AMERICAN GOTHIC: A GROUP INTERPRETATION SCRIPT
DEPICTING THE PLIGHT OF THE IOWA FARMER

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

By

Dennis M. Doyle, B.A.
Denton, Texas
August, 1985

This thesis examines the possibilities of social-context issues in interpretation. A group interpretation script relating the current difficult conditions of rural Iowa was compiled. Three experts in the field of interpretation were asked to evaluate the potential of this social-context script.

It was discovered that a compiled interpretation script of Iowa literature can successfully depict the social concerns facing the family farms of Iowa.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. ORAL INTERPRETATION IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope of the Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of the Literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan of Reporting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. DEFINING THE RURAL IOWA LIFESTYLE</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE LITERATURE: SELECTION, ANALYSIS, AND ADAPTATION</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting the Literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing the Literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation of the Literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. PRESENTING THE SCRIPT</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Concept</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Script</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of the Script</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for Future Research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

ORAL INTERPRETATION IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Introduction

Until recent years oral interpretation was regarded as largely an academic practice. Little of its impact seemed to spill over into communities and setting outside of educational institutions. A current trend, however, has explored the use of oral interpretation as an effective medium for presenting social issues of our time. Many scholars in the discipline have become interested in preparing scripts for performance that deal with the problems of the aged, prison life, death and dying, the difficulties of our youth, and other subjects of concern facing our society today.

These "social context" scripts have been received favorably by the audiences who have viewed them. K. B. Valentine suggests the advantages these performances have for the general public:

Society and interpretation benefit when
literature is used to comment on public policy,
 improve intercultural communication, change
unproductive attitudes, improve communication
skills, aid in the propagation of oral
traditions and oral history, enrich leisure time activities, promote self-discovery, and/or effect liturgical innovations, rehabilitation, and learning goals for educational institutions, government, business and industry. (1)

A further justification can be found from Jean Haskell Spear, who sees tremendous benefits to the discipline of oral interpretation:

Frequently we bemoan the lack of visibility our discipline has on our campuses and nationally within both the academic and non-academic spheres. While I believe this is changing already, . . . the interpretation in social context branch of the discipline can be a factor in bringing our work to the attention of more and more people. (6)

The concept of presenting a social theme is viewed as an excellent method of transferring our work to the general public. It has great potential both as a scholarly activity and as an artistic experience. Many experts, however, use caution when promoting social context performances. Marion Kleinau asks, "What happens to literature and its performance when used as therapy, . . . when used as a medium for attitude change, . . . or used as a tool for teaching history?" (14). The persuasive elements found in oral
interpretation performances must be considered and respected when a script designed for social awareness is prepared. A negative response can be just as likely as a positive one if special care is not taken.

It is important to realize also that this trend is an outgrowth of many fields of study, and is not a new branch of oral interpretation. For as Ted Colson reminds us,

Since the persuasive possibilities of interpretation have generally been recognized for some time, the concept of interpretation in social contexts should not be regarded as a new departure from the traditional approach to the study of literature, but rather as a re-emphasis of the rhetorical dimensions of the discipline. (11)

If responsibly prepared, the social context script can provide an insightful, inspiring approach to addressing current problems of our time. It allows an excellent opportunity to publicize the lively art form we in the field of interpretation have enjoyed for so long.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this thesis is to prepare such a social context script. The main body of this study involves discussion of compiling, adapting, and directing Iowa literature for group performance. Specifically, the
problem of whether the presentation of the American Gothic lifestyle can be depicted through a compiled script of Iowa authors is examined. This study also explores the related value of preparing a script that deals with a social context theme.

To clearly understand how this preparation is done, a distinction between adaptations and compilations of literature must be made. Usually, when referring to adaptations, one is talking about a single literary work that has been edited and staged for performance. Presentation of that one specific work is the major thrust of the preparation and performance. Compilations involve collecting a variety of pieces of literature, sometimes spanning several genres, that are connected by a central theme. The individual work is only as important as how it fits together with other selections to emphasize that theme. The key elements of a compiled script, as pointed out in Coger and White's *Readers Theatre Handbook*, are "unification, cohesion, focus, and point of view" (60). Transitions are an essential element in such a script as well. Therefore, the most important facet of research is finding suitable selections of Iowa literature that agree with the chosen theme.

Related to the main problem being pursued are some subproblems to consider. For example, how do current
theories and philosophies related to social context productions effect the development of this study? Can the mood and personality of the rural Iowan be accurately depicted through this medium? Consideration of these questions provides clarity and focus to the study.

Significance of the Study

The art form represented by literature in performance is advanced through this study. The written text (in this case compiled Iowa literature) in the hands of the interpreter creates a whole new artistic form. By performing literature based on social issues the impact for the audience is expanded and intensified. Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey maintain, "When the two are successfully fused, the value for both participant and audience will indeed be significant" (5). This study provides another example of how an oral interpretation performance of social context issues can convey the message to audiences in a unique way.

By rhetorically discussing the concepts involved with preparing a social context production, others can learn how to apply this current trend with the more traditional approaches to readers theatre productions. This study provides not only information about life in the Midwest United States, but it also supplies the audience member with the means to compare his or her way of life to fellow Americans from another region. One can discern which
aspects one admires about the rural Iowa lifestyle and what traits are similar to their own way of life. This process can prove important in aiding the individual to better understand the world in which he lives.

This study is valuable within the discipline of oral interpretation. For as Madeline Keaveney says, "Oral interpretation in social contexts can teach and please, and pragmatically, address the needs of the 1980's" (10). Valentine sees the unique benefits of this type of study to the field when she comments:

Students benefit with increased sense of relevance of their studies to the world outside of the classroom, positive visibility for themselves in what could become a work environment, and dynamic relationships with other areas of communication, such as small group, interpersonal, organizational, intercultural, rhetorical, theatrical, forensic, persuasive, public speaking, nonverbal, theatre, and communication disorders. (2)

This study contains all the necessary qualities of a challenging and interesting project. There are excellent opportunities for researching authors and literature from a specific region. Rhetorical study of readers theatre technique and performance concepts also provides scholarly
reading. Coger and White support the value of such productions as presented here when they say, "Oral reading, as used in Readers Theatre, is one of the best ways to know and feel the full meaning of literature because, when audibly expressed, it appeals not only to the mind but to the whole range of the senses" (11).

Scope of the Study

Literature written by native Iowa writers is used in this script. In capturing the attitudes and personalities of this state, the study focuses on literature that reflects the feelings and emotions of the rural Iowa lifestyle. The script follows a persuasive format that presents a clear view of the current economic problems in Iowa's rural population. The script states possibilities for action that should be taken to ease this stressful situation.

This study is concerned with preparing a compiled group performance script. Individual performances or other forms of presentation are not studied or compared. The study looks closely at the special challenges involved with preparing a social context script. Discussion of current trends and philosophies related to this type of performance are pursued and analyzed in terms of their relationship to the production concept. The final script is included as well as basic production notes. The intention of this
study is to reinforce the applicable nature of this movement in the field of interpretation.

Methodology

This study offers information about the complete production process; from conception to final script. This procedure is categorized as a descriptive (analytic) approach to research in interpretation. This type of research is clearly an acceptable method to follow, as Martin Cobin says:

The preceding examples of historical (reconstructive), descriptive (analytic), and experimental (predictive) research demonstrate that a variety of methods are employed in the area of oral interpretation. These examples all seem pertinent to oral interpretation because of the problem investigated. (335)

This literary analysis involves gathering and selecting appropriate pieces for the production.

Through extensive use of library sources and personal inquiries to Midwestern experts in the field, many useful materials can be found. This author's personal background as a native of this region assisted in narrowing the choices of material. Specific selections for the script are based on thematic objectives and literary quality. In determining literary quality, specific criteria found in
major interpretation textbooks is used. Lee and Gura provide an excellent three-fold system of criteria:

Let us assume that you have made a tentative decision of material, or have narrowed down the possibilities to two or three selections that are equally appealing to you, as far as content is concerned. Before making a final decision, you wish to evaluate the choices as pieces of literature. You will do well to consider three factors as touchtones: universality, individuality, and suggestion. (9)

Only material that meets these criteria is found in the script.

With the chosen material collected, the scripting was done. A discussion of arranging and adapting this material into script form is included to provide necessary background on how individual selections fit together to produce a group performance script. The development of original transitions is also included in the script.

Since the script is not intended for performance at the time of this study, the evaluation is to determine the potential this compiled script holds in revealing the lifestyle of Midwest people. A personal, subjective evaluation was done to assess the degree to which the script achieves the goal outlines in the purpose of the study. Similarly,
several external sources (experts in interpretation from various regions) were asked to judge the script on its potential for performance. Responses to these evaluations are also found in this study.

Review of the Literature

The resources needed for a social context interpretation study can be categorized in some general areas. The researcher should first justify the study through some historical perspective. Second, the definition of the theories and significant terms is needed. Third, the researcher must seek out suitable literature to be used in the actual script. Finally, discussion of the textbooks used to aid the researcher in choosing and adapting the material is provided.

The most highly regarded source of recounting the history of oral interpretation is the book by Bahn and Bahn. The book traces the origin of interpretation and its implication on other disciplines. An especially good thesis to read, also, is Richard Skiles's, for it gives the reader a very complete picture of the significance of the field and its history. Before the existence of the periodical, Literature In Performance, a series of pamphlets, Issues In Interpretation, was published. In one issue there appeared an excellent variety of articles discussing the benefits of social context scripts.
The most important definition to clarify is that of the American Gothic lifestyle. This label given to the rural Midwesterner is very important to the understanding of the completed script. *Rural Psychology* by Melton and Childs, as well as *Rural Society* by Sanders, delve into the progression of this stereotype. James Coop's empirical study also examines the development of rural society in the Midwest. This study helps in getting a grasp on how rural Iowans live. Clarence Andrews has edited a book which offers interesting definitions of this term provided by various Midwest authors. Individuals from all areas of the region describe their memories of growing up in the Midwest and how it seems different to them from other areas of the country. *The Midwest: Myth or Reality* is a book to carefully consider because it helps to clarify for the reader what makes rural Mid-America different from anywhere else. Martin Mohr's dissertation from the University of Iowa helps also to reveal this philosophy. He identifies specifically the writing of Iowan Ruth Suckow and attempts to pinpoint how her style is typically Midwestern.

Perhaps the most tedious process involved with a social context script is gathering appropriate literature. Many excellent anthologies refer exclusively to the Iowa rural lifestyle. The best resource available is the anthology of sixty Iowa authors, edited by Frank Paluka.
This work offers an excellent variety of native writers with short biographical sections for each one. It also has a good mixture of new and old authors to consider. The Heartland series of anthologies provides another good range of Iowa authors (vol. 1-2). Although editor Lucien Stryk showcases other Midwestern authors, there is a good representation in these books of Iowa writers.

