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EDITOR'S NOTE



## Voice Training through “The Mirror and the Lamp”

Rockford Sansom 

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The history of voice training remains one of my primary research interests. Nothing exists in a vacuum, and I am fascinated with how previous voice training continues to influence contemporary ideas. The art vs science debate within voice training endures and perhaps will never end (Winter 2021; de Lillis 2021). Using this dichotomy as a framing device for the voice field may help explain many of the changes and influences of the past 60 years (Sansom 2016). Nevertheless, I recently stumbled across a metaphor that offers an old yet fresh perspective: the mirror and the lamp.

M. H. Abrams was one of the most celebrated literary critics and Romantic scholars of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> His seminal book *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* explores the radical shift in Western art and literature between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the birth of Romanticism (Abrams 1953). Ultimately, the Romantic Movement represented a radical aesthetic and intellectual shift in European and eventually American culture with its emphasis in emotion and individualism—a stark contrast from the art formed during the Age of Enlightenment that valued reason and order.<sup>2</sup> In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, Abrams argues that until the Romantics art was generally regarded as a *mirror* reflecting the tangible and often literal world. With the birth of Romanticism, art became more like a *lamp*, where the artist's light (or inner soul) shined out to brighten the world. Within voice studies, the mirror and the lamp can serve as a lens for understanding both the evolution of the field and how voice research philosophically frames itself.

Historically, voice training functions as a *mirror*, perhaps even a pseudo mirror. The role of voice trainers can be to prepare individuals for the world as it is or how it is projected to be. Trainers can prepare actors and clients “for the real world” as the trainer perceives it or through a fixed training goal such as a particular vocal quality or accent. Or voice training can function as a *lamp*. Trainers can offer tools for actors and clients to shine light (speak their voice or “speak their truth”) into a dark world. I assert that this move toward individualism and self-expression in voice training is certainly the widening stream of late twentieth and twenty-first century training (Sansom 2019). Separately, the mirror and lamp metaphor can also operate around the art vs science debate as well. The *mirror* is science; how is training reflecting the physiological, objective realities of vocal anatomy and acoustics. And the lamp is *art*; how is training allowing the individual's perceptions and sense of self the opportunity to shine? And I surmise that there may be other ways to use this metaphor as well.

Rather than the stark discrimination between art and science, I find that the hazy metaphor of the mirror and the lamp captures this juxtaposition in voice training in a more nuanced way. Does the voice training reflect, or does it glow? Is the training centered on reflecting the tangible, or is it centered on shining individualism? How might the training do both at the same time? I find, of late, that these questions serve me better in my exploration of the voice field rather than “Is this training art or science?” Perhaps the mirror and the lamp is the better scaffold for looking at how old ideas influence the new.

## In This Issue

The issue opens with Amanda Flynn’s “Assessment in Musical Theatre: A Tool for Transparency, Equity, and Student Learning.” Flynn investigates the complex and sometimes divisive nature of assessment specifically in terms of musical theatre, but the implications and call to action of this research apply to both voice and the performing arts in general. Abimbola Adetola Stephen-Adesina offers “On the Effect of Honey, Bitter Kola, Ginger, and Alligator Pepper for Voice Care: A Case Study on the Perception of Undergraduate Actors.” This article examines herbal remedies and the undergraduate actor’s voice, specifically within a Nigerian training program. Henry Southwick opens the world of voice and actor training within a video game and digital context with “‘The Tongue Can Paint What the Eyes Cannot See’: The Voice Actor and World-Building in Videogames.” And Daniel A. Seda closes the article section with “A Literature Review on the Healing Effects of Music-Based Vocal Interventions for Novice Singers,” which explores how a transpersonal perspective on music-based vocal interventions may assist the therapeutic process.

The issue next highlights the 2021 Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA) Conference. The theme was “Rising Voices: Listening to the Past, Dismantling the Present, Cultivating a New Future.” This virtual conference featured several keynotes, two of which are featured in this issue. “Evolving into the Responsible Theater Artists We Aspire to Be” by Robin Miles reflects on the responsibilities voice trainers have in our current age, and “A Keynote Conversation with Tré Cotton” by Joe Hetterly and Tré Cotton looks at contemporary challenges, goals, and opportunities with accent coaching. As with previous conferences, the journal also features thoughts from attendees. My thanks to this year’s contributors: Kris Danford, Amy Chaffee, Vivian Majkowski, Linda Nicholls-Gidley, Jersten Ray Seraile, and Erin Nicole Washington, who created “Reflections on the 2021 VASTA Conference.”

The Forum section begins with “Making Connections: Combining Voice-Acting and Community Outreach” by Gwendolyn Schwinke. This essay explores community engagement and performance. Colton Weiss, Stacey Cabaj, Margaret Ball, and Lesley-Ann Timlick present “Dialect Coaching in Musical Theatre: A Conversation on Best Production Practices,” a roundtable discussion on trends in the field. And the Forum section closes with “Luisa Huertas: My Journey to Now” by Oscar Quiroz and Luisa Huertas. As regular readers of the journal will know, the My Journey to Now series consists of autobiographical reflections that honor and highlight distinguished practitioners from the world of voice. The journal is delighted to have Luisa Huertas share her story.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

## Notes

1. Modern Library (a division of Random House) named *The Mirror and the Lamp* one of the 100 most influential nonfiction books of all time. See <https://web.archive.org/web/20120825211346/http://www.modernlibrary.com/top-100/100-best-nonfiction/>
2. For more on Romanticism, see The Met at [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/roma/hd\\_roma.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/roma/hd_roma.htm)

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor



**Rockford Sansom**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Voice at Louisiana State University and the voice coach of LSU's resident Equity theatre, Swine Palace. As a coach, he has worked with actors Off-Broadway and in regional theatre, Fortune 500 executives, UN delegates, and members of the US Congress. He holds a PhD in education (Capella University), an MFA in theatre (University of Central Florida), and voice certifications from Fitzmaurice, Knight-Thompson, and Estill (Master Trainer). As an actor, he performed Off-Broadway, regionally, and in international and national tours. He is the Editor of the *Voice and Speech Review* and the editor of the book *The History of Voice Pedagogy*. Member, AEA, SAG-AFTRA.

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