Pedagogical Objectives for Multiple-Genre Interpretation

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One of the most discussed topics in education today is critical thinking skills (Tuchudi, 1988), and for the most part, many coaches believe that forensic competition serves as an excellent activity for students to hone and strengthen these skills. Chaffe (1990) says that thinking includes the abilities to think actively, think for oneself, discuss ideas in an organized way, support views with reasons and evidence, and be receptive to new ideas. While almost all coaches would agree that public address events foster critical abilities for the forensic student, oral interpretation events can also develop critical thinking skills. As VerLinden (1987) says, "The aim of the reader [interpreter] should be to render a performance that reflects the critical thinking that went into the preparation" (p. 59).

Despite VerLinden's claim, however, there is some doubt that forensic competitors develop their critical thinking skills in interpretive events. On the forensic circuit, one may often overhear coaches and oral interpretation experts debate whether forensic interpretation caters to a performance-oriented paradigm or an analytical-oriented paradigm. For example, Pelias (1984) found that "it appears that interpretation critics on the forensic circuit most typically rely upon the conception of interpretation as a performing art as their basis for critical judgements" (p. 228). But physical performance, according to Marcoux (1966), should not be the only focus of oral interpretation. Analysis and related critical skills are "at the very heart of oral interpretation as an academic study" (p. 327). The problem, as recognized by other forensic scholars (Holloway et. al., 1983 and VerLinden), is that forensic interpretation does not provide for a proper balance between performance and critical thinking skills—especially analysis.

There are different schools of thought concerning oral interpretation, but two are very apparent; one is basically concerned with delivery and the other is concerned with intellectual and analytical growth. While a balance between the two is desired by many, forensic interpretation seems to cater to one school of thought emphasizing performance over analysis, thus deemphasizing critical thinking skills. Although most would agree that a better balance between delivery and


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analysis would be desirable, forensic educators have not provided a means to unite delivery and analysis in a way that facilitates the development of critical thinking skills and allows judges to critique those skills in a typical tournament.

This essay argues that Multiple-Genre Interpretation, more than other interpretation events, has the potential to bridge the gap between performance and analysis in a way that maximizes both performance and critical thinking skills within the present confines of a forensic tournament. More specifically, this essay will examine the history and nature of Multiple-Genre Interpretation in order to establish a historical context for conceptualizing the event and justifying why it is an event that maximizes both performance and critical thinking skills. Second, it is necessary to explain how and why Multiple-Genre Interpretation provides a balance between performance and critical thinking skills for the forensic competitor while enhancing his or her critical thinking skills. Finally, since little has been written about evaluating Multiple-Genre Interpretation as both a performance and analytical event, the essay concludes with discussion of judging criteria in order to provide critics with a sound basis for their decisions.

**History and Nature of Multiple-Genre Interpretation**

Multiple-genre Interpretation is an event that goes by many other names including Mixed Interp, Oral Interpretation, and Program Oral Interpretation. These events, while relatively similar in concept, have existed for a number of years and have interesting origins. In a personal letter, Seth Hawkins comments on the origin of Multiple-Genre Interpretation in university competition:

> Mixed-genre oral interpretation events did exist sporadically prior to 1975. However, note that all availability of individual events competition was at a very low level by present norms until then. When these events did exist, they were called "Composition Interp" or (seldom) "Program on a Theme."

Multiple-Genre Interpretation was formally recognized as an individual event after interpretation events began to be divided into separate categories during the seventies. According to Hawkins, in 1973, Butler University hosted the first tournament on record to offer Composition Interp which allowed for a combination of the three recognized genres of literature. However, one particular forensic tournament series, the Great Eastern, created and kept Mixed Interp intact and active. The event was offered eight times in 1976: all of them in the East, multiplying to 118 times nation-wide in 1989.¹ The rules for Mixed Interp, and most interpretation events for that matter, usually vary from tournament to tournament, but most require literature with merit from one or more authors and original introductions and transi-
tions where needed. The rules for the Great Eastern Forensic Tournaments state:

MIXED INTERP (INT) Rules analogous to PRO [prose] and POE [poetry]. Multiple-selection program must use two of the following genres: prose, poetry, drama. One or more authors. No journalism, speeches, essays, modern song lyrics.