Specific individuals have some very important works to explore. Probably the most well-known Iowa writer is Paul Engle. His collection of poems offers some insightful glances into this Mid-American work ethic tradition. Engle also edited an anthology entitled *Midland* which effectively captures the essence of rural Iowa. This anthology includes a fine assortment of prose and poetry literature. Ruth Suckow's books also illustrate the Midwest experience. Her writing often reflects her memories of growing up in rural Iowa. Relating to Suckow's style is Margaret Stewart's dissertation from the University of Illinois which critically discusses her fiction writing. Bess Streeter Aldrich is also a well-known Iowa author. Her books offer some excellent historical background of how this American Gothic lifestyle has developed. Many of her books deal with the pioneer spirit and the early Iowa settlers who cleared the way for further civilization. Perhaps the best collection of her works is the "treasury" of her favorite stories.
There are also many lesser known writers who contribute quality literature. Dale Kramer's collection of tales and songs gives the reader a view of the plight of the farmer from the time Iowa became a state up through the depression years of the 1930s. McKinlay Kantor, a famous name in American drama, edited an anthology of ballads and songs that also exemplifies this pioneer spirit and hard-working lifestyle typified in the American Gothic value. James Hearst published a recent collection of his poetry that brings a more current collection of moods and emotions to examine. Jay Signund should also be reviewed for his books of poetry that reveal the rural Iowa character. It is important to re-emphasize that all these authors are native Iowans writing about their home state.

In looking for guidelines in adapting and preparing the script for performance, previously completed theses on social context scripts are good references. Cancilla offers a good example of how to write the chapter on adaptation and scripting of the chosen literature. Also she provides some good suggestions for evaluation techniques. Gary Truitt's thesis also is helpful in the evaluation of the script. The major assistance, however, comes from the leading textbooks in the field of interpretation. Charlotte Lee's latest edition of her basic textbook develops credible criteria to follow in choosing
quality literature. She discusses a three-point evaluation measure to decide how well the selections might work in a performance setting. Also many helpful suggestions can be found for specifically analyzing prose and poetry selections. For guidance on production concept and adaptation technique, Coger and White's textbook is one of the best sources available. The book is clear and very precise in its instruction. All the necessary information for cutting and effectively compiling the literature into a smooth script are found in the textbook. Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey's group performance textbook supplements the other textbooks very well. Especially important is that the book offers sound advice in staging and rehearsal techniques when the script is finished. The sample scripts and production notes included in this book give the novice director fine examples to follow.

Plan of Reporting

The following chapters of this study further develop the ideas presented in Chapter I. Chapter II discusses the American Gothic lifestyle and the factors influencing the survival of that lifestyle in Iowa today. Chapter III explores the rationale behind selecting, adapting, and analyzing the chosen literature. Clarification of the criteria used, and discussion of thematic considerations is included. Chapter III also provides an analytical
approach to compiling the chosen literature. Explanation of cutting, adapting, and arranging the material into a cohesive form is done. Chapter IV is the presentation of a production concept and the finished script. Finally, Chapter V offers an evaluation of the script and suggestions for future research in the area of socio-interpretation.
Chapter Bibliography


CHAPTER II

DEFINING THE RURAL IOWA LIFESTYLE

Perhaps aware of its pioneer heritage, this nation has viewed life in rural areas in a romantic, nostalgic way for decades, and throughout American history, writers, politicians, and scientists have noted this phenomenon. This chapter will explore the common qualities of the rural lifestyle which seem to encourage this curious bond, particularly the rural areas found in the state of Iowa. A more vivid label that captures the rural quality of Iowa is American Gothic. A definition and examination of this label will also be made. To understand clearly the current factors influencing rural life in Iowa, this chapter will examine the economic contributors and social implications of the current farm crisis.

When one is discussing the lifestyles of rural people, the range of topics is broad, and a clear definition of rural life is needed to narrow this range of possibilities. A state that is generally rural, like Iowa, still maintains areas that are distinctly non-rural. Certainly a native Iowan could easily identify Des Moines as an urban area, Ankeny as a suburban area, and Bloomfield as a rural area. There are basic factors that make these distinctions
obvious. Sanders implies that a widely accepted definition of rural today depends on the size and density of the settlement (2). The population density usually associated with rural areas ranges from 1,000 to 5,000 inhabitants (Sanders 2). Sanders reports that county officials often use these numbers to limit the size of rural versus non-rural areas within a county parameter (2).

The traditional perception of rural communities probably consists of a general store, one filling station, a church, and a school house. This concept, Melton and Childs propose, is in today's terms viewed as neighborhoods rather than rural communities (28). In Iowa this is truly the case. Although these small commercial areas still exist throughout the state, a better definition of rural communities should encompass the possibility of increased business activity. Childs and Melton define a rural community as "... the areas where people meet most of their social and economic needs" (28). It is this modern definition that better applies to today's rural Iowa life. Rural communities are more completely developed to accommodate the demands of its rural citizens. The commercial development in rural areas allows the rural people to remain separate from urban areas. It is important to recognize that even though Iowa's rural urban areas are often found close to each other, there is not
necessarily an interdependent relationship between these two lifestyles.

Childs and Melton rank Iowa fourteenth in rural population (17). According to their statistics, 41.4% of Iowa's entire population is rural (17). The isolation factor of rural life is important to consider. Sanders states that the average size of the farms found in these rural areas "... consists of at least ten acres" (8). No matter what size the farm may be, rural Iowans often find themselves physically isolated from surrounding neighbors. Usually one must travel at least one-half mile to visit the nearest farm. This necessity puts greater emphasis on family interaction and lessens the influence of external social pressures.

To define the individual rural citizen, Sanders suggests an analysis of the individual's attitudes towards work, family, religion, community, and current events (2). The phrase American Gothic captures the personality usually associated with rural Iowa. This phrase is taken from the title of Grant Wood's famous painting depicting an Iowa farm couple, complete with pitchfork, standing in front of a gothic-style farmhouse. This title makes reference to not only the gothic architecture of the farmhouse, but to the stereotype image of rural Iowans. The use of gothic in this context should not be confused with its meaning in
a strict literary sense. Childs and Melton explain their image of American Gothic rural life as "stoically upright and self-reliant" as well as "uncultured, naive, and ignorant" (1). Also associated with these images are such character traits as honesty, strong religious convictions, and a vigorous independence. These American Gothic qualities do much to define the attitudes of rural Iowans. It is significant to compare the relationship between this view of a hard-working family-oriented, independent Iowa farmer and the nostalgic pioneer spirit about which Americans enjoy fantasizing.

There appear to be three primary components that characterize rural citizens of Iowa. The land and its many resources comprises one of these components. The land has great influence on the farmer's life because it becomes his employer, provider, and partner in life. The demands the land makes on the farmer are substantial. His ability to meet these demands often determines his success or failure in farming. A part of the American Gothic character is sense of confidence. To build a better life for his family and its future generations, is a primary goal of an Iowa farmer. It is imperative, then, that he feel a sense of hope and promise in the soil's potential. The land also represents more freedom and independence than might be found in urban areas. The nearest neighbor may be
a mile or two away, and the sense of space and isolation enhances a sense of freedom that the rural Iowans prefer.

A second component which identifies rural life in Iowa are religious beliefs that help govern farm families. Michael Borich says that "... a Midwestern conservative is a caretaker of time-proven beliefs" (72). This statement exemplifies the traditional, protestant perspective rural Iowans have toward religious issues. The devout faithfulness to basic religious doctrine like "Honor Thy Father and Mother" is clearly important to this lifestyle. Iowans possess a loyalty to God that stems from their appreciation to Him for the lifestyle He allows them to preserve through agriculture. The local churches in rural communities are well attended, and there is active participation in church offices. The churches are crucial social institutions for reaffirming the belief in a particular way of life.

Third, close family unity characterizes rural Iowa life. Childs and Melton describe the rural family as typically "... close-knit, loyal, supportive and highly dependent on one another" (34). Because of isolation and the demands of farm living, families develop a lifestyle that encourages a great deal of interaction. In rural communities, there are no shopping malls in which to congregate or neighbors who live next door. The parents
have a deeper responsibility to teach social values to their children because of the absence of these factors. In a rural environment the children spend more time with other members of their family than with peers, classmates, or other adults. As they work together to plant and harvest the crops, farm families tend to develop a bond that lies at the heart of the American Gothic tradition. The sense of unity and identity found among farm family members is one of the most important qualities of the rural lifestyle.

The stereotypical perception of rural Americans possessing a better quality of life than found in metropolitan areas is a myth associated with the rural life. Childs and Melton tell us, rural life is looked upon as slower paced, more in tune with the natural rhythms of life (1). The rural way of life is considered by many to be clean and simple. Many urban citizens, in fact, periodically enjoy the rite of "getting back to nature" to maintain their bond with this simpler lifestyle (Childs and Melton 1). To think, however, that life in the country is constant and unchanging is false. As Sanders points out, "The drama of change in rural communities is now being played on a world stage" (1). Modern farming technology makes agriculture a global business that has far reaching impact on the national and world economic picture. Rural
society should not be viewed as simple, uneventful, or remote. Rural citizens are now required to alter their lifestyle to meet the demands of a progressing nation. Modern technology closes the gap between urban and rural living, thus making today's world much smaller than it once was. The assumption, therefore, that rural Iowa still maintains the aspects of life found in the dreams of urban society is not completely true. Current economic conditions forecast the passing of the family farm, the heart of these pioneer qualities. The danger is real for losing completely this pioneer spirit that is most often associated with rural society.

The rural lifestyle that exists among Iowa farm families provides an important link to the frontier heritage of American life. Understanding and appreciating these qualities is primary to believing in the need for preserving this way of life. Today the nation is seeing the demise of this heritage as small farm operations go bankrupt. According to Iowa State University Agriculture Economist Neil Harl, "... nearly 30% of the nation's farms are sliding towards insolvency" (Newsweek 52). The consequences of losing the small farms of Iowa and other Midwestern states will be severe. The implications extend beyond just forcing a few individuals to readjust their lives. From the U.S. deficit to the private banks and
businesses of small towns across the nation, the plight of the Iowa farmer is influencing the quality of life in America (Farm Journal 16).

Although farmers are usually pessimistic in their predictions of agricultural conditions, the current crisis is not a false alarm. The major difficulties that farmers currently face can be traced to the developments in agriculture during the 1970s. The mid-to-late 1970s was an era of great prosperity for farmers. Prices for their products were high and interest rates were seven to eight percent, a relatively low level by today's standards. Land values for premium Iowa soil were good and all economic indicators for agriculture were positive. Caught up in the exhuberance of these good times, many farmers planted fence row to fence row and produced record yields. Federal and state lenders encouraged farmers to expand by borrowing on their current success. Many farmers in Iowa, and across the nation, found themselves with mounting debts that exceeded their assets. The risky decisions made during the excitement of the 1970s provided the catalyst for the grim economic conditions now facing Iowa farmers.

The 1980s have seen an extremely different economic picture for farmers. In an effort to fight inflation, the Carter and Reagan administrations raised interest rates (Register 11A). This decision changed easy payments into
expensive ones for the farmer that threatened their solvency. As a result, land investments in Iowa began to decline along with their value. Paul Baker, a twenty-eight year old Creston, Iowa, farmer commented to the Des Moines Register that a nearby farm that was worth $2,250 per acre three years ago recently went on sale for $600 per acre—and did not get a bid (Register 11A). Only a few years earlier the bright prosperity of owning more land and producing greater yields was very encouraging. Now, burdened with the debt of those good times, many farmers are experiencing the result of those decisions.

To add further damage to the steadily deteriorating economic picture, prices for corn, soybeans, beef, and other produce began to fall. President Carter's embargo on grain exports to the Soviet Union began this drop in the value of Iowa's crops as silos became filled with surplus grain (Register 11A). One-third of all American crops were severely hurt by this action (Register 11A).

