?

The Speech in Its Final Form (Blankenship chapters are helpful when writing the speech.)

This paper is to be the ten (plus?) minute speech which you will have your character deliver at the scheduled time during the final weeks of classes.

The first paragraph on the paper (to be enclosed in parentheses) is to be a brief description of the character speaking, at what stage in his/her life the character is being portrayed, the "year" of the speech, and the fact that this speech is being given at SCSU as part of the "Impersonation Speaking" course requirements, when and by whom.

This speech is to be written in the speaking style of your character as you have researched it. It is to be an accurate representation of your character's philosophy, ideas, concerns, behaviors, and speaking style.

The speech should include some amount of autobiographical material, possibly a few direct quotations from your character's actual speeches or writings, commentary on some of her/his ideas, and something about her/his views on the world in which s/he lived---and maybe their possible relevance to this audience's world.

The speech is to be typed/word processed and double-spaced. An average ten-minute speech will take 3-4 pages, depending upon your character's speaking pace.

#### Final Exam

During the regularly scheduled final exam period, you will write short essays in answer to selected questions on the assigned readings and course lectures.



### JOAN d'ARC

Joan d'Arc was born January 12, 1412 in Domremy, France. She began to hear voices at the age of 13 instructing her to save France from English rule. She became the general of the French army during the Hundred Year War and won freedom for France. But in the year 1431 she was charged with heresy (practicing witchcraft) and burned at the stake. No one could understand how a peasant girl like herself could have so much military knowledge. Finally in 1920 the Church acknowledged her and canonized her a saint making her Saint Joan. Joan d'Arc is speaking in the year 1425, not long after she heard her voices for the first time. Her speech is titled: "God's Chosen Peasant Girl."

### NICOLAUS COPERNICUS

Nicolaus Copernicus was born in Poland on the 19th of February, 1473. He became a noted astronomer, developing a functional and systematic model of the universe. As a cleric and always interested in education, he speaks on "Educational Incentives" in the year 1531.

### QUEEN ELIZABETH I

Born in 1533, the daughter of King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth became queen of England in 1558 at the death of her half-sister, Mary. Her long reign, til 1603, is considered one of the most glorious periods in English history. She speaks in the year 1559 about "England and Elizabeth."

### GUGLIELMO MARCONI

Born just outside of Bologna, Italy on April 25, 1874, Guglielmo Marconi grew to become one of the finest scientists and inventors in modern times. His most famous invention, on which he holds the patent, is the wireless telegraph, invented in 1896. He is speaking in the year 1900 on "My Life with the Advances in Technology."

### FLORENCE NIGHTENGALE

Born on May 12, 1820 in Florence, Italy, where her wealthy British parents were living abroad, Florence Nightengale later became world reknowned as the founder of the nursing profession as we know it today. After many personal struggles, she became known as an advocate for the freedom of women to choose their own work. She reflects her struggle in this speech, located in 1850, on "The Right to Strive for One's Goal."

### ELIZABETH BLACKWELL

Elizabeth Blackwell was born in Bristol, England on February 3, 1821. She and her family immigrated to the United States when she was eleven years old. She graduated from Geneva Medical School in New York City, at the top of her class in 1849, becoming the first woman to receive a medical diploma from an accredited school. She is speaking in 1853 on her experiences in being the first female physician in modern times.

### JANE ADDAMS

Born in Illinois to Quaker parents in 1860, Jane Addams became what some have called America's first social worker. This humanitarian became well known as the founder of Hull House in Chicago. Later, as an ardent pacifist, she became a leader in the world peace movement, and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. Today she is speaking in the year 1890 on her work with the poor and the downtrodden.

### MARGARET SANGER

Margaret Sanger was born on September 12, 1879 in the industrial city of Corning, New York. She was a licensed nurse and is most noted as the founder of the Birth Control Movement. She is speaking in the year 1921 on "Birth Control, Continual Progress Is Still Needed."

### JOHNNY TORRIDO

Born in Orsara, Italy in 1882, Johnny Torrio immigrated to the United States with his mother when he was two years old. He was a shrewd businessman who became the most powerful bootlegger in Chicago during the early 1920's. He is best noted for being the first of the ganglords. Al Capone inherited Torrio's empire when he was shot in 1925. This speech is being given in the year 1923, three years after prohibition began.

### LOU GEHRIG

Lou Gehrig was born on June 20, 1903 in New York City. He grew to become one of the greatest baseball players ever, most noted as the "Iron Horse" having set the record for the most consecutive games played at 2,130. He was four times selected most valuable player in the American League. He had to retire in 1939, ending a 14 year career in baseball with the New York Yankees because of a rare, incurable and fatal disease. He is speaking today in the year 1939, shortly after being diagnosed with ALS. His title is "Work Hard and Have a Positive Attitude."