A forensic organization that helped formalize the event is Phi Rho Pi, the community college national forensic organization. This organization had one of the earliest documented multiple-genre events that required a "unified presentation made up of at least two selections from at least two authors" (Ogden, 1960, p. 5). That event allowed the selections to be either prose or poetry, so it is reasonable to conclude that some programs had mixed genres while others did not. Phi Rho Pi formalized the event approximately a decade ago and made it an event at their national tournament. In a personal letter, M'Liss Hindman, President of Phi Rho Pi, states that "there are no accurate records of how this event began," but she speculates on the formalization of Multiple-Genre Interpretation, or Oral Interpretation:

About a decade ago, in a business meeting, coaches began to quarrel about the unfairness of different judging criteria for Prose, Poetry and Dramatic Interpretation. Some regions seemed to prefer program approaches to the events (use of more than one piece) and other regions seemed to prefer a single piece of literature. Through the debate, another event evolved—Oral Interpretation.

The official (and original) Phi Rho Pi rules for the event state:

This event is to consist of a unified presentation made up of at least two selections of different genre (i.e. prose, poetry, dramatic literature, plays). A contestant may use the works of one or more authors. The selections should develop a theme.

The AFA-NIET Committee chose Multiple-Genre Interpretation, or Program Oral Interpretation, as the experimental event for 1989 and 1990 national tournaments, and this event has now been added as a regular event starting in the 1991-1992 season. J. G. Harrington proposed the event to the AFA-NIET National Committee in 1988 in part due to the nature and uniqueness of the event. He states in a personal letter that "POI-like events do contestants a lot of good. Doing something different encourages contestants to take chances and to explore their own limits." The official 1989 and 1990 AFA-NIET Program Oral Interpretation event description is as follows:

A program of thematically-linked selections of literary merit, chosen from two of the three recognized genres of competitive interpretation (prose, poetry, and drama). A substantial portion of the total time must be devoted to each of the two genres used in the program. Use of
A manuscript is required. Maximum time allocation is 10 minutes including original introduction and/or transitions.

The above event descriptions have some interesting elements that separate Multiple-Genre Interpretation from regular solo interpretive forensic events. At present, most tournament rules stress that the event include at least two genres, and at some tournaments all three, taken from prose, poetry, and drama. The genres should be arranged in some type of balanced program, and the event should also develop a theme around the literature with appropriate introductions and transitions. These elements suggest that Multiple-Genre Interpretation demands both effective analytical and performance skills.

**Elements of Multiple-Genre Interpretation**

Multiple-Genre Interpretation provides a strong balance between performance and critical thinking skills within a typical forensic tournament. This may be accomplished in two ways. First, Multiple-Genre Interpretation requires a student to maximize his or her talent by demanding a mastery of technical skills for different genres. And second, Multiple-Genre Interpretation demands the student to make a wide variety of critical decisions and choices concerning different genres in a program. In these respects, Multiple-Genre Interpretation is a unique event by the way it integrates a multiplicity of interpretation skills—both physical/vocal and intellectual—into a single program. These skills may be learned and/or accented in the major elements of this event. Specifically, the four major elements of Multiple-Genre Interpretation will be examined: genre, program balance, theme, and introductory material. Analysis of these four elements will illustrate how Multiple-Genre Interpretation integrates critical thinking skills and performance of literature in a way that maximizes a student's presentation.

**Genre**

The requirement of more than one genre in Multiple-Genre Interpretation offers many benefits for the forensic interpreter. Obviously, there is a demand for various technical skills from the interpreter. Each genre requires special skills. For example, poetry stresses heightened emotion and sound patterns; drama requires a great deal of concentration and commitment in that the interpreter must take on all the characters in a play and make them, as well as the time, place and situation, believable; and prose may demand a mix of elements from both poetry and drama with a strong focus on the narrator (Lee and Gura, 1987). Multiple-Genre Interpretation allows the student to illustrate his or her performance strengths of a specific genre and practice weaker skills from other genres. The interpreter is allowed to stretch his or her skills.
by performing challenging literature from more than one genre. This requirement demands that the student actively search for, choose, and analyze different types of material.

The different genre requirement also gives the forensic interpreter a chance to broaden his or her knowledge of the types of literature—a benefit that surely does not quash critical thinking skills such as processing, analyzing, and clarifying. Armstrong (1968) says that the oral interpreter should strive to develop a broad reading background and choose material "that will open new vistas and make new discoveries" (p. 50). The more material an interpreter attempts to encounter, according to Armstrong, the better the chance he or she will broaden his or her literary background and deepen an appreciation for the genre choices.