The final blow resulted in four consecutive years of poor crop yields due to bad weather conditions. For most parts of Iowa, the planting seasons during the 1980s were plagued with either too much or too little rainfall (Register 11A). Now, as the debt problem mounts for farmers, many are searching for places to acquire loans that might keep them farming one more year.
As President Reagan began his attack on the federal deficit, cuts in federal aid to farmers were instituted. These actions left many farmers with nowhere to turn for help. Bankruptcy, for many, is the only solution. Bankers and credit union officers who once encouraged the farmer to borrow and expand, are now foreclosing on farmers' loans, or are going out of business themselves. Certainly the farmer must accept a portion of the blame for his present condition. It is the belief of many stable farmers that better management by the more zealous individuals during the boom years of the 1970s could have prevented the problems those unfortunate farmers are now facing (Reed interview). However, many others believe as Green County, Iowa, extension director Galen DeValois does, that, "Telling a farmer now having financial problems that it's because he is a poor manager is not only unkind or crude. This is just not true" (Register 14Z).

As farmers and government officials exchange heated accusations, the crisis deepens for rural Iowans. Linda Schotsch reports in the March, 1985, Farm Journal that the central states appear under the most stress and that the young farmer is the most vulnerable (14). Iowa banker John Crystal likens the farm situation to a "whirlpool" in which the weakest farmers are being sucked down now, with another layer of farmers on the verge of joining them (Register
Young farmers who have begun to farm face extremely ominous predictions for their future. In Iowa the crisis has fallen heaviest on the one-family farm. The Des Moines Register and Tribune was overwhelmed during the first three months of 1985 with letter after letter from individuals wanting to explain their plight. Many find themselves at the end of hope, struggling to survive in farming.

The basic American Gothic values are threatened by this farm crisis. The proud dependence on these virtues is beginning to crumble. As the crisis worsens, many young people are re-evaluating their plans of entering school programs that would prepare them for a life in farming. Duane Pecinovsky, a Crestwood, Iowa, high school student explains his reasons for changing his career plans.

I don't want to lose everything, be wiped out in a few years. I want to do something and make sure it'd last a while. I'd like to work on a farm, but I don't think I'd like to do it every day of my life. (Register 12F)

Pacinovsky's attitude is representative of many young Iowans who may be deciding farming is too uncertain to depend upon. This lack of confidence strikes at the very heart of the rural values for which Iowans take such pride. The February 18, 1985, issue of Time magazine reveals disturbing details of the impact the crisis is having on
the family unit. According to the magazine's reports, suicides among farmers is on the rise (32). As the realities of economic stress takes its toll, many farmers are becoming desperate. Many of those who are close to the farm crisis tell of growing violence among frustrated farmers (Time 32). Child abuse or family neglect may be an outgrowth of this problem if the emotions are not controlled. The American Gothic characteristics of strong-will, independence, and intense loyalty are being threatened by this farm crisis. The need for a sense of security and confidence in the future of farming is crucial to these same values. As individuals seek to save the family farm from extinction, perhaps they are also seeking to save the pioneer heritage of these people.

This chapter suggests that Americans are proud of their frontier roots and want to believe that this spirit still manifests itself in the lifestyle of rural America. Perhaps it is the belief by urban society that this way of life will always exist that is deterring more comprehensive action from taking place. James. T. McAvoy's essay entitled "What Is the Midwestern Mind?" captures well the current attitudes and realities of Midwestern residents like rural Iowans.
The Midwestern mind is no longer that of the frontiersman who gave up comfort and culture to conquer the fields and streams, nor is it the mind of the raw immigrant who had not yet learned to live in the freedom of mid-America, either on the countryside or in the slums. Nor is it yet that of the hard working pioneer farmer and businessman whose practical ideals aid the foundation for the present prosperity. . . . The Midwestern mind is the mind of those who intend to stay in the Midwest and make it their home. But that is not to say that these same people do not want to retain the strength of character of the pioneer, or the spirited courage of the incoming immigrant, or the matter-of-fact hard working spirit of the transplanted Yankee of other days. (66-68)

As McAvoy's essay illustrates, the rural traditions and heritage found within Iowa's farm families are important to preserve. The current crisis in Iowa and throughout the Midwest is challenging the existence of the values discussed in this chapter. Without thoughtful and considerate action, the lifestyle that Iowans so dearly cherish will be lost.
Chapter Bibliography


"Concern Over Drop In Farm Students." The Des Moines Register 3 Mar. 1985: 12F.


"Midwest Farmers Fail to Weather Economic Storm." Des Moines Register 10 Feb. 1985: 11A.


CHAPTER III

THE LITERATURE: SELECTION, ANALYSIS, AND ADAPTATION

Introduction

Most practitioners of oral interpretation probably believe as Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey do, that, "Literature has been considered incomplete until it is performed" (6). This same individual should realize that an appropriate performance of literature requires careful analysis and preparation. This chapter will explain the special factors that influence selecting literature for a social-context script. Close examination of the analysis and adaptation procedures used to prepare such a script will also be included. Specific examples of literature chosen for this interpretation study will be used to illustrate how these principles have impacted the outcome of this study.

Selecting the Literature

Most respected sources in the field of group performance would probably suggest beginning the selection process with the evaluation of quality literature. This practice, however, does not consider the more recent developments in social-context based group performances. K. B. Valentine says in her article, "Interpretation in
Social Contexts," that, "The performance can extend beyond the normal bounds of literature in performance" (1). A social-context script by its very nature is rhetorical. Such a script addresses a clear social problem or issue, and also states a specific action. The awareness of the persuasive elements in communication can be found at least as early as Aristotle, who said, "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (26). Although one may approach a more traditional group production script by first conducting a literary evaluation, a social-context script must initially consider thematic and rhetorical concerns.

The wide range of literature available for a social-context script requires that the adapter understand fully the framework in which the literature will interact. Because this script is attempting to stimulate interest, provide better understanding, and provoke action, a persuasive speech structure can be employed. The "motivated sequence" invented by Alan Monroe in the late 1940s still remains an effective organizational tool (315). The five-step structure--attention, need, satisfaction, visualization, and action--establishes the persuasive framework for this script.

An immediate decision to explore exclusively native Iowa writers was made. Iowans writing about their state
and its past and present conditions is probably the most accurate and credible literature available for this study. Coger and White suggest that, "In selecting material for Readers Theatre, one should consider the audience. . . ." (33). Since this script is about Iowans and is intended for Iowans, the decision to include only Iowa writers was a logical one. The focus on the thematic and persuasive structures was the first determiner for choosing the literature.

Once the framework of the script was clear, more specific criteria were followed for literature selection. Charlotte Lee's three "touchtones" were used for general reference in limiting possible alternatives. In her book, Oral Interpretation, Lee suggests the literature should contain "... universality, individuality, and suggestion" (19). This three-fold criteria provides a solid starting place for evaluating material. It is important that the literature chosen for this script appeal not only to rural Iowans experiencing the farm crisis, but to all audience members. Literature that will display its uniqueness, while also contributing to a compiled script, is important to choose. In accordance with this criteria, the selections found in this script should not merely inform the audience about the farm crisis, but instill a deeper appreciation
for and desire to preserve the rural way of life that is threatened.

Coger and White's Readers Theatre Handbook discusses more specific criteria for selecting material. They advocate that a piece of literature should embody "... evocative power, compelling characters, action, enriched language, and wholeness" (33). These guidelines for literary selection warrant closer attention to discover their implication to a social-context script. Coger and White maintain that a piece of literature possesses evocative power when it, "... contains stimulating ideas and insights that leave the audience with a memorable, meaningful experience" (33). A selection that pulls the audience into its experiences is suggested by this term. The literature must be evocative in the sense of employing interest and strong imagery. Powerful literature has the ability to stir emotional responses in the audience as they become actively involved (33). Material that prompts the audience to recall, reminisce, or react to Iowa's heritage and present troubles meets this criterion.

Characters in literature that are the most interesting are the ones that illicit clear, emotional responses from the reader. Coger and White say that, "Action and interaction of interest-compelling characters are necessary ingredients in a theatre script..." (35). Because of
its inherent rhetorical framework, this script draws heavily upon non-fiction material. Although the interaction may not be found among characters in the literature, the interaction of speaker and society, or speaker and himself creates an extremely intriguing definition for action.

Literature that focuses on specific cases rather than broad generalities can be powerful indeed. The plight of the Steffe family, for example, as presented in *Time* reveals a character and his fight to survive (32). The diary of Elmer Powers also provides close insight into a man's confrontation with society (10).

Newspaper articles and letters are good examples of the activeness non-fiction literature provides for a readers theatre performance. The value of distinguishing between outward and inward action would appear to further justify the viability of compelling speakers in non-fiction. Coger and White suggest that the action of a character need not always be outward, or physical because "... a thinking or feeling character is a character in action, especially if the thinking or feeling is directed against a counter-sentiment or force" (36). The inward reflections of anger and desperation in the letters are examples of the action available through non-fiction prose.
Literature written with creative, thoughtful language should be chosen also. Coger and White classify, "... language that benefits from being heard," as enriched language (37). A valuable testing device for this criterion is reading the selection aloud. Material that is well constructed will noticeable orchestrate harmoniously when read aloud. An awareness of empathic responses to rhythm, rhyme, tone, phrasing, and descriptiveness will better assist the choice of good literature (37). The poetry found in this script especially exemplifies these qualities of enriched language.

A final concern governing the selection of material should be one of unity and harmony within the script. Coger and White offer the advice in this area of considering a selection's possible place in the whole script (40). An adapter must imagine how a certain piece will interact with others and whether that interaction creates a desired effect. A sense of "wholeness" is imperative to a good readers theatre script. In meeting the demands of a social-context script, the selection process comes full-circle with this final step. When considering the interaction of the material, the adapter is once again focusing on the script's rhetorical framework.
Analyzing the Literature

Once the selection process has been completed, the adaptation of the chosen material occurs. This process involves close investigation of the literature to determine its meaning and purpose within the group script. Charlotte Lee reinforces this statement when she says, "After making a selection, the interpreter must thoroughly investigate everything to be found within that particular piece of literature itself" (19). Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey also define the objective of analysis in group performance as attempting to "... determine what the literature means and how it means what it does" (7). The term adaptation refers to the process of arranging the selections into an effective progression of ideas, emotions, and action. Involved in this procedure may be certain alterations, deletions, or additions, to the literature for it to better fit the script's intent. As Coger and White maintain, however, "... the text should be kept as intact as possible" (42). The process of adapting and arranging the material lies at the heart of preparing this group script.

The social-context script found in this study has relied completely on two literary forms, non-fiction prose and poetry. Sessions and Holland define non-fiction as a category of prose that, "... concerns itself primarily with explanation and persuasion" (165). Forms of
non-fiction most frequently encountered are diaries, letters, essays, biographies, editorials, and political documents. The primary concern for social awareness found in a social-context script may steer an adapter to this type of literature. Many of these types of non-fiction prose are incorporated within the script, providing variety and emphasis to the social issue being addressed.

Charlotte Lee suggests that non-fiction prose may be easier to analyze and adapt because of its didactic approach (163). Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey, however, point out some challenges to working with non-fiction literature. Because non-fiction is more factual in focus, their suggestion is that a redundancy or predictability can occur that detracts from the power contained in the literature (67). The use of choral effects and creative line divisions can solve this dilemma. An example of confronting this problem is found in the auction notices included in the script. By adding the choral refrain "Auction!" and dividing the auction notices themselves among the readers, the factual focus becomes more interesting and meaningful for the audience.

