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**They Know What They're Doing But They Don't Know Why:
A Theoretical Exploration of Intertextuality in Interpretation Events**

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Previous versions of this paper were presented at the 1991 Central States Communication Association, Chicago, IL and 2009 convention of the National Communication Association, Chicago, IL

Abstract

Our agenda is to offer a conceptual/theoretical understanding of the post-structural approach to literature interpretation/performance. We make a practice of the theory in the construction of the paper—we allow the text to speak for itself. We provide a juxtaposition numerous authors. We focus on the text rather than the author. We offer the following reading instructions: Please read the text as a whole and skimming the referential notations. The citations are provided for readers who wish to further the topic.

We realize we depart from the traditional academic writing form. The common occurrence of the style in competition underscores the merit to our use. We have interspliced text from numerous sources dealing with post-structuralist thought in the same manner used by intercollegiate competitors in Program Oral Interpretation. Our approach illustrates the form and simultaneously explains the justification behind the approach.

Introduction

Oral interpretation of literature remains an important and intricate part of forensics education and competition. McBath provides the most commonly cited paragraph concerning what oral interpretation has to offer: Oral interpretation of literature events are distinctive because they focus on the human perspective from a poetic stance. The oral performance of literature requires that students understand literary analysis, history, the emotional

and intellectual aspects of literature, and effective vocal and physical expression. Students must acquire knowledge of literary form and style while striving to interpret literature with the purpose of enriching the audience's understanding of the human condition.¹

The forensic community does not dispute McBath's perspective on oral interpretation events, however, controversy exists regarding the approaches used to achieve an "understanding of the human condition."² Because competitive events are dynamic, the conceptual approaches have changed and adapted through the years. Expressive realism (i.e., author intent) was once held as the most commonly defended mean of achieving the enrichment of the "audience's understanding of the human condition."³ The need for the interpretation to make an argument is gaining popularity.⁴ Competitive success may require more than well-written literature and a solid interpretation; a performer may be expected to make a claim/argument about a social issue.

Program oral interpretation (POI) is an event that most readily manifests these changes. The requirement to use multiple types of literature and the decision for how the selections shall be framed makes the introduction of an argument an obvious and compelling issue. POI has changed during the years. In its genesis, pieces were most commonly read one after another, presented consecutively in a full format. Now, that approach is rarely—if ever—heard. The mostly employed method is a post-structural/post-modern approach of splicing texts together to create a new whole. As with many conventions, one person started doing it and when it worked, others also adopted the approach.⁵ This weaving does have theoretical justification, but the theory may have taken a backseat to the form. While a "copycat without comprehension" practice is a concern in POI, a recent change in Dramatic Duo has made the concern even more relevant.

Recently, the American Forensics Association-National Individual Events Tournament (AFA-NIET) allowed the inclusion of different types of literature into Dramatic Duo. The decision sparked an explosion of "program duos" (a duo performance utilizing more than one text). The ability to have a number of types of texts directly connects to having an argument focus the performance; the allowance of the first motivates the use of the second. While we fully support the idea of including other texts, we are concerned this will promote a "copycat without comprehension" approach to the event at the expense of educational coaching.

The use of conventions in forensics is unavoidable; without the use of developed standards, directors/coaches/judges would have a difficult time comparing and ranking competitors. But in certain instances,

we fear convention takes the place of quality education. As a coach, teaching the theory/concept behind the different approaches to various interpretation events is a laborious and time-consuming process. As a competitor, it is far easier to watch what everyone else is doing and copy them than to take the time to learn why you are doing what you are doing. Especially when programming literature, or weaving together several texts together, we have observed form taking priority over justification. This approach continues to flourish, becoming the preference on the circuit, yet we fear students are not aware of the motivation behind this act. Instead, the motivation for designing their pieces in this manner is because it what is winning and what is passed down from previous years. If the pedagogical purposes of these actions are left behind, it will harm the integrity and purpose of this activity.