Although Multiple-Genre Interpretation offers the interpreter a chance to strengthen performance skills, critical thinking skills, and literary background, there are limitations in some rules regarding genre. Specifically, two issues, one dealing with material type and the other concerning the number of genres in a program, deserve attention before moving on to the next element. Dennis (1988) points out in his discussion of Mixed Interp that some event descriptions—usually at regular season tournaments—limit genre to prose, poetry, and drama; non-fiction material is usually not allowed. Armstrong, in his discussion about choosing literature, says, "Although poetry is often the most popular form of interpretive literature, the reader should include other forms, such as essay, short story, novel, drama, letters, and biographies" (p. 50). Bacon (1972) also promotes a variety of literary kinds and modes including the three recognized forms, children's literature, the essay, history, biography, autobiography, journals, letters, diaries, and the literature of travel. It would seem to be that inclusion of these genres may strengthen a student's breadth of knowledge and skill. Dennis concludes his discussion by saying, "This event [Mixed] would seem to be the only place where these forms of writing could be utilized, but obviously there is no agreement here" (p. 3).

Genre limitation is not the only restriction in certain rule descriptions. There is diversity at tournaments concerning the number of different genres allowed. For example, Phi Rho Pi tournaments usually require at least two different genres with any number of selections in a program. When Program Oral Interpretation was an experimental event at AFA, competitions could use any number of selections, but there was a two genre limitation in any program. This restriction was due in large part to prevent a program that, as Harrington argued "would consist of two relatively lengthy pieces and a 'sound bite' of the third genre." However, since AFA has made Program Oral Interpretation...
tion a regular event, the organization has lifted the genre limitation. It seems that such a limitation may restrict forensic students from developing more critical thinking and performance skills by challenging them to find, analyze, build, develop, and perform a program consisting of a variety of literature. Allowing the interpreter to use an unlimited number of genres in a program may offer a student the chance to broaden his or her literary knowledge and display and practice technical skills from each type of genre. Furthermore, unlimited numbers would allow for the creation and development of deeper and more complex thematic analysis. However, it is important to note that "sound bites," or snippets of genres, may not provide for a clear, coherent, and well-developed program. Coaches need to direct students to develop a program that best utilizes and stretches their analytical and performance skills without sacrificing the program in order to display many genres just for the sake of displaying many genres.

While genre limitation and the number of genres allowed in Multiple-Genre Interpretation constitute areas of disagreement for some coaches, there is agreement that the event should challenge students to display and expand their literary knowledge and performance skills, critical thinking skills, and literary knowledge.

**Program Balance**

The element of program balance in Multiple-Genre Interpretation actually deals with two individual but related factors, program intensity and program shape. **Program intensity** deals with how each text is emotionally and/or technically balanced, or weighted, against the other materials. **Program shape** deals with how materials are arranged in a physical sense, a factor relating to textual proportion.

Dennis (1988) recognizes that some sense of balance is desirable in Mixed Interp; however, he does not differentiate between intensity and shape. Program balance, according to Dennis, depends in large part on the material, but there is ambiguity as to how a student should achieve this. For example, a balanced program, according to Dennis’ definition of program balance, may include an emotionally intense and technically challenging three-minute poem and a less intense and challenging six-minute prose. The element of program balance in reference to literary intensity is very situational while program shape is less so but still should be approached in such light. Program balance demands that the student make strategic choices in organization of varied materials, construct arguments to justify certain choices, and remain open to new ideas regarding program construction.

The arrangement, or shape, of the pieces in Multiple-Genre Interpretation requires that the interpreter create a program containing a
substantial portion of each genre. This factor does, in large part, depend on program intensity. A balanced program with respect to shape may take one of two forms. Parallel organization, or block organization, is one way of illustrating a balanced program where the chosen pieces are placed one after the other. For example, an interpreter may open the program with a poem and then end with a prose selection. Another organizational approach, what this author refers to as sequencing, is where the interpreter divides pieces into sections and integrates the material creating a program where two or more stories are told within each other. For example, the interpreter may choose to break up a short story into four sections and place three short poems or perhaps four stanzas from one poem between each story section.