When analyzing a piece of non-fiction, the necessary question of point of view is influenced by somewhat different concerns than when analyzing point of view in prose fiction. Non-fiction writers do not use a persona
or narrator to relate the story, but communicate directly with the reader in their own voice (Long, Hudson, Jeffrey 67). The diary of Delight Wier, for example, can be seen as a sounding board for her own need to reaffirm her love of rural life. This inward form of communication is different, however, from the form used in the letters. The letters written by Iowans establish a rather direct dialogue with the reader. The author of the letter realizes that there will be a reader to communicate his message to. A sensitivity to the possible points of view will show, through performance, the variety and strength of non-fiction literature.

Public documents that use a reportorial style of communication also carry a different point of view. Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey say that the position for communicating to an audience through these documents is more distant (71). The reporter does not interject personal opinions in good journalistic pieces. Such depersonalizing develops a distance that could alienate the audience member in a performance. If the audience member feels too detached from the speaker and the speaking situation, he may become disinterested in the subject being presented. The explanation of available crisis organizations and the discussion of the stages of loss experienced by some farmers present examples of this reporting style. At first
this material may appear cold and unworthy for inclusion because of the distance in point of view. Through careful line division and proper attention to the most important words or phrases, however, the selections can indeed work well in group performance.

Whichever form of non-fiction is explored, it is important that a main concern be the motivation behind the speaker's thoughts and emotions. Sessions and Holland suggest doing as much background research on the writer of non-fiction pieces as possible (191). An extensive review of the author will allow the adapter a more complete understanding of the reasoning and intent behind the writing of the selection. A close examination of the conditions found in rural Iowa satisfactorily achieves this type of research. By understanding the environment and emotions affecting their opinions, one can make confident choices about this literature and its use in performance.

Generally speaking, poetry differs from prose in its increased emotional appeal. Many scholars have attempted to define poetry, most with varying degrees of success. This script follows the definition given by Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey that identifies poetry as "... a rhythmic expression of human experience through a tight, well-chosen, intensified language" (54). These same scholars further
offer support for performing poetry through group readings when they say:

A group is easily able to magnify, by its numbers alone, the interest, excitement and possibilities of performance. . . .

Responsiveness and creativity—essential ingredients to the performer—frequently benefit from group vision and participation. (54)

Poetry is characterized by its capsulized form and therefore presents unique challenges for a group performance.

The persuasive aims of the script once again governs the initial selection process. The four poems chosen for this script attempt to portray the American Gothic values found in rural Iowa. The fond memories recalled in "Our Family/Our Farm," or the strains of our past found in Engle's poem, "Heritage," were chosen for a pathos effect. The Iowa depicted in these poems emphasizes the rural lifestyle that is in danger of extinction. Through the arrangement of these poems in the script, it is believed the audience will respond to the emotions and images through increased awareness of the values they represent. The poems urge the audience to visualize the need for action as well.

Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey propose four considerations for exploring group performances of poetry (55). The first
of these examines the dramatic situation of the poem. The interaction of the speakers or the implied speakers in the poem is referred to as dramatic situation. Their conflicts provide the frame for the emotions to be expressed. The selections used in this script employ the implied voice consistently. The poem, "Iowa's Constant Crop," for example, could be very meaningful if placed in a musical round setting. The repeated stanza suggests the cyclical way of life Iowans cherish. As more voices speak this same stanza, the theme of the constancy of life is emphasized. The interaction of voices reaffirming the emotions of the original speaker can be quite dramatic.

According to Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey, an acute sensitivity to the sound structure of a poem is also needed (59). It may be assumed that a poet has already reduced his poetic expression to the least amount of words possible. This aspect of poetry results in much richer and more potent language than might be found in other genres. The sound of the words when spoken create a myriad of reactions that could impact on the poem's effect. Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey exhort that "Sound texture is the acoustic surface of language" (60). The oral, aural reaction to the poem must be closely examined. Incorporated within this concept would be careful scrutiny of the poem's rhyme and rhythm patterns, as well as the analysis of alliteration,
assonance, and onomatopeia. The impression of the sounds and the implications of their meanings are key factors to understanding sound structure. The pronunciation of words like, "swell, bulge, creased, stubbled," create sounds of hardness and sturdiness that connote a rugged individualism. The use of assonance in words like, "furrow, meadow," suggest a flowing, cooling sound that brings softness to the poem. A sensitivity to alliteration will derive special sound qualities as well. Examples like, "dark depths, streams stubbled" provide strong consonant sounds that once again emphasize a feeling of strength and individuality important to the poem. Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey caution against "oversounding" in poetic analysis, however (61). If one becomes too aware of these sound characteristics, one might distort the meaning of the poem. Identifying and enhancing the sound structure in the poem can increase meaning for the audience and provide variety in experience.

Important clues to the poem’s meaning may be found in the composition of the printed poem. Many times the way a poet arranges the poem on the page can lead to key meaning. Paul Engle’s poem, "Heritage," for example, provides an interesting look at how stanza division can effect analysis. Each of the first three stanzas discusses a different family member as the poem traces the persona’s heritage. Engle
reinforces the individual significance of each person by separating these descriptions into stanzas. Further use of commas can be seen to highlight each, specific quality inherited. The next two stanzas are longer and possess a flowing quality that reveals a spiritual persona who symbolizes the broader heritage of mankind. By the fifth stanza the commas are less evident and the images more closely linked together. The central message of the poem is emphasized in a two line stanza. The shortest and last stanza draws, then, the most focus. An awareness of this visual structure can, therefore, enhance the performance of the poem.

The programming of the poems to which Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey refer deals with the placement of poems in the script (64). Following the thematic and structural concerns, the poems should be strategically placed in the script to focus on important concepts. By arranging the poems early in the script, the foundation identifying the American Gothic lifestyle is laid. The audience member first must identify with and feel appreciation for these values of Iowa life before an explanation of its fight for survival can be expressed. The "Heritage" poem is placed near the end of the script not only to reaffirm these values, but to strengthen their importance in the rural Iowan's life.
Adaptation of the Literature

Coger and White have commented that, "At times, portions of literature may be rearranged for the purpose of turning the material into a performance script" (82). As one begins to look at the whole of the script rather than its separate parts, some changes within individual selections may have to be made to satisfy the intent of the entire script. Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey remind us that the word adaptation "... refers to change, alteration, or adjustment" (21). When necessary and ethical, a piece of literature may require deletions, additions, rearrangements, or extractions (23). To be consistent, the decision to adapt a selection first depends upon the persuasive framework of the script. The arrangement of the selections serves to move the audience through the motivated sequence explained earlier in this chapter. Any alterations of selections also was done to enhance the persuasive process.

The adaptation of poetry can be a dangerous pursuit indeed. Because it is already pared to its smallest form, a poem does not lend itself agreeably to deletions. There are no changes in the poems found in this script. The original poems contain the vibrant qualities needed to heighten the goal of the script. Their arrangement within the script frame was decided upon by their function in
conveying the script's message. By placing the poems which reminisce about Iowa's rural character in the early portion of the script, it was intended that they would satisfy the attention step of Monroe's "motivated sequence" for the audience (315).

The non-fiction selections required some extractions, due mainly to time restraints placed upon the script. Coger and White warn that, "The maximum duration of Readers Theatre performances is usually sixty to seventy minutes, and many directors feel that it is difficult to hold an audience longer than an hour and a half" (40). It has been the experience of this adapter that fifty minutes is a very good running time for a readers theatre production. This limitation, therefore, demanded that selections like James Gannon's letter to President Reagan and Elmer Powers' diary be shortened. Another reason for shortening some of the non-fiction selections is to achieve balance. It is important that the audience not be overpowered by one certain point or emotion presented in a single selection in the readers script. A good balance of the various forms of non-fiction prose used in the script was strived for. As previously suggested, non-fiction prose literature can be cut fairly easily. Paragraphs or long explanatory sentences can be removed without impairing the expression of thought in the selection. This statement does not imply,
however, that careful consideration to keeping the original material "intact" was not done. It is believed that a progressive, unified script was produced with this kind of extraction. The most extensive adapting occurred within the Elmer Steffe story that originally was found in *Time* magazine. To dramatize the reportorial quality of the literature, personal pronouns were implemented, replacing the proper nouns used by the original reporter. Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey support the ethics of this type of rearrangement when they say, "Occasionally the director of a group performance will locate material that needs to be reordered for more effective communication" (22). This minor alteration enhances the serious condition of the Steffe farm because it allows Elmer and Pat Steffe to speak out themselves, thus focusing on individual characters and their confrontation with this crisis.

Another major form of adaptation is the employment of additions. Original transitions were created to instill continuity and balance in the overall progression of the script. By placing these transitions between the selections, the script is linked together and the persuasive motive of the performance is more fully realized. In many cases, quotations and statistics were used to emphasize or highlight the major thrust of an article, letter, or poem.
Summary

Together the qualities necessary for preparing a group script—selection, analysis, and adaptation—reflect the challenges and complexities involved in such an undertaking. As a final reassurance of the script's potential, Long, Hudson, and Jeffrey pose some insightful questions for the adapter to consider when he feels the script is finished (25). They ask, first of all, does the script possess unity? In other words, do the parts fit well together to create a new, vivid form? It is felt that this script does possess this unity. Does the script contain contrast in tone, length of selections, and style? The use of prose and poetry with varying lengths and emotions satisfies this question. Finally, is the focus clear? Perhaps this is the most important question to ask when evaluating a social-context script. To answer affirmatively to this question, one must consider the progression of the script and its clear organization. One should evaluate the selections to determine if their variety actually serves one main theme or message. This script clearly focuses on the current plight of the farmer in a persuasive manner.

If a readers theatre script can survive truthful answers to these questions, it may be ready to stand alone as a literary re-creation. If the finished product makes
its point, is faithful to the original texts, and is understood to be an artful, meaningful experience by its adapter and critics, it is ready for rehearsal and performance. Theoretically, this script can now be taken into this next phase of production.
Chapter Bibliography


CHAPTER IV

PRESENTING THE SCRIPT

Production Concept

The original intention for compiling this script was to present an accurate portrait of the rural Iowa lifestyle. The production concept was influenced by the desire to provide a deeper appreciation for the way of life found in that state. The changing events in Iowa's rural economic situation over the past few months has altered greatly this initial motivation. As the compiling and arranging process began, the overall concept for the script's purpose became more and more persuasive. What began as a readers theatre script to inform and instill appreciation for Iowa's rural lifestyle, has now become a rhetorical social-context script to persuade and motivate individuals to preserve the rural way of life in Iowa.

In selecting the material for this type of script a three-fold criteria was developed. The literature focuses on the essence of rural Iowa life, the severity of the economic crisis now confronting this lifestyle, and supportive evidence for action that must be taken to save this way of life from extinction. The important goal that unified the selection process was to develop within the
audience member an appreciation for and a desire to preserve the family farm way of life in Iowa. The decision to limit the possible choices of material to native Iowa writers was made in order to enhance authenticity and credibility. Native Iowa writers who have described the special qualities of their state or have discussed the crisis that currently exists are the best sources for such a script as this. This choice has provided an original, unifying voice that urges Iowans to maintain their family farms.

The poetry selections specifically attempt to identify the special qualities of life unique to rural Iowa living. The commitments to the land and the family unit, as well as the pride found in a hard day's work, are emphasized. These portions of the script primarily serve to reinforce the American Gothic virtues of hard work and clean living associated with rural Iowa life. Paul Engle's poem "Heritage" is positioned near the end of the script as a reminder of these virtues.