### GLENN MILLER

Born March 1, 1904 in Colorado, Glenn Miller, in later life, became known for his unique "big band sound." Accomplished as a composer, a performer on the trombone, and a band leader, Glenn joined the army in 1941, losing his life during the war on an plane trip from Britain to the continent. His speech is being given in 1941, and his title is "Only Human."

## Speech class gives license to impersonate famous, little-known figures from history

by Sandy Cordie

Imagine going to your next class and finding yourself sitting next to Catherine the Great, Calamity Jane or St. Francis of Assisi.

That is exactly what might transpire in Robert Kendall's speech impersonation class.

These and other historical characters are some of the famous, and not so famous, people that have evolved out of the class, probably the only class of its kind in this country, according to Kendall, professor of speech communication.

The class developed as an approach or method to teaching public speaking, Kendall said. By emphasizing the style of their characters, students begin to understand the basic element of public speaking.

Each student in the class is required to select a person and, throughout the quarter, learn as much as possible about him or her. For the final exam, students need not bring a pencil, Kendall said. Instead, students present a speech that their character might have given to a present-day SCS audience. The script is presented in full costume and makeup.

"I do not expect anything of my students that I wouldn't do, so I have developed the character of Carl Schurz," Kendall said.

"My country right or wrong. When right to be kept right, when wrong to be put right." This quote by Schurz has stayed with Kendall since his junior high school days, he said. It inspired him to develop his first-person monologue.

Schurz was a Civil War general, editor of the *New York Post*, adviser to eight presidents and Secretary of the Interior under President Rutherford B. Hayes.

Kendall's own desire for variation is evident in his personal background. "It's a variety of interests that keep me excited," he said.

Kendall's educational background includes a B.S. in Psychology, a master's degree in both theology and theater and a doctorate in speech.

Kendall served as a Methodist minister for 13 years, when he began to impersonate biblical characters. His repertoire now includes six of the 12 apostles. "I often get called to perform during the Lenten season," he said.

The class has been offered only twice at SCS, and the response has been extremely favorable, he said. Some of Kendall's students have been asked to perform their characters for local groups.

Overall, the class teaches history, research techniques, acting, costumes, makeup and public speaking, Kendall said.



Robert Kendall as Carl Schurz

Photo/Choe Ng



# Medley

by Mary Steinert

## A woman worth remembering

"Good day, women and gentlemen. I am Dr. Mary Edwards Walker, a New York physician who has found her way to Minnesota. I reside in a lovely home on a bluff, surrounded by an orchard near Oswego, N.Y., the prosperous fur-trading post. I call that place 'home,' though I have up and left it often to speak and serve where I am needed. I even crossed the Atlantic in 1866—11 years ago—so crowds in England could hear me speak of the advantages of the clothing I wear.

"Yet this is my farthest venture west and my first trip to Minnesota. It is as lovely, and not nearly as cold, as the Union soldiers from your state told me it was, when they talked of returning here after their wounds healed and the war finally ended."

That was the introduction I gave for myself when I portrayed Dr. Mary Edwards Walker in an impersonation speaking course at St. Cloud State last winter.

The vast majority of you know nothing of Dr. Walker, I'm sure. I'd never heard of her, either, before Dr. Bob Kendall (a former Monticelloan) convinced me to take his class, probably the only one of its kind in the nation. Each of us chose a character and throughout the quarter learned as much as we could about him or her. We looked for unusual incidents and tragedies in the person's life, influential happenings scrawled in letters and diaries, but seldom found in reference or textbooks.

Oh, I'm glad I "met" Mary through my research! Somehow this petite lady's energy, persistence and stubbornness make her more admirable to me than dozens of heroes I've read about in history books or newspapers. Perhaps it is because she is so real to me—I feel I know something about who she was, quirks and all.

At the start of the course, Dr. Kendall spoke excitedly about how we would come to appreciate and admire, even sympathize with our characters. By the end of the quarter, we understood what he meant. I "found" Mary purely by chance. She was tucked away in a reference book of biographies, a mere paragraph out of hundreds of pages. She was simply described as a Civil War doctor and dress reformer. However, the book also speculated that she may have been the first female doctor in combat. That caught my interest, and I dug for references to Dr. Walker elsewhere.

I soon discovered more twists to her life than I'd ever expected—Mary wore men's clothing throughout her long life. She was first loved, then ridiculed by suffragists. She was the first woman to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. The U.S. government later took it away from her but she refused to give it back and wore it until her death. It wasn't until a couple decades ago that it was "re-awarded" to her relatives.



Dr. Mary Edwards Walker

I have never been an actress, beyond being in crowd scenes in high school musicals. But I think I know something about actors who "get into their character, get into the part." Just a month after we started our research, we had our "Quizzing the Characters" day of class.

When it was my turn, I sat before my classmates, introduced myself as Dr. Walker, then fielded any and every question they asked. They were soon talking to Mary Walker, not to me, and I was responding as she would: I wasn't me anymore, I was her. Sound confusing? Well, to me and to my classmates—St. Francis of Assisi, Robert E. Lee, Sarah Bernhardt, Charles Lindbergh and others—it was exciting.