Organization of material in Multiple-Genre Interpretation raises the issue of whether or not a student should somehow alter a piece to make it fit into the program when taking into consideration the 10 minute time limit. The actions of excerpting and cutting texts are of importance in this respect. Performance studies scholars are leery of cutting material. As Lee and Gura state:

In excerpting from a longer work, the interpreter chooses a scene or passage that, when taken on its own, displays a totality of action, theme, or character development...Cutting differs from excerpting in that it imposes on diverse or unrelated words, lines, or scenes a false consecutiveness or immediate relationship that was not intended by the author... We are not saying that you should never cut; we are saying that sensitive and experienced interpreters undertake cutting with great caution. If they can avoid cutting, they do (p. 219-20).

Although a purpose of this paper is not to debate the issue of excerpting and cutting, it is important to note that thematic excerpts from a text are preferred in Multiple-Genre Interpretation in order to capture a full-bodied, thematic moment. Parallel organization also seems to be a popular method of balancing a program because it does not disrupt the rhythm or tempo of a piece, whereas sequencing integrates textual rhythms and tempos that may create distortions of an author's work. These two factors, excerpting and cutting, deal basically with the appearance and rhythm of a program, but critical thinking skills may be gained by the forensic interpreter from these aspects of program shape. Excerpting requires that the student analyze pieces, find portions that are thematically related, and then extract them to build a program. Longer pieces, then, require a great deal of analysis to find the best excerpt to use in a program. If cutting is used, the interpreter should use great care in analyzing pieces that are to be cut in order to ensure proper communication of the essence of the work. All cuts should be thoroughly scrutinized, and arguments should be solidly constructed by
the forensic student in supporting such decisions. Excerpting and cutting most definitely require the student to possess sharp analytical, judgmental, and argumentative skills.

**Theme**

The element of theme is crucial to all interpretation events, and only through a variety of genre analyses may a forensic interpreter create a Multiple-Genre Interpretation program that captures the essence of different pieces and the intricate details that allow for a full-bodied performance. Guerin, et al. (1979) state that theme "is a complex aspect of literature, one that requires very intentional thinking to discern..." (p. 15). Thematic analysis is an important aspect in developing better critical thinking skills.

Results from an action caucus on criteria for oral interpretation in forensic tournaments held during the 1982 Speech Communication Association provides a great deal of information on the subject of analysis. Colley (see Holloway et al. 1983) gives his general impression of forensic interpretation from the perspective of an outsider, or scholar of oral interpretation theory. He states, "Overall, I tend to come away from oral interpretation rounds with a feeling of having heard a series of contrived readings. The aim of readers seems to be to display facility" (p. 6). Barr, a member of the caucus, adds, "How much actual analysis is involved in preparing a selection for competition? As coaches, I know we could put much more emphasis on understanding the literature" (p. 9).

Although all interpretation events usually stress thematic analysis, Multiple-Genre Interpretation forces the student to maximize such skills. A central purpose in Multiple-Genre Interpretation is to illustrate the forensic interpreter's ability to read different genres, analyze them, and construct an oral performance program that centers around a common theme. However, as Dennis points out, "The concept of theme or program should be more than a single word. It should also be more than some vaguely generic idea" (p. 2). A student may construct a program linked only by an item, or topic, such as a person, place, action, emotion, movement, or some other thing. For example, a number of programs in previous years of competition have been built around the ideas of "love," "death," "Marilyn Monroe," "cars," and "the Vietnam Conflict." A program about "fish" consisting of Hans Christian Andersen's story, *The Little Mermaid*, and T. J. Spencer's play, *Jonah* about a great fish that swallowed Jonah of Ninevah along with two other men who all become friends and philosophers about the existence of the supernatural, would not create much of a thematically-linked program. The subject of "fish" does not demand that the student fully
analyze the selections before building a program. A generically con-
ceived program also fails to require a thorough analysis of thematic ele-
ments. For example, a generic program consisting of "boyish fun"
including excerpts from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*,
the whitewash scene, and Howard Korder's *Boys' Life*, a play about three
former college friends who illustrate their large male egos during vari-
ous adventures in a large city, would not suggest a true thematic link
either. "Boyish fun" is simply a label that describes these works in a
rather simplistic and superficial way. Although the last two examples
illustrate poor analysis, it is important to note that there might be sub-
stantive programs built from these materials with further analysis.