We support a variety of interpretive/performative approaches. Our purpose is to advocate that whatever interpretive/performative concept is utilized, that we as coaches and competitors actively teach and learn the theoretical frameworks supporting it. Our agenda in this paper is to offer a conceptual/theoretical understanding of the post-structural approach to literature interpretation/performance. A traditionally structured paper explaining this theory seems counter intuitive. Therefore, we have made practice of the theory. We allow the text to speak for itself. The following juxtaposition comes from many authors. Each specific author is not important, the text is important. Thus, we offer the following reading instructions: Please read the text as a whole while skipping over the referential notations. The citations are merely provided for those wishing further exploration of this approach.

We realize this article is a departure from the traditional academic format. However, we believe the juxtaposition constitutes a legitimate form for the expression of post-structuralism in oral interpretation. The common occurrence of this approach in competition gives merit to approaching our explanation in a similar way. Just as prose, poetry, and drama may be interspliced in competitive program oral interpretation and duo interpretation, we have interspliced text from numerous sources dealing with post-structuralist thought. Our approach only illustrates the form and simultaneously explains the justification behind the approach.

One final note: In line with post-structuralist thought we consider the reader/interpreter to be a critic. An interpretation is also a criticism.

A Post-Structuralist Reader

"Structuralists assume that (presumably universal) laws, or structures of laws, govern human activity and that these laws can be ferreted out by determined investigation of human systems such as language or kinship The term 'post-structuralism' subsequently evolved into a designation that could be used for any theory

or methodology which offered a critique of modernist notions."⁶ "There, is then, a rooted Western prejudice which tries to reduce writing to a stable meaning equated with the character of speech."⁷ "The traditional is the idea of the text as a bearer of stable meanings and the critic as a faithful seeker after truth in the text."⁸ "Smoothing out contradiction, closing the text, criticism becomes the accomplice of ideology ... effectively censoring any elements in them which come into collision with the dominant ideology. To deconstruct the text, on the other hand, is to open it, to release the possible positions of its intelligibility, including those which reveal the partiality (in both senses) of the ideology inscribed in the text."⁹

[Yet] "meanings circulate between text, ideology and reader, and the work of criticism is to release possible meanings."¹⁰ "A written sign, in the usual sense of the word, is therefore a mark which remains, which is not exhausted in the present of its inscription, and which can give rise to an iteration both in the absence of and beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it."¹¹ [Thus,] "Poststructuralism pushes self-conscious reflection toward the limits of what is historically tolerable for readers."¹²

"There must be an awareness of ambivalence, of the discrepancy between meaning and the author's assertion."¹³ "An analytic reading of a text attempts to establish a meaning for it, to tell other readers what the interpreter thinks the text "means." But to read a text deconstructively is not to produce a doubling commentary, one that would escape the deconstructive insight that there is no "meaning," no "ultimate signified" that exists outside the text and to which the text refers or tries to reconstruct."¹⁴ "In general, theories of intertextuality replace the author-text relationship with one between reader and text, placing the locus of meaning in the cultural coeds of discourse itself."¹⁵ "Thanks to its author's absence, any piece of writing, even the smallest scrap, makes itself available to appropriation by readers and other writers, who can, and do, interpret it in multiple ways."¹⁶ "The author's absence also permits writing to do its work with or without a context ... any 'real' context we might imagine for a text is always constructed by its readers."¹⁷

"Writing, which makes itself available to anyone who can read, never authorizes a given reading all by itself, never tells us exactly what it 'means,' least of all what its writer's intention might have been ... the meaning we derive from reading is located as much in the process of reading and in the social and cultural contexts which surround our reading, as it is in the 'text itself.'"¹⁸