The diaries of Elmer Powers and Delight Weir provide insight to specific individuals who have lived in this rural environment. By dividing the Powers' diary into various voices the concept of the general rural community is stressed. Especially, the diaries serve to reveal the
historical perspective by which this farm crisis can be approached.

The various editorials and letters written by residents of Iowa were found in issues of the Des Moines Register and Tribune. The issues covering the first three months of 1985 were examined. A conscious attempt was made to keep the original contents of the letters intact so as to maintain the emotion and tone of the individual.

Factual and statistical material was chosen to instill a move to action in the audience members. The listings of crisis hotlines and the explanation of Boyum's stages of accepting loss reveal what must be done to save the family farm. The purpose of this portion of the script is to make a more direct plea to the audience to be involved in the solution to the crisis. Suggestions on how to help on a local and statewide level are given.

The decision to place the narrator in the role of moderator rather than story-teller presents a more rhetorical framework for the script. The narrator serves to introduce each selection and provide important factual information related to the severity of the current economic situation in Iowa. By keeping the moderator outside the dramatic structure found in each selection, the rhetorical tone of the script is emphasized. It is important that each audience member realizes that the events are real, not
merely dramatizations. Much of the narration is original and based on months of careful study related to the farm crisis in Iowa.

A final overriding concern in preparing this script was the audience role in the production. A very specific audience is imagined for this production. The purpose in preparing this script is to present it in Iowa to the citizens of that state, both rural and city populations. The overall effect desired is one to motivate Iowans to become unified in their actions to solve or mitigate this crisis. The script focuses on imagery and emotions common to the Iowa experience. It is expected that the audience members will recall or reminisce about their own memories of living in Iowa. This script is intended to urge all audience members to take action to save Iowa's family farms.
PRESERVING A WAY OF LIFE IN IOWA:

THE PLAGHT OF THE FAMILY FARM

a compiled script by Dennis M. Doyle

(this script is compiled for five performers and a narrator)

1: The rural Middle West is more than a physical area. It is a region of the heart. A home place: sometimes narrowly disapproving, but nurturing and loving, and preserving the style of the era before America moved away to the city. A place of ice cream socials on warm summer evenings, of the autuminal smells of fresh cider and burning leaves, of snowy silences pierced by the zip of sleds, of the dewy softness of a new born calf.

N: This definition of Middle America by William Carter focuses on some of the qualities that make this region so special. Cedar Falls native James Hearst uses his poem, "Landscape--Iowa" to explain how Iowa fits into this special part of America.

2: No one who lives here knows how to tell the stranger what it's like, the land I mean,

3: farms all gently rolling, squared off by roads and fences,
creased by streams, stubbled with groves,
a land in its working clothes,
sweaty with dew, thick-skinned loam,
a match for the men who work it,
breathes dust and pollen, wears furrow
and meadow, endures drought and flood.
Muscles swell and bulge in horizons
of corn, lakes of purple alfalfa,
a land drunk on spring promises,
half-crazed with growth--
I can no more
tell the secret of its dark depths
than I can count the banners in a
farmer's eye during spring planting.
"Our Family/Our Farm" by Jim Heynen, a native of
Sioux City, Iowa, illustrates the special family-oriented quality of the people who live there.
Land there in Iowa lay so flat
we never dared run naked through the fields
and only joked of swimming nude
in the creek so close to the railroad.
Now and then we did pee in the clover
but only on dark nights when the neighbors
were inside with their four-cornered eyes.
All roads there were so straight,
barns rode the horizons like ships,
the sun was hours in setting,
and on the heaviest summer nights,
a laugh could be heard for a mile.
We learned to be cautious as the albino fox
the whole township hunted for years.

So we were never exposed
except to ourselves on Saturday nights
when, just after eight, our family of five
conspired in the dim-lit kitchen,
stark-naked around the galvanized tub.
We laughed and pinched and took turns
scrubbing and using the same water.

Sunday morning the wide church pews
were the final test. We passed: Father,
Brother, and I in our black suits and starched collars.
Mother, tightened in her corset, black hat and veil.
Sister, too fully developed, draped in her loose
brassiere and the dress that kept everything private.
We liked things that way:

the inside and the out.

The confidence of Iowa's future as a rich, productive
state is a source of pride for its residents. "Iowa's
N: Constant Crop" by Peg Smart shows the continuous way of life Iowans depend on.

1: These tanned young boys ride big tractors, and learn of life from animals instead of city street corners. They look ahead with honest eyes and see right through put-on airs. When they find love they settle down,

2: then have tanned boys who ride tractors and learn of life from animals instead of city street corners, and see right through put-on airs. When they find love they settle down

3: then have tanned boys who ride tractors. . . .

N: A young farm couple's love for each other is only matched by their mutual love for the land. This excerpt from Delight Wier's diary reveals this special quality of Iowa.

3: I am one of those extremely lucky women who have a farmer for a husband. I don't let it get too far away from my thinking, either, when I have a complaint coming up on my lips and my blood boils about some of our problems. I try to remember I'm where I always yearned to be--on a farm.
3: I've noticed that farm women know all about doing the chores if they like being married to a farmer. We can actually live our business together. No office secretary knows more about her boss's work than a farmer's wife can know and talk over with her husband. There's no eight-hour day. You're in it together. You can talk it at breakfast or in the living room. And it's your calling for life and 24 hours every day. You say there's no escape? Well, if you want to think of it that way, there isn't. But we prefer to think we are farmers by choice, masters of our fate, co-workers with God.

I think the work a farmer and his wife share is one of the binding influences rewarding to rural living. I don't hear of many honest to goodness, hard-working farm couples filing for divorce. In fact, I can depart on my favorite subject and sing about Ralph anytime, whether it is June and our wedding anniversary or not. What do I love about him? True, we have grown older and the crinkles in the corners of his eyes when he laughs are deeper. But who cares when the same has happened to you. The important thing is that he laughs. I like to hear him at the supper table after the prayer or Bible talk is over. He can joke the children into a fine state of hilarity. Then if it
has rained so that he can't work overtime in the fields, the kids all coax for a ball game in the front yard. When we all go out to feed the bees or check the pigs or count the calves we enjoy the togetherness. It is good to share the responsibility. It's wonderful when you can see the value of being out in the fields with him to check the growth of the young corn or the dryness of the alfalfa hay. There's little doubt in my mind that he knows I feel a quiet assurance sitting beside him in church on Sunday morning. These are some of the things I love about him.

Unfortunately this way of life and its special qualities is being threatened in Iowa today. The following comments found in Iowa farmer Elmer Powers' diary are common feelings many farmers are currently expressing.

Every time I have been to the city and get back home again the farm feels so good. I like the cities for business places, but to live, for me I must always have, "one foot in the furrow, and one hand on the plow."
2: Saturday. October. 31.
Looking back over the past seven or eight months, it does not seem possible that the changes that have taken place in agriculture can be real. How the people of a Nation can show so little appreciation to their fellow citizens who produce the two most essential things for them (food and clothing) is beyond my comprehension. There is little consolation in the fact that while justice is slow, it is certainly sure.

Today is the beginning of a new year. I believe everyone is speculating more than usual as to what the New Year will bring to themselves and to all of us. Personally I still think the farm is more than a business and a place to accumulate wealth. It is life itself. First of all the soil, the feel of the earth. The respect they have for it. The fields. The weather and the changing seasons. All life itself comes from these things. Then there is the plant life. The crops. The trees. The live stock and poultry and all of their young things to be cared for. The responsibility of growing the food and flesh for a distant and often unappreciative city. Just to be close to work with nature is one of life's greatest opportunities.

Another neighbor is talking bankruptcy as the only way out. I do not know if I spelled the word correctly or not, but I do know that to many farm folks this is the meanest and ugliest word in the language. And it is a word that many of them yet may be compelled to use in their own business affairs.

5: Sunday. April. 19.

Another Sabbath day has come and gone. The weather was unusually nice today. I was here at the place all day. With me, the day was a day of rest. I drew a comfortable chair up to a window and spent some time looking out at the farm. But what I saw and thot about was more than just the farm. I saw all of the other farms as well, all of agriculture. The conclusion that I arrived at was that our nation is a careless, thotless nation in so far as our farm folks are concerned.

It is true that a great many people are serious in their efforts to better agriculture, but the nation as a whole is not. They take their food and clothing and source of it as a matter of course.

N: The sad truth about these comments made by Powers is that they were made over fifty years ago during the years of the Great Depression. Violett Olsen also
N: recalls those depression days in Iowa and sees the startling comparisons to life in Iowa today.

3: I was 10 years old in 1932 and as a farm child in NW Iowa I remember those terrible times when farm neighbors were losing everything. I remember my mother crying, but I didn't understand why. All farm families were afraid! History is repeating itself, and once again American farm families are in deep trouble. Farmers need a president and national administration that remembers, recognizes, understands, and reacts positively to a national emergency that, if neglected, could cause a depression in the 1980s even worse than the one of the 1930s.

N: This is no longer just a farm crisis, it is a people crisis.

All: AUCTION!

1: I am quitting farming and moving out of state. I will be selling my machinery on the premises south of Pomeroy.

All: AUCTION!

2: As we have sold our farm, will have a complete dispersal sale of our machinery and farm related items at the old Sewal school house east of Corydon.

All: AUCTION!
3: Complete closing out of International Harvester machinery. We will hold a complete closing out sale of our machinery northeast of Algona.

All: AUCTION!

4: Complete liquidation dealer auction. Going out of business of Koelker Implement Company one mile north of Dyersville.

All: AUCTION!

5: As I have decided to quit farming, I will sell the following property located from Mason City 10 miles east on Highway 18 to Nora Springs and 3 miles north on S-70.

All: AUCTION! Lunch served on the grounds.

N: The past few winters have seen almost as many farm auctions as funerals in Iowa's rural towns. The combination of low prices, heavy debt, and high interest rates is threatening to eliminate the privately-owned family farm. The fears expressed by many farmers suggest the possibility of experiencing another great depression in the farm belt. One Iowa farmer expressed her fears to a CBS crew on a cold February evening.
"I wonder," she said, "if the whole southern half of Iowa were to go bankrupt and disappear, if anyone would care. Would anyone really care?"

Perhaps Elmer and Pat Steffe are wondering that today. Here is their story.

A neighbor emerged from Elmer Steffe's white farmhouse amid the gentle bluffs of southwest Iowa. Inside the house, Elmer, 47, a sturdy, barrel-chested man, explained he is losing his 460-acre farm and suspected that the neighbor might have been snooping around for the bank that will seize his property.

"You can't be too careful with anybody these days."

There is an air of mourning around the Steffe farm.

Friendlier neighbors drop by, bringing covered dishes of food.

The quiet talk centers on the misfortune of the Steffes.

Without saying so, each visitor is aware that his or her farm could go next.

As third-generation farmers, we had acquired 280 acres by 1966, raising livestock and planting a variety of crops.

In the booming 1970s we added another 180 acres and rented 530 more.

Farming began to sour for them in 1979 as they fell in debt.
The people in town really trusted me. The feed dealer carried us along. So did the gas dealer. Everybody helped us out.

The recession of 1981-82 put the Steffes further into debt. When they could not get a new loan to tide them over they filed for bankruptcy, reporting liabilities totaling $800,000.