A thematic link, rather than a simple item or generic link, must be
established in Multiple-Genre Interpretation. For example, a themati-
cally-linked Multiple-Genre Interpretation program might be built
around the theme of "good coming from evil" using three genres by
combining Bertolt Brecht's poem "To Posterity" which explains how
peace and a better society (the good) may come from revolution (evil),
with Robert Flynn's short story "Christmas in a Very Small Place," a
story of the birth of a wartime child (the good) during a patrol in
Vietnam (the evil), and with Tim Kelly's play *Bloody Jack*, a bizarre
drama (based on the killings of Jack the Ripper) about a series of crimes
committed by a man whose victims are criminals themselves where the
good is the retaliation against offenders even though the acts them-
selves are evil. In such works, a sophisticated thematic link can be
developed. Such a program would show evidence of a student's ability
to analyze literature for its thematic connections and illustrate those
relationships in the performance of a literary program. The concept of
theme in Multiple-Genre Interpretation requires an interpreter to
analyze material in order to construct a thematically-linked program.
An item or a generically conceived idea is not sufficient for a coherent
and well-conceived program. Such vague labels only illustrate a stu-
dent's inability to analyze literature and find common themes rather
than common concepts. A program may, of course, be developed
around both item and theme, but the theme is the overriding and cru-
cial element of the two.

**Introduction, Transitions, and Postscripts**

Analysis, as stated above, must be completed before competition,
but the task of analysis is not complete until the student can explain his
or her analysis during the actual performance in the introduction, tran-
sitions, and—if used—postscripts. These elements become vital to a
student's Multiple-Genre Interpretation because they reveal the
depth of the student's understanding of the literature. A number of
The introduction cannot be over-stressed for here is the place for the reader to establish his [or her] own individuality apart from the personality of the author. Here, too, is the place to prepare the audience for the author's message as the reader discerns it (p. 277).

Brandes and Shepardson also stress the importance of introductory material, but they state that one type of introduction, narrative, is better than another, artistic. A narrative introduction, according to the authors, should be a unified, coherent statement that will "acquaint subjects [the audience] with the circumstances of the story to a degree which would enhance their understanding of the poem [or other genre] without removing the factor of suspense" (p. 113). An artistic introduction gives little more than historical background and literary type of a work; little or no discussion of the theme or action in the material is given in the introduction. Brandes and Shepardson found that a narrative introduction is "more effective in improving retention of a complicated literary communication" (p. 115).

Introductory material in forensic interpretation is vital, but, according to VerLinden, since the 1982 caucus (see Holloway et.al.), little change has occurred in forensic competition in regard to performance and analysis. VerLinden proposes an approach that utilizes the power of introductory material that promotes critical thinking skills and illustrates literary and thematic analysis. He suggests that the competitor needs to provide a link among the text, the performance, and his or her claims about the material. A student's thematic analysis (and any other interpretive claims) in Multiple-Genre Interpretation are shared with the judges and audience in order to make an argument and establish the program. In essence, the introduction, transitions, and postscript make the claim(s); the literature and performance support the claim(s).

These arguments may take one of two forms in Multiple-Genre Interpretation; description (informative) or prescription (persuasive). Descriptive programs merely illustrate a common theme among genres. For example, a simple program may be constructed around a theme of how good conquers all; such program introductions and transitions would merely give a description of common theme(s) and other necessary information pertaining to the pieces. Prescriptive programs attempt to construct a program that convinces an audience to adopt a certain belief, value, or proposition exemplified in the program material. For example, a program may be constructed around a theme that argues that resisting radical change in a time of political and societal turmoil is
desirable; the audience is persuaded to act on something and/or adopt a belief.

It is obvious that introductions, transitions, and postscripts are vital to Multiple-Genre Interpretation. These devices are where the interpreter makes critical claims about literary themes and other pertinent information after careful analysis has been conducted. As far as balance is concerned in regard to introductions, transitions, and postscripts, it is important to note that the first student-written device is usually longer than the others because it takes longer to reveal and fully explain the program.

Judging Criteria

Criticism in interpretation is truly an art that encompasses analysis, evaluation, and guidance (Cobin, 1968). Judges should not consider themselves the "general public to be entertained" (Leigh, see Lewis, 1984, p. 30). Rather, judges must remember that they are professionals who, as Leigh says, "aid students in exploring their tastes and abilities" (p. 30). Long (1977) tells us that interpretation critics must judge both textual understanding and delivery techniques demanding that the critic know the literature before the performance. Forensic interpretation judges have a responsibility to provide an artful critique, but this job seems to be difficult when taking into account Long's statement. Delivery techniques are quite well-judged in forensic competition (Pelas, 1984 and Keeffe, see Holloway et al.), but as Allen (see Holloway et al.) says, very little textual understanding is judged in forensic competition. Allen states, "Today it can safely be said that no school of interpretive thought would deny that the literature must come first in performance. This leads us to the position that the evaluator must know thoroughly the literature performed..." (p. 14).

