

Louise Rosenblatt

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Louise Michelle Rosenblatt (23 August 1904 in Atlantic City, New Jersey – 8 February 2005 in Arlington, Virginia) was an American university professor. She is best known as a researcher into the teaching of literature.

Contents

- 1 Biography
- 2 Research and contributions
- 3 Works
- 4 Awards and recognitions
- 5 References
- 6 External links

Biography

Rosenblatt was born in Atlantic City to Jewish immigrant parents. She attended Barnard College, the women's college at Columbia University in New York City, receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1925.^[1] Her roommate was Margaret Mead, the anthropologist, who urged her to study anthropology. She initially planned to travel to Samoa after graduation in order to do field research, but decided instead to continue her studies in France. In Paris, she met French author André Gide and American expatriates Gertrude Stein and Robert Penn Warren.

Rosenblatt obtained a Certitude d'etudes Françaises from the University of Grenoble in 1926. She continued her studies in Paris, receiving a PhD in Comparative Literature from the Sorbonne in 1931.

Rosenblatt published her first book in 1931. It was written in French and examined the "art for art's sake" movement that had stirred England in the latter portion of the nineteenth century.

Rosenblatt was enrolled as an instructor at Barnard College in 1931, and remained on the college's rolls through 1938. In 1938 she transferred to Brooklyn College, and remained on that college's rolls through 1948. In 1948 she became a Professor of English Education at New York University's School of Education, where she remained until her retirement in 1972. She retired to Princeton, New Jersey. In 2002 she moved to Arlington, Virginia, to live with her son Jonathan. She died of congestive heart failure at the Virginia Hospital Center in Arlington on 8 February 2005.

During World War II Rosenblatt worked for the United States Office of War Information, analyzing reports concerning or coming from France, which at that time was controlled by the Germans.

Research and contributions

When Rosenblatt began teaching English Literature at Barnard, she developed an intense interest in each reader's unique response to a given text. Her views regarding literacy were influenced by John Dewey,^[2] who was in the philosophy department at Columbia in the 1930s, as well as Charles Sanders Peirce and William James.

She is best known for her influential texts *Literature as Exploration* (1938) and "The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work" (1978), in which she argues that the act of reading literature involves a transaction between the reader and the text. Each "transaction" is a unique experience in which the reader and text continuously act and are acted upon by each other. A written work (often referred to as a "poem" in her writing) does not have the same meaning for everyone, as each reader brings individual background knowledge, beliefs, and context into the reading act. Additionally, she distinguished between different kinds of reading with her defined "stances". Rosenblatt placed all reading transactions on a continuum between "aesthetic" -or reading for pleasure, experiencing the poem-and "efferent" -or reading to gain meaning. Rosenblatt maintained that the act of reading was a dynamic "transaction" between the reader and the text. She argued that the meaning of any text lay not in the work itself but in the reader's interaction with it, whether it was a play by Shakespeare or a novel by Toni Morrison. Her work made her a well-known reader-response theorist.

Works

- *Literature as Exploration* (1938). Literature as Exploration. New York: Appleton-Century; (1968). New York: Noble and Noble; (1976). New York: Noble and Noble; (1983). New York: Modern Language Association; (1995). New York: Modern Language Association
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- "The acid test in the teaching of literature". *English Journal*, 45, 66-74. (1956)
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- *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press (1978). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press (reprint 1994)
- "What facts does this poem teach you?", in *Language Arts*, 57, 386-94. (1980)
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- "The aesthetic transaction", in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 20 (4), 122-128. (1986)
- "Literary Theory", in J. Flood, J. Jensen, D. Lapp, & J. Squire (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (pp. 57–62). New York: Macmillan. (1991)
- *Making Meaning with Texts: Selected Essays* (2005)

Awards and recognitions

When she retired in 1972, Rosenblatt received New York University's *Great Teacher* award.

In 1992 Rosenblatt was inducted into the International Reading Association's Reading Hall of Fame.^[3]

She received the John Dewey Society Lifetime Achievement Award in 2001.

Rosenblatt made her final public appearance in Indianapolis in November 2004 at age 100, speaking to a standing-room-only session of a convention of English teachers.

References

1. Joe Holley, *Louise Rosenblatt at 100, a Scholar of Reading, Author* (Washington Post, 20 February 2005), reprinted in the Boston Globe, 20 February 2005 (http://www.boston.com/news/globe/obituaries/articles/2005/02/20/louise_rosenblatt_at_100_a_scholar_of_reading_author/)
 2. Jeanne M. Connell, Continue to Explore: In Memory of Louise Rosenblatt (Education and Culture, 21.2) (<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/eandc/vol21/iss2/art7>)
 3. Reading Hall of Fame membership, Retrieved from <http://www.readinghalloffame.org/deceased.html> on 11/07/2007.
- Clifford, J. (editor) (1991), *The experience of reading: Louise Rosenblatt and reader-response theory*

External links

- 1999 award citation (<http://www.ncte.org/elem/awards/educator/113260.htm>)
- 1997 article *The Significance of Louise Rosenblatt on the Field of Teaching Literature* (<http://www.vccaedu.org/inquiry/inquiry-spring97/i11chur.html>)
- 1999 Interview with Louise Rosenblatt by (<http://www.education.miami.edu/ep/Rosenblatt/>) University of Miami students

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