The bank won the right to temporarily seize the collateral we had on the loans.

After waiting all week for Sheriff Bill Shaw to carry out the seizure orders, we were surprised when 13 lawmen from several counties arrived at the farm before 8 a.m. on Friday.

We were still in bed.

The officers blocked off all the access roads to the farm.

I called some of our neighbors to let them know what was happening, but only a few hiked the half-mile from the nearest intersection in the cold weather.

We did not resist,

but cooperated only minimally with the sheriff.

Workers hired by the bank loaded many of their pigs, sheep and cows into a cattle trailer. They also hauled away much of Steffe's machinery.

We do not want to be escorted off our land.
And we do not intend to be on hand when the house is taken.

Neither is outwardly angry, although Pat wonders . . .

why farmers with debt out of proportion to their assets are told to get out of business, but the Government keeps right on going that way. My husband has been despondent, but he has come to view his situation philosophically.

I am still a rich man, I've got my wife, my kids, my health and some good friends.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Budget Director, David Stockman.

The U.S. farm economy is 'fundamentally faulty' and can be mended only by a 'shakeout' of financially troubled farmers, not by a major program of federal credit assistance. There is not going to be a big agriculture credit rescue bailout. U.S. farming suffers from over investment and too many producers. The farm financial woes are the result of bad debt that was incurred by consenting adults. Certainly this means the likelihood of substantial numbers of farmers going out of business, but that is how a dynamic economy works.

This infamous statement did not endear Mr. Stockman to the people of Iowa. What followed was a wave of protest
and indignation that indicated the outrage felt by the people of Iowa toward the public that appeared to be turning its back on them.

Farmers want parity, not charity.

Farmers need a chance, time to work things out.

Farmers have had enough . . . we are going to move forward and reclaim rural America.

We gather in troubled times . . . to mourn, grieve, and even perhaps weep over the loss of our people, those who lost a future because of this crisis.

The Midwest farmer should shut down all grain and livestock hauling and selling and marketing goods and products, (even) if that means getting everyone's tractor out on the highways and interstates, slowing down and ultimately halting the flow of traffic, creating mile after mile of traffic jams. We would cause a food shortage and panic buying at all food stores by a strategy of creating false shortages that in turn create real shortages. We must use peaceful resistance to gain our ultimate goals, the preservation of the family farm, thereby putting the profit back into American agriculture. All social and economic revolutions were ignited by one spark. We must save what it took two or three or four generations to progressively build. Our children deserve it and our forefathers would expect it.
5: We must look peaceful and harmless chewing on a blade of hay but we have not begun to fight for our own acre of land, house on the hill, tranquil and stable existence that haunts every square mile in rural towns. The days of cheap food are over.

3: I'm a farmer, farm wife and mother, and fighting to keep all Iowans peaceful and compassionate. Foreclosure, bankruptcy, and voluntary liquidations all mean slow death to Iowa and rural America. I was born in an old farmhouse in Emmet County. When I was a small child, my dad let me ride on the tractor, help him milk the cows and feed the pigs. All these chores taught me to love the soil, animals and farming. When I was 6 years old, my father was killed in a tragic farm accident. We left the land, so I understand how many adults and children feel. Iowa has always been the best place to raise children and corn; let's keep it that way. Help Iowa remain a state of loving and kind farmers.

2: I am a district superintendent for the United Methodist Church. I travel a 10-county area in Southern Iowa called the Creston District. Mostly these days I spend my time dealing with hurt and pain. The people who talk with me are the proud rural people who are witnessing the death of their way of life. Last month
I found myself in a prayer meeting on the courthouse lawn in Corydon. Several hundred persons had gathered in support of a farm family that was 'going under.' We placed 73 crosses on the lawn to symbolize the deaths of that many family farms and businesses in Wayne County. It is estimated that 10 percent of our families will 'go under' in the next 18 months. I am told that a group of six farm families leaving the land spells the death of one small business on Main Street. Our schools and churches soon follow, leaving a ghost town. Recently I visited our church in Beaconsfield. The small congregation has lost half of its church school this year. As farmers leave the land, children cease to be a part of the community. The small church is about the only social institution left in small towns. Social services do not really exist locally. Now government, through a cruel economic policy, is closing churches. What are the people to do? Our land is becoming idle through bankruptcy and voluntary liquidation. We know that one day it will be sold for a small price to the large, faceless, corporate farm operator. We are watching our beautiful land of the small family farm become a colony for large corporations. Already 1 percent of the
farms, with income above $500,000, receive two-thirds of the farm income. Meanwhile, in places like Lenox and Bedford, the producers of the nation's food supply stand in food lines and apply for food stamps. This ought not to be! Iowans do not ask for much these days. We would like the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This translates as the right to keep our communities from becoming ghost towns, the right to work and grow food and to receive something for our labor, the right to give our children a future on the land, and to keep our dignity as humans.

N: James Gannon, writer for the Des Moines Register, received statewide acclaim for his letter to President Reagan written on March 3, 1985. He attempts to enlighten the president on the farm crisis that is facing Iowa's people today.

4: Dear Mr. President:
Oh, you should have been there. They invited you to the big farm-crisis rally in Ames last Wednesday, and if you had come you might have begun to understand what's going on here in the Heartland of America.

5: I don't blame you for not understanding the farm-credit crisis: even those of us who live in the Midwest and watch agriculture closely are just
starting to grasp its complexity and implications. We've been so baffled by lifeless numbers—debt-asset ration, farm-foreclosure statistics, budget-cost figures—that we've lost sight of the essence of the problem.

1: You see, Mr. President, the country does not have a farm crisis. Our rich land, our advanced technology, machinery, chemicals, and agricultural know-how guarantee that the United States will lead the world in food production. No, it's not a farm crisis; it's a people crisis. The land will produce, but will anybody live on it? The chemicals will work, but will Iowa's small towns die? Someone will own and work the land, but will farm families end up in town on food stamps?

2: You would have seen that these are the real issues, if you had joined us in Ames. You'd have seen more than 15,000 men and women from rural America, brought together by a financial crisis that threatens their jobs, homes, heritage, and hopes. And you'd have liked them.

3: They are your kind of people, Mr. President—most of them voted for you, and they like what you say about the importance of family, patriotism, hard work, self-reliance, old-fashioned virtue. These people are the Americans of your nostalgic dreams.
4: But if you had been there, you'd have seen the farm crisis threatens all those values. It threatens to turn these God-fearing, hard-working, family-concerned, well-rooted Americans into welfare cases—dependent, dejected, bitter, hopeless. It could turn them against you, your party, your ideas and your vision of the future.

5: Yes, they would have put a lump in your throat, Mr. President. Unless we are all wrong about your human side, I know you would have not turned your back on these farmers. I can envision you saying,

1: "I'll work with Congress to design a long-range farm program to ensure the future of rural families and rural towns."

2: My God! Mr. President, can't you imagine the wave of relief, joy and hope that would sweep the prairies?

3: Can't you see that you could forever enshrine yourself in America's Heartland?

All: Oh, you should have been there.

N: But, of course, Mr. Reagan was not there and the situation in Iowa and the other farm states worsens as the opinion and attitude of farmers toward the administration blackens. This is not a farm crisis, it is a people crisis. We are in danger of losing a way of life, the privately owned family farm. Much
N: of the strength and identity of Iowa is found in the heritage of this lifestyle. Paul Engle, one of Iowa's most prolific writers, expresses the importance of this heritage in his powerful poem entitled, "Heritage."

All: I HAVE INHERITED

2: My mother's nature,
Sensitive to light,
By any strong wind led,
Loving each living creature,

4: And from my father feature
In eye alert of sight,
In a horse trader's head,
Hands that are never still,
Hair as brown as a walnut hull.

1: And finally a will
Running through bone and marrow
Tough as grandfather's skull
Which seventy years ago
Broke a hickory arrow
From a Dakota bow.

3: I have the hands of a man,
The harried hawk eyes to see.
I am the ghost which ran
From the sun, and out of flame
3: Made a length of energy,
   Giving it face and name,
   The lonely touch of a woman,
   The terrible power to be,
   Calling it proud and human.

5: The generations of men,
   Thrust their shoulders behind
   The wheel of my living when
   Neither wheel or I can find
   The plain road to the future,
   The rut through the buffalo grass.
   They bind the ragged suture
   In bone around the brain,
   They stare from my eyes and pass
   With the little pulse of heart
   Through artery and vein.

All: No man lives apart.

5: He cannot ever hide,
   For they are at his foot
   And wander by his side,

3: They are the bold, dead stone
   That bends the living root.

All: This is not a farm crisis, it is a people crisis.

3: If the southern half of Iowa went bankrupt,
All: would anybody care?
The rural Iowa lifestyle is one of the small towns, small farms, and close families. This way of life is in danger of extinction. An immediate concern is preserving a positive attitude for the struggling farmer. Many are becoming so discouraged and defeated that they are giving up. Many farmers are facing foreclosure or extremely difficult economic decisions. They need help. The stages of accepting the realities of the problem can be awesome to handle alone. Richard Boyum, a counseling psychologist at the University of Wisconsin, says that the emotional stages involved with losing a farm is very similar to dealing with the loss of a loved one.

1: The first stage is denial. The farmer refused to believe he could lose his farm. He says to himself, "Sure, things are bad, but not that bad . . . They're really not going to foreclose . . . We've been here so long it's just a scare tactic."

2: Then it is bargaining. The farmer grasps at anything that gives him a reason to hang on. "We've planted a different hybrid and our corn never looked better; the U.S. is about to make a big grain deal with the Russians." The farmer tries to buy time and hope.

3: Anger. The farmer lashes out in an attempt to find blame. "I had one farm wife who left her husband
3: because she couldn't stand to see him beating the kids--something he never did before." Often the anger stage takes the form of increased drinking.

4: Depression. Awareness of the inevitable seeps in. The farmer may stop caring. "I had one banker call me who had a farmer tell him if he foreclosed he'd kill himself. The banker wanted to know whether he should take him seriously. I said, yes, definitely."

5: Finally, acceptance. The farmer and his family realize they did their best and are faced with one of life's more negative experiences--loss.

N: Handling and coping with these difficult emotional stages may require guidance. Iowans need to wake up out of the anger stage and start helping fellow citizens accept the realities of the situation. Too little concern and attention has been directed to dealing with the emotional crisis these farm families are facing. Their emotional trauma impacts their work, their relationships with family, and with friends. Better government and state support is needed to help preserve a foster the family farmer. There are currently a variety of support groups around the state and Midwest.

1: The state Farm Bureau.

2: Groundswell (organized in Minnesota).
3: Iowa Farm Unity Coalition.
4: Iowa State University Extension Service.
5: Family Agriculture Crisis Team.
3: Help Distressed Rural America.
2: Farmers Helping Farmers (based in Illinois).
1: Iowa Hotline for Farm Families.
5: Rural Concern Hotline, and
2: The Prairiefire Hotline.

N: All these groups and phone services are there to assist the farmer with the farm crisis. But these are not good enough. As one travels from county to county, one finds a variety of individual agencies and organizations attempting to help their farmers. Better unity needs to be achieved for the whole effort to save these people to work with greater impact. Senator Charles Grassley supports better organization when he says,

1: The farmers are well-organized themselves, through crisis committees and other organizations. But what we need now is a means of bringing out the power of the rural communities . . . we need the kind of think-tank attention given by folks in Washington to the problems of the Third World nations a while back.