Since a typical forensic tournament may require a judge to critique a good number of interpretation events, it is not difficult to conclude that Long's explicit requirement concerning interpretation critiques and Allen's implied solution that forensic judges read the material before tournaments would be logistically difficult if not impossible to implement. But, as the 1982 SCA interpretation caucus report concludes, "We [forensic educators] are intelligent folk. Even though we may not know a piece of literature, we can listen hard and apply our past training and experience in making a judgement" (see Holloway et al., p. 21).

Multiple-Genre Interpretation allows the judge to critique both the interpreter's performance and analysis of literature. All that is required of the judge is basic understanding of performance technique, elementary argumentation skills, and the following set of suggested cri-
teria. These judging criteria for Multiple-Genre Interpretation should stretch across any of the definitions revealed in section one of this paper. This list includes both performance and analytical criteria concerning Multiple-Genre Interpretation. Questions concerning theme and introductory materials have been combined since they are so closely related.

Questions Concerning Genre:
1. Do the materials have **merit**? Are the texts universal in nature? Have the authors proven their individuality? Is there a sufficient amount of suggestion in the pieces? (Lee and Gura)
2. Do the genres allow the interpreter the opportunity to display a **breadth** of skill? For example, a program consisting of a dramatic poem and a first-person prose may not have the potential for performance breadth as a lyric poem and a four-character drama piece.
3. Is the student's **depth** of various genre skills effective? Does he or she illustrate an obvious mastery of interpretive skills in accordance with the literature? Is he or she believable?

Questions concerning genre should examine the literature and the performance of that literature. Although present tournaments do not allow enough time to have oral critiques or questioning periods, judges who have a working knowledge of literature and performance studies can critique the merit and difficulty of a piece just as the student must have done before the tournament. Judges may evaluate the performer on his or her ability to identify material that is unique and challenges them to illustrate his or her performance talents. However, putting technique before the literature is dangerous because the performer rather than the material becomes the star of the program. Literature must always come first when critiquing a program because it is the center of attention in oral interpretation, and it must also possess qualities that allow the student to be challenged in the preparation process. A quality program is one that contains literature with merit that challenges the interpreter to shape the material into an effective performance. Lee and Gura state that the "effectiveness [of an interpretation] is the result of a preparation so thorough and a technique so perfectly coordinated that the audience cannot see the wheels go around" (p. 4).

Questions Concerning Program Balance:
1. Are the pieces in the program balanced in accordance with their **intensity**? Does the material and the performance illustrate a balance of emotion and technique?
2. Are the pieces **shaped**, or arranged, in a rhythmic and flowing fashion?
3. Are program intensity and program shape balanced together? Does one piece pull attention away from other(s)? Does one piece distract an audience from the theme of the program? These questions concerning program balance attempt to provide a focus for a judge to critique performance talents and strategic choices in constructing the program. The interpreter should display a balanced mastery of performance skills illustrating his or her ability to perform more than one genre. Judges may critique how the program covers a spectrum of technique and emotional response. In addition, critics should not judge a program on a single, dominating piece. Instead, the program should display a variety of technique and emotion from a variety of material. The strategic choices in the arrangement should produce a very rhythmic program so that the unique appeal of individual selections are not diminished by being poorly arranged. In other words, all parts of the whole body should be proportionately placed—considering both intensity and shape—in a structure that is vibrant and pleasing to witness.

Questions Concerning Theme, Introductions, Transitions, and Postscripts:

1. Is the theme more than a simple topic or generic idea?
2. Can the critic comprehend a common theme running through the program in all the pieces?
3. What are the student's critical claims about the literature? Can the critic list those claims? What is the student's argument?
4. Does the literature and performance work together to support these critical claims?
5. Is the program descriptive or prescriptive? If it is descriptive, has the student gone beyond a simple plot summary and constructed a unified, coherent argument that establishes a common link among texts? If the program is prescriptive, does the critic feel compelled to act on something and/or adopt a certain belief?