"The object of the critic, then, is to seek not the unity of the work, but the multiplicity and diversity of its possible meanings, its incompleteness, the omissions which it displays but cannot describe, and above all its

contradictions."¹⁹ "The inclusion of a number of perspectives does not necessarily require compromise or resolution; rather it invites complications and tensions that allow those involved to engage in critical dialogue."²⁰ "It is a mistake to believe that any language is literally literal. Literary works are in a sense less deluded than other forms of discourse, because they implicitly acknowledge their own rhetorical status. Other forms of writing are just as figurative and ambiguous but pass themselves off as unquestionable truth."²¹

"Composed of contradictions, the text is no longer restricted to a single, harmonious and authoritative reading. Instead it becomes plural, open to re-reading, no longer an object for passive consumption but an object of work by the reader to produce meaning."²² "Because the seamless intertext has no single perspective, point of view, or 'mastervoice,' its subject matter is often fragmented, unstable, deconstructed."²³ "Meaning will never stay quite the same from context to context; the signified will be altered by the various chains of signifiers in which it is entangled."²⁴ "Indeed poststructuralism typically denies the integrity of a coherent individual perspective, especially one that would claim consistency over time."²⁵

"Poststructuralism works to textualize the entire social domain, thereby at once undermining any secure links or distinctions between persons and the meaningfulness of messages."²⁶ "Poststructuralism reinscribes communication as a field of differences, substitutions, displacements, and multiple determinations."²⁷ "A seamless intertext is created by piecing together these ready-made images in order to achieve certain political or social effect, is structured to follow a consistent story line, and maintains consistent characters throughout the script. The sources are stitched together 'seamlessly' so that parts are not featured and the transitions are not marked. In other words, the parts cannot be discerned without close analysis."²⁸

"Language is not an instrument or tool in man's hands, a submissive means of thinking. Language rather thinks man and his 'world,' including poems, if he will allow them to do so."²⁹ "The solution ... a critical practice which insists on finding the plurality ... Such a criticism finds in the literary work a new object of intelligibility: it produces the text."³⁰ "One reason for 're-discover' this method of scripting at this time is the increased emphasis theorists are placing on cultural studies, postmodern performances, and intertextuality. Recent critical theory highlights the importance of intertextuality in the experience of texts."³¹ "Clearly, the expansion of the theories offered here would enrich what we already intuitively believe to be the power of performance."³²

Notes

- ¹ McBath, J., ed. *Forensics as Communication: The Argumentative Perspective* (Skokie, IL: The National Textbook Co., 1975) 11.
- ² Mills, N. H., "A Rationale for Events to be in I.E. Competition." *Perspective on Individual Events: Proceedings of the First Developmental Conference on Individual Events*. L. Schnoor, V. Karns, eds., (Mankato, MN: Mankato State University, 1989).
- ⁶ Crowley, S. *A teacher's Introduction to Deconstruction* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1989) 51.
- ⁷ Sarup, M. *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989) 45.
- ⁸ Sarup 43.
- ⁹ Belsey, C. *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980) 109.
- ¹⁰ Belsey 104.
- ¹¹ Derrida, J. *The Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 317.
- ¹² Nelson, C. "Poststructuralism and Communication," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 9 (1985) 3.
- ¹³ Sarup 57.
- ¹⁴ Crowley 6.
- ¹⁵ Mitchell, K. "Seamless Intertexts: Extrinsic and Intrinsic Intertextuality and Emily Mann's *Execution of Justice*," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 13 (1993): 45
- ¹⁶ Crowley 14.
- ¹⁷ Crowley 15-16.
- ¹⁹ Belsey 105.
- ²⁰ Mitchell 48
- ²¹ Sarup 51.
- ²² Belsey 104.
- ²³ Mitchell 58
- ²⁴ Sarup 36.
- ²⁵ Nelson 4.
- ²⁶ Nelson 6.

²⁷ Nelson 4.

²⁸ Mitchell 45

³⁰ Belsey 129.

³¹ Mitchell 45

³² Mitchell 59

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