N: The financial portion of the picture is the tip of the iceberg, the part that is visible. Yet the emotional
portion of the picture lies beneath the surface. To those not directly involved with the loss the family unit faces, it is invisible and unknown. But this emotional strain can rip and tear the family unit apart.

2: The troubled farmer faces an overwhelming sense of isolation. He may see himself as different from his neighbors, as having failed, and may feel he must hide his feelings from them—even from his family.

3: I remember the spirit of joy and ecstasy the Holidays always brought to our home. Last New Year's marked the twenty-first year that my family spent the holidays in that old, drafty farm house. Little did we know it would be our last. At that time my family knew little about terminology such as bankruptcy or foreclosure, and if we did, we took the words lightly, not really anticipating the impact that they would someday have on us. We were forced to leave behind the farm that we lived on for twenty-one years, and father was forced to leave an occupation that he dreamed and built upon for thirty-two of his fifty-seven years. It is somewhat hard moving from a two-story farm house into a double-wide trailer. My family feels the impact of this even emotionally, financially, and even physically. Mom and Dad seem
3: to have aged more rapidly this year than any other. My father looks as if he is lost. I often see him fighting back tears which easily develop in his eyes as he reminisces about the American dream that he once touched. My mother now wears a pale, cold look on her face. She bravely tries to smile, but the eyes that once sparkled are now replaced by a dull glaze. Four years ago my father's assets totaled around $1 million, and today he has little to show for it.

All: It is not a farm crisis, it is a people crisis.

N: Though there has been a steady exodus from the farm for decades, today's statistics describe the accelerated passing of a way of life. So far, 8 to 10 percent of family farmers have sold out to pay off loans in the last year, up from 1 to 2 percent normally. Many experts take it for granted that in two or three years 25 percent more will vanish. Eventually, some say, as many as half of the Midwestern farmers could go out of business. Therefore, the way of life presented in the previous diaries, articles, and poems is in danger of extinction. What can we do to prevent this from happening?

1: First, we must begin on a grassroots level. Each of us can be involved by becoming more sensitive to the
1: condition of our neighbor. Farmers must feel able to talk with others who are understanding and sympathetic to their cause.

2: Second, those of us who are not from the farm can volunteer to be a good listener for those people who need to express their frustrations.

3: Third, we need a solidarity of effort. Helping organize on local and regional levels will provide our communities with a voice—a voice that must be heard by the state legislature and the federal government.

4: Fourth, we Iowans must call upon our state law-makers to better regulate the support groups that are currently operating. Those that have sprouted up are sometimes at odds with each other over how to handle the people in the crisis. This conflict does not help the farmer. By bringing the ideas of individuals involved with the crisis together statewide, we can save the lifestyle we so dearly cherish, and make the voice of Iowa be heard all across the nation.

1: Communicate!

2: Listen!

3: Unify!

4: Legislative!

5: These are the steps to take in order for a movement to save the family farms to take place.
Dixon Terry and David Ostendorf from the Iowa Farm Unity Coalition sum up the problem with their view of what lies ahead for Iowa if no action is taken.

This is no longer a farm crisis or a rural crisis, but a crisis for all Iowans and the nation. The Iowa economy as a whole has suffered from the long-term denial of adequate farm income, and is about to be hurt on a much larger scale. We will continue to see our soil and water resource base deteriorate as our family farm system comes to resemble the energy industry in terms of corporate control, then everyone who eats will pay the price for losing the family farmer.
Bibliography


Dixon, Terry, and David Ostendorf. "What the State Could Do to Help Alleviate the Farm-Debt Crisis." *Des Moines Register* 7 Feb. 1985: 3A.


"Farm Rally Renews Hope That Farmer's Plea Will Be Heard." *Des Moines Register* 3 Mar. 1985: 1F.


Lane, Susan. Letter. Des Moines Register 3 Feb. 1985: 6C.


CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Three acknowledged experts in the field of oral interpretation were asked to assist in the evaluation. This chapter discusses the implications those evaluations have to the final social-context script. Also included in this chapter are responses to these critiques made by the adapter of the script. The second part of this chapter assesses the values this study may have for future exploration in socio-interpretation.

Evaluation of the Script

The decision was made early in the development of this study to seek outside evaluation responses. It was believed that these responses could add an impartial perspective to the potential of the script.

Vera Simpson of Texas Tech University was chosen because of her expertise in regional literature. She is well-known in Texas for her many years of careful study in Southwest literature. Because this script attempts to convey the thoughts and emotions found among the residents of a specific region, her comments are especially valuable to this study.
Kristin B. Valentine of Arizona State University is nationally recognized for her work with social-context scripts. She served as editor for the Journal of the Arizona Communication and Theatre Association's special issue concerning the new emerging relationship between social issues and interpretation (Spring 1978 Vol. IX). Her published articles on socio-interpretation are regarded as important contributions to this area of oral interpretation. Her comments on the accuracy of placing this script in the social-context frame were sought.

Phyllis Scott-Carlin of the University of Northern Iowa is also recognized as a leading advocate of performing literature in social contexts. Her recent exploration of interpretation beyond the classroom has been significant to the discipline. It was suggested that her comments focus on the performance potential this script may have for an Iowa audience.

These critics have a firm foundation from which to discuss social issues in interpretation. All three attended the 1979 special conference hosted by Southern Illinois University that explored the role of interpretation in social contexts (Colson interview). Letters sent to these professors recommending a specific focus for their response are found in Appendix A in this study. They were asked, in this letter, to return a brief written
evaluation that might be included within this study. Simpson and Valentine provided their comments in the form of notes written on the returned script copy. Carlin responded with a written critique that is reprinted in Appendix B.

Simpson organized her remarks in three areas of the script. She suggested that the transitions need to be better developed to provide more "interesting and provocative" transitions. Second, she recommended that the line assignments for the poems be re-analyzed to heighten their dramatic effect. Third, she felt that the persuasive structure of the script is inconclusive without more clearly stated action.

Two considerations governed the arrangement of the transitional material for this script. The author feels the transitions should serve to introduce the selections as well as unify the entire script. Each transition provides the author's name and title of the selection, or valuable commentary to illustrate the connections between selections. The decision to reinforce the persuasive theme in these transitions may account for Simpson's concern. Perhaps individually they appear too simplistic or didactic, but in viewing the script as a whole, the transitions provide necessary dramatic progression in addition to their informative purpose.
The second area of concern is for the line assignments used in adapting the poetry selections for the script. Simpson feels that better sensitivity to the voices within the literature is needed. This comment appears well-founded when each poem is analyzed in an isolated case. Because of the rhetorical structure of this script, however, it is believed that simplicity rather than complexity in line assignments is important. Individually, re-assignment of lines may improve the dramatic effect of the poem. An increased dramatic effect may not satisfy a need in this script, however. Collectively, the poems must interact evenly with all the other material. The residual effect of these poems cannot be so great as to overshadow the next step in the persuasive process. If an audience member, for example, is so enraptured with the dramatic effects of a single poem, he or she may miss the valuable statements made in the next selection that is presented. In a social-context script this must not happen.

Simpson's suggestion for a more complete statement of action at the end of the script is a good one. Certain rearrangements and additions were made to correct the original structural problems.

Valentine generally finds the script to be an accurate example of how literature can be used to enhance a social issue. Her main concern is the need for an increased
clarification of the action step in the script. She refers to Monroe's "motivated sequence" as a very good framework guide in which to organize the script. This advice was heeded and proved very helpful in correcting the problem with the ending.

Carlin focuses her concerns in two areas of the script. Although she feels the script succeeds in reflecting the voice of Iowans, she implies there may be confusion as to which specific voice is emphasized. Carlin advises clearer focus on the "target audience" may be needed. She proposes that several scripts may be necessary to effectively address each specific audience. This comment draws attention to performance results that are unattainable until the script has been fully actualized through performance. Carlin also refers to the weakness found in the original ending to the script. Her comments for revising the action step basically echo those of Simpson and Valentine.

It is significant to point out that all three critics discovered a weakness in the ending of the script. All suggested that it be made more powerful and more explicit to better emphasize the persuasive intent of the performance. Acting upon Valentine's suggestion, the "motivated sequence" became the predominant persuasive framework for the script. To better emphasize the action step, a long
narrative section of the script was readapted and rearranged. Simpson's advise of better line division appeared to apply with this revising, and the narrative was divided further to enhance the dramatic effect of the literature. Carlin's suggestion of focus was also taken into consideration as the major steps to action were repeated by the performers. It is felt that the changes made in the ending of the script makes for a more powerful and conclusive finish to the script. The original script ending can be found in Appendix C for comparison to the revised ending found in Chapter IV.

Another important observation to make is that Simpson, Valentine, and Carlin all agree that this script has promising potential for achieving its purpose. All feel the script represents good research and analysis of the social problem involved. This writer concludes that the evaluation responses provide useful insight and criticism for this study. As seen by their comments, the ending of this script especially benefits through a better developed action step.

A personal evaluation finds that this study has successfully achieved its purpose. It can be concluded that the plight of the Iowa family farm and the social concerns that relate to their survival, can be accurately depicted through a group script of Iowa literature. The
American Gothic values in danger of extinction can be truthfully illustrated through this type of performance medium. It is believed that a performance of this script in Iowa would prove to be productive in encouraging Iowans to act now to save this lifestyle. The Iowa voice expressed through this script accurately reveals the frustration and fear many small farmers are feeling during this crisis.

Current philosophies and trends in interpretation, like those expressed by the critics, show that this script clearly can be identified as a social-context script. The clearly defined rhetorical framework of the script helps in separating it from other forms of readers theatre scripts. The adapter has learned that consistent focus on this framework, both in adapting and arranging of material, is needed to correctly address a social issue through a readers theatre script.

Suggestions For Future Research

The research indicates that a social issue can be addressed effectively through an oral interpretation performance. It is shown that this method of relating social concerns can be beneficial for its audiences. The possibilities for extending this type of study to other social issues are numerous indeed. As Carlin suggests, other scripts which explore the impact of the current farm
crisis on Iowans could prove worthy. Other issues that particularly affect a certain region or state can be addressed through social-context scripts with similar value.

The complex world in which we live requires constant examination to determine the quality of life that exists. As this study shows, social-context readers theatre are viable media for this examination process. A script that presents current issues like the plight of the homeless people in our urban areas, nuclear energy and its control, or the re-emergence of conservatism among our youth, could be prepared to offer close examination of these issues. The wealth of issues available to the interpreter supplies plenty of opportunities to use his art to explore the impact of the issues of our day.

There are, however, other questions raised by this study that can serve as the catalyst for further research. More investigation into the new demands that social-context themes place on the interpreter should be done. The use of interpretation in social context brings the pedagogical nature of the discipline outside of the classroom. A close analysis of the effect this process has on society and on oral interpretation may reveal important information about how agreeably the two can merge together to solve social problems.
As the field of interpretation evolves and broadens its perspective, it is important that research be done to document the changes that take place. Studies, like the kind presented here, help to advance the discipline by exploring new avenues of possibilities.
Chapter Bibliography

APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTORY LETTERS TO THE EVALUATORS
May 7, 1985

Dr. Phyllis Scott-Carlin  
Department of Communication and Theatre Arts  
University of Northern Iowa  
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613

Dear Professor Scott-Carlin:

Since visiting with you on the phone in April, I have finished the compiling and arranging of my thesis script. I believe it is finally ready for your perusal. I am sending it along with a copy of a production concept. I hope this added information will suffice in providing you background information on the study. Because the focus of the script has changed to a more persuasive one, I doubt that my original papers would prove helpful at all.

