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Exploring Character Through Structural Metaphor

A Guide for Actors and
Directors

JOHN GRIBAS
AND ANGELINE UNDERWOOD



Exploring Character Through Structural Metaphor

Exploring Character Through Structural Metaphor will help performers discover new and valuable insights into the characters they play.

Grounded in a contemporary approach to understanding and applying the power of metaphor, it offers a practical guide for both actors and directors. This book introduces the idea of metaphor as a way of thinking rather than simply as clever comparison or figurative language. It demonstrates limitations of ways metaphor has traditionally been used in character development and presents a method for applying structural metaphor to discover rich, in-depth character insights. For directors, the model can serve as an option for guiding character analysis that is less individualistic and actor-specific and more wholistic and cast-inclusive, promoting stronger overall performance unity and production cohesion. In addition to offering a clear, followable guide for character analysis, the authors draw on personal experience to vividly demonstrate how applying this method for character analysis could impact performance and production.

This book will be a useful addition to an actor's or director's set of character development resources.

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Angeline Underwood**

First published 2024
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 9781032376059 (hbk)

ISBN: 9781032376066 (pbk)

ISBN: 9781003341024 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003341024

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Newgen Publishing UK

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Section I

About metaphors



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1 How we usually understand metaphor

In this book, we will be proposing a new model to guide character analysis. Our hope is that this model will be a helpful tool for both actors and directors. We want to be clear from the outset that we are in no way trying to replace the teaching and application of well-known, well-loved, and established methods for character analysis. Instead, we intend to offer one more tool you can add to your character analysis tool belt. Of course, we do think this new model offers something unique; otherwise, it really wouldn't make much sense for us to take the time to explain it to you or for you to read, consider, and hopefully put into practice these ideas. One advantage we see in our model is that it can be applied by actors in their own personal character exploration, but it can also be used by directors to guide not just individual actors but entire casts. In this way, it can offer a unifying dramatic framework for the complete action of a play.

We will explain this and more about the potential and payoffs of what we are proposing for character analysis later in the book. But before we can do that, we need to begin by noting that our model is grounded in the idea of metaphor. More specifically, it is grounded in a particular understanding of a particular kind of metaphor—what we will be calling “structural” metaphor. If you happen to be a cognitive linguist, you might feel completely comfortable just accepting that statement and moving along to the application. For most of us, the general idea of metaphor may feel like a very familiar thing, but we probably are a bit less confident that we fully grasp the particulars and nuances of this notion of structural metaphor—a notion that extends