

[About NYU \(http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about.html\)](http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about.html) / [News, Publications, and Facts \(http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about/news-publications.html\)](http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about/news-publications.html) / [NYU News \(http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about/news-publications/news.html\)](http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about/news-publications/news.html) / [2005 \(http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about/news-publications/news/2005.html\)](http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about/news-publications/news/2005.html) / [February \(http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about/news-publications/news/2005/02.html\)](http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about/news-publications/news/2005/02.html) / [15 \(http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about/news-publications/news/2005/02/15.html\)](http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about/news-publications/news/2005/02/15.html)

Louise Rosenblatt, Pioneer in Reading Theory and the Teaching of Literature, 100

February 15, 2005
N-232, 2004-05

Retired New York University Professor Louise Rosenblatt, who developed a revolutionary approach to reading and the teaching of literature with the 1938 publication of *Literature as Exploration* (Appleton-Century; Modern Language Association, 1995, 5th ed.), died Feb. 8 at the age of 100 in the Virginia Hospital Center in Arlington, Va.

The University of Chicago's Wayne Booth, writing the foreword to the 5th edition of *Literature as Exploration*, noted, "I doubt that any other literary critic of this century has enjoyed and suffered as sharp a contrast of powerful influence and absurd neglect as Louise Rosenblatt. She has probably influenced more teachers in their ways of dealing with literature than any other critic."

Rosenblatt's final book, *Making Meaning with Texts: Selected Essays*, was published by Heinemann on Feb. 1. She also authored *The Reader the Text the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Southern Illinois University, 1978, 1994) and had numerous articles and co-authored publications.

Rosenblatt was a professor of English education at NYU's School of Education (now Steinhardt School of Education). Prior to her arrival at NYU in 1948, Rosenblatt was an assistant professor at Brooklyn College (1938-1948) and an instructor at Barnard College (1927-1938). At NYU, where she earned the university's "Great Teacher Award" in 1972, she headed the doctoral program in English Education until her retirement from the university in 1972.

After her retirement from NYU, Rosenblatt was a visiting professor at Rutgers University and the University of Miami. She was also a member of faculty institutes in English at Northwestern University, Michigan State University, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Alabama, the University of Alberta, Auburn University, and the University of Massachusetts.

Rosenblatt received numerous awards from organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), including its Distinguished Service Award (1972), the David Russell Award for Distinguished Research (1980), and the James R. Squire Award for Extraordinary Contributions to Teaching and Learning in the English Language Arts (2002). She was elected to the International Reading Association Hall of Fame in 1992 and received the John Dewey Society Lifetime Achievement Award in 2001.

During her years at Barnard College, from which she graduated in 1925, Rosenblatt developed friendships with anthropologist Margaret Mead and poet Léonie Adams, part of a group known informally as "The Ash Can Cats." Mead chronicles the friendship in her memoir, *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years* (William Morrow & Co., 1972).

Rosenblatt was married to Sidney Ratner, an economic historian at Rutgers University. The two were married for 63 years at the time of Ratner's death in 1996. During World War II, Ratner was an economist for the U.S. State Department's Board of Economic Warfare and the Foreign Economic Administration, the *New York Times* reported in a 1996 obituary. During World War II, Rosenblatt worked for a U.S. intelligence agency, the Office of War Information, analyzing information from Nazi-occupied France.

Rosenblatt began as a literary historian and literary critic, publishing at age 27 a book in French on the "Art for Art's Sake" movement in England. While teaching literature to college students, she developed an approach that broke with the dominant academic model (the New Criticism), which elevated "the text," declaring it accessible only to those trained in unlocking its code. By contrast, Rosenblatt stressed that every act of reading involved a "transaction" of reader and text in which both were essential. In her view, any text-Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a car owner's manual, a poem-was lifeless without a reader who is active: active readers create multiple readings of the same text; no reading is uniquely "correct." At the same time, Rosenblatt argued against the purely personal and subjective approaches more popular in recent years. She noted that some readings were more defensible than others and worked for a community of readers who sought to refine their reading and test their responses against the text. Rosenblatt maintained that this approach-respectful of the individual's response while dedicated to serious communication and debate-is essential to fostering citizens equipped for democratic life.

Rosenblatt affected the teaching of English in this country and abroad. Two years after publication of *Literature as Exploration*, she addressed more than 3,000 teachers in the Manhattan Opera House. According to the NCTE's Kent Williamson, "This may have been the beginning of her work's profound effect on elementary and secondary teachers." Through her work in the 1940s and 1950s as a leader of professional bodies on literature and composition, Williamson stated, "she influenced thinking that would shape pedagogical practice at all levels of English instruction in the second half of the twentieth century." *Literature as Exploration* has been translated into Spanish, Swedish, and Arabic.

In November 2004, she spoke at a standing-room-only session of a national convention of English teachers, according to Gordon Pradl, an NYU colleague who chaired the session. NCTE's Williamson observed that, "At 100 years of age, she had acquired rock star' status because her ideas and beliefs were just as fresh, as liberating, and as relevant to the challenges that teachers face today as they had been so many years ago."

Born Aug. 23, 1904, in Atlantic City, N.J., Rosenblatt received the "Certificat d'Etudes Francais" from France's University of Grenoble in 1926. She received a doctorate in comparative literature from the Sorbonne in 1931.

Rosenblatt is survived by a son, Jonathan, of Arlington, Va. and a granddaughter, Anna.

This Press Release is in the following Topics:

[Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development \(http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about/news-publications/news.advancedsearch.html?tags=nyu schools%3Asteinhardt school of culture education and human development\)](http://www.nyu.edu/content/nyu/en/about/news-publications/news.advancedsearch.html?tags=nyu%20schools%3Asteinhardt%20school%20of%20culture%20education%20and%20human%20development)

Type: Press Release

Search News