Our final exam was to write and present a speech our character would've given to a 1985 St. Cloud State audience. We did it once on videotape, then a second time, in costume and makeup, before an audience. I told about her wedding, how she struck "serve and obey" from the vows and kept her name. My explanation was a direct quote from the good doctor: "It is preposterous for anyone to suppose that two equal people, once joined, should turn into master and slave."

Few of the other words I said that day were hers, since her diary is tucked away somewhere in a tiny museum in New York, out of my reach. But I think she would have approved of what I said. I think I expressed some of the pain she felt, some of the triumphs she hoped for but never achieved.

I spoke of her struggles as a Civil War surgeon, of the cheating husband she divorced, of the assassination of her hero, Lincoln. And I told of the suffragists who ostracized her because she wouldn't support a suffrage amendment: "I realized that since men and women are equal, it is a usurpation of power for men to suppose they can decide if women can vote . . . Men have suppressed women's rights for centuries, but they have not yet destroyed them . . . Miss Anthony is afraid I will anger men by speaking out like this, so she calls me a radical . . . She refuses to let me even come to the podium."

Yes, I feel like I know Dr. Mary Edwards Walker. Yet if I had only glanced in a single history book I wouldn't have met her at all. Taking time to look for her was the key. I encourage you to do the same, whether it be discovering George Washington or Elizabeth Cady Stanton—or your great-great-grandparent.

It is a treasure well worth the search.

by Kelly Althoff  
Copy Editor

Charles Lindbergh, Robert E. Lee and St. Francis of Assisi will speak Tuesday and Thursday in Atwood Little Theatre.

They are among the 12 historical guests of Robert Kendall, SCS professor of speech communication, and his impersonation speaking class. The final performances, 9-11 a.m. Tuesday and 1-2 p.m. Thursday, are the result of quarter-long course work.

Kendall developed the class and offered it for the first time last spring. "As far as I know, it's the first of its kind in the nation," he said.

Kendall has been performing

first person monologues for about 20 years, he said. A former pastor, the earliest characters he developed were six of Christ's disciples. "I got my message across by becoming Biblical characters," he said.

His approach to the class emphasizes public speaking, he said. "It scares the life out of some people because they're afraid it'll be so much like acting," he said. Kendall has graduate degrees in both speech and theater, but most students have not had acting experience, he said.

The course begins with students choosing historically significant characters who lived before 1950. "A living or very recent character sometimes ends up in caricature," he said.

Rick Schmit, a senior speech communication major who will speak as St. Francis, said that it is more difficult if the character has a well-known image. "You have to live up to that image, or if it's a false image, you have to break it."

The next step in the process is to develop a bibliography to research the character. Next, students write papers on their characters' views of themselves and of the world.

Then they decide on speech content and analyze their 1985 SCS audience. The final product, a 10-12 minute speech, presents the concerns of the characters' day to a modern audience, Kendall said.

Of the eight women in the class, five are focusing on women's issues, he said. "It adds to the understanding of the current situation by knowing what things were like back then (during the characters' lifetimes)," he said.

The final presentation is done in costume for the public. "There must be a non-verbal hint of believability," Kendall said, explaining the secondary importance of mannerisms. "They reinforce the message."

This quarter, Kendall has emphasized the study of style, he said. "Personal style is not always the same as the character's style," he said. "That contrast is a learning process."

Schmit thinks his speech will be close to what St. Francis would give, he said. "I'll be giving the speech (based on) the way Rick Schmit interprets St. Francis. Others might interpret him differently," he said.



Underneath this Biblical costume is Janine Kruger, SCS student. This morning, she will impersonate Miriam, Moses' and Aaron's sister. At this time in her life (circa 1320 B.C.) Miriam has just recovered from leprosy and has returned to the Hebrew camp in the desert.

Before the final performance, the students' in-costume presentations are videotaped, giving them time to revise, polish and rehearse, Kendall said.

"This is a viable option in education," he said. "You learn about style and your subject. You also learn to analyze the audience, to organize and write."

Other characters are Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, Charlotte Bronte, Sarah Bernhardt, Dorothy Arzner, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Miriam (Moses' sister), Mary Todd Lincoln, Lucy Hayes and Dr. Mary Edwards Walker.

Another step includes quizzing each of the characters, Kendall said. The class asks questions of the students, and they must respond as their characters would, even if they do not know the answer, he said. "That's when the character really starts coming alive for the students," he said.

"At first I had some feelings of insecurity and fright," Schmit said. "But as I got more into my character, those feelings went away."



Photo/Tom Hill

St. Francis of Assisi will find himself in Atwood Little Theatre this morning. SCS student Rick Schmit has studied the character this quarter and will give a speech he thinks St. Francis might give to a 1985 audience.

for speech students