A judge may critique a program on the way a student has analyzed selections and built a thematically-linked program. Topical programs do not illustrate a student's ability to analyze and make strategic choices about literature. The judge may critique the complete program by the way a student makes thematic claims in relation to the literature and performance. For example, a program built around a theme of "creating facades to hide the inner-self can be physically and emotionally destructive" using, for instance, Frank Bidart's (1977) narrative poem, "Ellen West" about a young woman with anorexia nervosa, should come from the literature and be reflective in the performance.
A thorough analysis should reveal that Ellen is a young, physically weak, and secretive woman who creates a facade by starving herself to hide her insecurities and feelings. Ellen's starvation ultimately hurts her physically and emotionally. A performance—as well as the critical claims made in the introduction and transition—should reflect such an analysis.

The above judging criteria obviously promote an eclectic judging approach and are open to interpretation and criticism. Since very little has been written about Multiple-Genre Interpretation, and judging criteria for this event have never been established beyond event descriptions, it is hoped that these comments and questions can serve as a guiding model for judges in Multiple-Genre Interpretation rather than a rigid, prescriptive format.

Discussion/Conclusion

The central purpose of this paper was to promote Multiple-Genre Interpretation as an event that creates a strong balance between and maximizes performance and critical thinking. This essay in no way attempts to solve the conflict between performance and analysis; that problem still exists in the most basic interpretation events. Since forensic interpretation remains a relatively performance-oriented activity, integrating these valuable critical thinking skills with performance skills seems to be desirable. If critical thinking skills are not encouraged in forensic interpretation more than they already are, the activity will surely suffer as it will continue an elocutionary tradition focused on voice and gesture rather than intellectual stimulation. As VerLinden states concerning the lack of literary analysis in forensic competition:

The activity suffers because when the rewards of participation are perceived to result primarily from vocal facility even our best students quickly make such facility their goal. The critical choices are then made on the basis of what will make for the best show, not what will make the best oral interpretation...the discipline of speech communication suffers because the judging model for oral interpretation as it has evolved is clearly a descendent of the elocutionary school of rhetoric. Too many of our colleagues in other disciplines still believe we teach merely gestures and inflection; our credentials suffer when we promote an activity that rewards such elocutionary training (p. 2).

In a way, Multiple-Genre Interpretation goes beyond gestures and inflections more than single interpretation events. All interpretation could be improved in many of the ways described above; however, Multiple-Genre Interpretation combines all of the interpretation events' foci and purposes with the added emphasis on a whole program of diverse skills. Multiple-Genre Interpretation best maximizes and stimulates a student's intellectual and performance growth, and it
moves forensic interpretation towards an analytical orientation while still promoting and maximizing performance. Thus, judges of this event must adopt an eclectic approach given the confines of a typical tournament and the nature of Multiple-Genre Interpretation.

Multiple-Genre Interpretation definitely offers a wealth of opportunity for forensic students and critics. In fact, future issues concerning this event may center around more opportunities for a student to stretch and grow by participating in Multiple-Genre Interpretation. For example, the event might be improved and advanced by replacing "thematically-linked program" to simply "unified program." Such a change would open doors to many more program ideas in accordance with literary analysis and criticism. Metaphoric analysis, symbolic analysis, and other methods may alter programs to go beyond just a thematic analysis. Other innovative ideas from interpretation coaches, teachers, and students may find their home in Multiple-Genre Interpretation, for as Chaffee writes, "While it is important to think for ourselves, others may have good ideas from which we can learn and benefit" (p. 40). While this essay outlines many elements and content for Multiple-Genre Interpretation, critical insights and new approaches should be explored. This event may be promoted and encouraged by educators in order to push students to expand not only their performance skills but their critical thinking skills as well.

Notes
(1) These statistics were researched by Seth Hawkins who found them in the only complete collection of I.S.T.R.
(2) Some of these criteria were discussed by George Dennis during a panel presentation at the 1988 Speech Communication Association Convention. His points of discussion are: 1) the nature of theme or program, 2) the balance among parts, 3) the use of scripts, 4) the genres allowed, and 5) lack of judging criteria.
(3) This label is not to be confused with VerLinden's "descriptive claims" explained in his metacritical judging model essay. These claims are superficial plot summaries, rhetorical questions, or some other type of introductory material that lacks any specific claim(s).

References


Ogden. (1960). Phi Rho Pi rules and regulations. Results from official meeting in Ogden, Utah.