Your evaluation of this script will be included in my thesis study. The evaluation will serve as further verification for the significance this study holds. I would appreciate it if you could direct your comments specifically towards the promise this script has for an Iowa performance. I am very interested in learning if you think the script may prove beneficial to the Iowans experiencing the farm crisis. Also, I would like to know your view on the accuracy of this script in terms of the social-context frame. Of course, I am anxious for any suggestions you might have for improving its impact.

I am hoping that by sending this material to you in mid-May, there will be sufficient time for you to write the evaluation by the middle of June. I must turn over my finished thesis manuscript to the typist in the early part of July.

I feel very proud of this script, and am honored that you have agreed to take time to help judge its value. Please do not feel that this must be a lengthy evaluation. I will be thankful for whatever you choose to write. If you feel that you will not have time to complete the
May 7, 1981  
Dr. Phyllis Scott-Carlin  
Page 2

evaluation however, I would be grateful if you would notify me so I might find another respondent.

Thank you for your interest and guidance.

Respectfully yours,

Dennis M. Doyle  
901 Bernard #233  
Denton, Texas 76201  
817-387-5702
May 7, 1985

Dr. Vera Simpson
Department of Communication
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, Texas 79413

Dear Professor Simpson:

Since visiting with you at our festival in February, I have been researching, compiling, and arranging the material for my script on the plight of the Iowa farmer. I believe that it is finally ready for your perusal. I am sending it to you along with a copy of a production concept.

Your evaluation of this script will be included in my thesis study. The evaluation will serve as further verification for the significance this study holds. I would appreciate if you could direct your comments specifically towards the promise this script has in terms of performance potential and its accuracy within the social-context frame. Of course, I am anxious for any suggestions you might have for improving its impact.

I am hoping that by sending this material to you in mid-May, there will be sufficient time for you to write the evaluation by the middle of June. I must turn over the finished thesis manuscript to the typist in the early part of July.

I feel very proud of this script, and am honored that you have agreed to take the time to help judge its value. Please do not feel that this must be a lengthy evaluation. I will be thankful for whatever you choose to write. Thank you again for your interest and guidance. I will let you know how the thesis is received!

I am still planning to attend your retirement party on June 1st, so I will see you then.

Respectfully yours,

Dennis M. Doyle
901 Bernard #233
Denton, Texas 76201
817-387-5702
May 7, 1985

Dr. Kristin B. Valentine
Department of Communication
Arizona State University
Tempe, Arizona 85827

Dear Professor Valentine:

Since visiting with you at our festival in February, I have been researching, compiling, and arranging the material for my script on the plight of the Iowa farmer. I believe that it is finally ready for your perusal. I am sending it to you along with a copy of a production concept.

Your evaluation of this script will be included in my thesis study. The evaluation will serve as further verification for the significance this study holds. I would appreciate if you could direct your comments specifically towards the promise this script has in terms of performance potential and its accuracy within the social-context frame. Of course, I am anxious for any suggestions you might have for improving its impact.

I am hoping that by sending this material to you in mid-May, there will be sufficient time for you to write the evaluation by the middle of June. I must turn over my finished thesis manuscript to the typist in the early part of July.

I feel very proud of this script, and am honored that you have agreed to take the time to help judge its value. Please do not feel that this must be a lengthy evaluation. I will be thankful for whatever you choose to write. Thank you again for your interest and guidance. I will let you know how the thesis is received!

Have an enjoyable, relaxing summer.

Respectfully yours,

Dennis M. Doyle
901 Bernard #233
Denton, Texas 76201
817-387-5702
APPENDIX B

EVALUATION BY PHYLLIS SCOTT CARLIN
June 12, 1985

Dennis M. Doyle
901 Bernard #233
Denton, Texas 76201

Dear Mr. Doyle:

As you requested in your letter (May 7, 1985), I will make evaluative comments on your script entitled "Preserving a Way of Life in Iowa: The Plight of the Family Farm." According to your request, these comments will focus on the promise the script has for an Iowa performance, the potential benefit to Iowans experiencing the farm crisis, accuracy in relation to the context, and suggestions for improving the impact. Some general reactions open and conclude the evaluation, which is based upon review of the script and the written production concept.

I was pleased with the choice of this topic and your recognition of the potential uses of compiled scripts to interact with a major social issue or problem. The background research you have done is apparent and your familiarity with recent news reporting, the farm organizations, and the events of early 1985 in Iowa provides a solid base for a social-context script. I also appreciate the mixture of poetry, diary, news article, and factual text. The shift in the production concept that you decided to make indicates your study and analysis of present problems in Iowa agriculture.

One of the challenges to a social context project on the 1985 farm issues is the variation of opinion and perspective that exists among Iowans and even among the Iowa farmers. Your script acknowledges this when it refers to the differences between the various farm organizations. Thus the impact of your script will vary according to the specific audience you have within this group. In the production concept, you state that "a very specific audience is imagined" and that the purpose is "to present it in Iowa to the citizens of that state, both rural and city populations" (p. 3). This statement does not yet define a specific audience, but refers to a group that contains many audiences, some of which are in extreme opposition in their interpretation of the farm situation.
Some audiences in Iowa will not have to be convinced or reminded of the value of preserving the farm, and in fact, are already working on that goal, or view the value of farm life as a given fact that inspires their work to provide service to farmers, to work for government and community assistance, or to accomplish some other active purpose. Thus my suggestion for increasing the impact of the script is to define and analyze more specifically the make-up of the target audience, and refine the script so that it fits the level of awareness and involvement of the audience(s). You may need two scripts, or several, if you plan to approach farmers in crisis, farmers experiencing little difficulty, legislators, leaders of farm organizations, Iowans not directly involved in farming, and other groups within the wide range of interpretation, empathy, and experience.

Poetry and drama therapy theories and the research in the functions of dramatic language support the projection of impact from a performance of literature. The potential benefits of a script such as yours to those experiencing the crisis include the therapeutic effects it may have. Persons experiencing a threat of losing the farm may respond to its reaffirmation of the value of the family farm and its enactment of the emotions and experiences they have had in the struggle to hold on. For several potential audiences, the rhetorical structure combined with the impact of the selections may result in benefits such as (1) triggering action in organizing and solidifying farm groups or (2) encouraging individuals to be more aware and helpful to farmers in difficulty. I think these results are possible because I see potential power in group performances for social education, awareness, and action, and your script could well have this kind of impact in appropriate contexts.

Generally, I found the selections and the ordering of them to be effective and logical. You might consider adding poetic or dramatic mode text in the closing section of the script, which is primarily composed of factual, non-fiction text. These items are well structured and clearly address the intended and hoped for responses, but I feel the closing might be more effective if the selections were
augmented with aesthetic texts. (Note: the staging of this section may increase the drama, scene, symbolism, imagery; stage directions and the production itself were not available for review at this time.)

In conclusion, I applaud the informed approach to the issue, the ordering of the selections, the inclusion of crucial facts and current events, the mix of varied texts, and the rhetorical confrontation of a significant set of problems. I would encourage the selection of specific target audiences for presentation of the script(s) with some minor modifications and adaptations to the specific context. The script succeeds in reflecting the voices of many Iowans (and farm communities in other states as well) in a manner that demonstrates research and insight. Persuasion and performance of literature interact throughout a culture; a project such as this highlights the potentials of artistic group performance in society. Best wishes in the completion of your thesis and the production of the script.

Sincerely,

Dr. Phyllis Scott Carlin
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, IA 50614
APPENDIX C

ORIGINAL ENDING TO THE SCRIPT
of the picture lies beneath the surface. To those not directly involved with the loss the family unit faces, it is invisible and unknown. But this emotional strain can rip and tear the family unit apart.

The troubled farmer faces an overwhelming sense of isolation. He may see himself as different from his neighbors, as having failed, and may feel he must hide his feelings from them—even from his family.

For farmers facing difficult economic times, assistance is needed to help them to preserve their way of life. The best way to do this is to start on a grassroots level. Each of us can be involved by becoming more sensitive to the condition of our neighbor. Farmers must feel able to talk with others who are understanding and sympathetic to their cause. Those of us who are not from the farm can volunteer to be a good listener for those people who are. What we need is a solidarity of effort. Helping to organize on local and regional levels will provide our communities with a voice—a voice that must be heard by the state legislature and the federal government. We Iowans must call upon our state law-makers to better regulate the support groups that are currently operating. Those that have sprouted up are sometimes at odds with each other over how to handle the people in the crisis.
4: This conflict does not help the farmer. By bringing the ideas of individuals involved with the crisis together statewide, we can save the lifestyle we so dearly cherish, and make the voice of Iowa be heard all across the nation.

3: I remember the spirit of joy and ecstasy the Holidays always brought to our home. Last New Year's marked the twenty-first year that my family spent the holidays in that old, drafty farm house. Little did we know it would be our last. At that time my family knew little about terminology such as bankruptcy and foreclosure, and if we did, we took the words lightly, not really anticipating the impact that they would someday have on us. We were forced to leave behind the farm that we lived on for 21 years, and father was forced to leave an occupation that he dreamed and built upon for 32 of his 57 years. It is somewhat hard moving from a two-story farm house into a double-wide trailer. My family feels the impact of this event emotionally, financially, and even physically. Mom and Dad seem to have aged more rapidly this year than any other. My father looks as if he is lost. I often see him fighting back tears which easily develop in his eyes as he reminisces about the American dream that he once touched. My mother now wears a pale,
cold look on her face. She bravely tries to smile, but the eyes that once sparkled are now replaced by a dull glaze. Four years ago my father's assets totaled around $1 million, and today he has little to show for it.

All: It is not a farm crisis, it is a people crisis.

N: Though there has been a steady exodus from the farm for decades, today's statistics describe the accelerated passing of a way of life. So far 8 to 10 percent of family farmers have sold out to pay off loans in the last year, up from 1 to 2 percent normally. Many experts take it for granted that in two or three years 25 percent more will vanish. Eventually, some say, as many as half of the Midwestern farmers could go out of business. Therefore, the way of life presented in the previous diaries, articles, and poems is in danger of extinction. Dixon Terry and David Ostendorf from the Iowa Farm Unity Coalition sum up the problem with their view of what lies ahead for Iowa if no action is taken.

2: This is no longer a farm crisis or a rural crisis, but a crisis for all of Iowa and the nation. The Iowa economy as a whole has suffered from the long-term denial of adequate farm income, and is about to be hurt on a much larger scale. We will continue to
see our soil and water resource base deteriorate as our family farm system comes to resemble the energy industry in terms of corporate control, then everyone who eats will pay the price for losing the family farmer.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


---. *The Bess Streeter Aldrich Treasury.*


**Articles**


"Concern Over Drop in Farm Students." *The Des Moines Register* 3 Mar. 1985: 12F.

"Crisis Casts Pall Over Farm Country." *The Des Moines Register* 3 Feb. 1985: 14Z.
Dixon, Terry, and David Ostedorf. "What The State Could Do To Help Alleviate The Farm-Debt Crisis." The Des Moines Register 7 Feb. 1985: 3A.

"Farm Rally Renews Hope That Farmer's Plea Will Be Heard." The Des Moines Register 3 Mar. 1985: 1F.


Valentine, K. B. "Interpretation in Social Contexts."

Other Materials


