AN ANALYSIS OF THREE MODES OF GROUP INTERPRETATION
IN THE SPEECH ARTS CURRICULUM

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AN ANALYSIS OF THREE MODES OF GROUP INTERPRETATION
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By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

Oral interpretation of literature has been regarded by some critics as an exhibitionary display of a reader's style and delivery. After a long and harried history oral interpretation became accepted as one of the speech arts through the efforts of such proponents as Mary Maud Babcock, R. A. Tallcott, Gertrude Johnson, and W. M. Parrish. To define speech and English courses into their proper areas, in 1936, the functions and objectives of the two curricula were published in *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*. Currently, under the tutelage of such authorities as Robert Breen, Wallace Bacon, Chloe Armstrong, Paul D. Brandes, and Charlotte Lee, interpretation is assured of a respected position in the speech arts curriculum.

Group interpretation of literature, however, does not participate in this established tradition. In past years, group readings have been associated with inadequately performed choral reading or verse-speaking choirs. In recent years there has been a popular revival of group

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interpretation productions on many college and high school campuses. Prior to 1953, textbooks and journal articles considered this art form exclusively as verse-speaking or choral reading. After 1953, group interpretation performances are discussed in a variety of terms as multiple reading, ensemble readings, staged readings, Readers Theatre, Interpreters Theatre, or Chamber Theatre. Directors of group interpretation productions have been free to experiment with various modes of expression. These experiments have encompassed productions from script-in-hand readings to nearly conventional theatre productions. Extracting methods and objectives from both, interpretation and theatre, group interpretation seemingly perpetuates the acting-interpretation conflict when lighting effects, costuming, and physical movement are used to present a piece of literature to an audience. The confusion which surrounds the motives and terms to be assigned to a group interpretation challenges the value and validity of this art form as an educational activity in the speech arts curriculum. Jere Veilleux identifies three basic areas of confusion in interpretation which are applicable to this discussion.

Confusion over the present theory and practice of oral interpretation seems to arise out of three basic areas of misunderstanding. The first of these areas can best be illuminated by raising once again the tiresome question of the distinctions between oral interpretation and acting; the confusion here is a result of seemingly close analogical techniques of the two disciplines. The second source lies in the nature of peculiar language of oral interpretation as
compared with the more familiar language of rhetoric and of science. And the third source is the failure to perceive the unique psychology of the audience present in the interpretation.  

Directors of verse-speaking choirs, the prototype of Choric Interpretation, made remarkable claims about the training values of the media for teaching speech skills or as a quick programing device. Advocates of Readers Theatre or staged readings have enthusiastically written about this style of interpretation as a substitute for conventional theatre productions or as an easy production method for presenting literature to an audience in an interesting and entertaining manner. There have been few efforts to specifically measure or identify these goals or to evaluate the effectiveness of group performances. In past years when teachers of interpretation presented students in public performances without apparent teaching goals or methods, some educators and school patrons regarded any performing art with skepticism.

To alleviate the confusion which surrounds group interpretation and the skepticism of educators and patrons, it is necessary to define and describe explicit educational functions, aims, styles and procedures for a group interpretation production in a speech arts curriculum. This thesis is a corporeal attempt to define and clarify some of those functions, aims, and procedures.

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In order to complete the requirements for this problem, four objectives guided the research and writing of this thesis. First, there was an attempt to identify and establish specific educational goals for a group interpretation production. Second, there was an effort to describe certain procedures for selecting, adapting, arranging, and presenting a piece of literature to an audience through a group interpretation performance. Third, this thesis attempted to relate the three modes of group interpretation—Choric Interpretation, Readers Theatre, and Chamber Theatre—as a single art form. Fourth, there has been an attempt to suggest specific evaluative criteria and evaluation sheets for group interpretation performances.

Definition of Terms

Before discussing the approach observed in the preparation of this thesis, two terms need to be defined. Group interpretation is understood to mean any performance by two or more readers, with or without staging devices, for the purpose of conveying the emotional, intellectual, and aesthetic content of a literary selection to an audience. As stated in the problem, this definition will include the three modes of group interpretation recognized as Choric Interpretation, Chamber Theatre, and Readers Theatre. Also, in this thesis a speech arts curriculum will be considered as all instruction included within the academic areas observed as speech therapy, public speaking, oral
interpretation, and dramas. This position is deemed advisable because there have been times when some scholars have mistakenly attempted to detach their respective areas from any connection with the other speech disciplines in order to establish individualistic identity.

Procedures Followed

To define and describe the educational functions, aims, modes, and procedures stated in the problem, the following agendum was observed. The first step was to investigate the historical backgrounds of group interpretation. By tracing the development of group interpretation as an art form and its status in various periods of speech history, it is proposed that the contemporary status of group interpretation can be more clearly defined. Next it was necessary to study the theoretical and philosophical development of group interpretation. This study tends to make it possible to determine a specific philosophical attitude for group performances. The findings of these two preliminary studies are discussed in Chapters II and III.

The major area of investigation for this thesis focused on the three interpretative modes—Choric Interpretation, Readers Theatre, and Chamber Theatre. It was necessary to analyze each mode to determine its individual characteristics, purpose of style, and particular production technique and problems. Originally it was proposed to
include representative production scripts for each of the styles, but copyright restrictions made it impossible to include these scripts. This area of investigation is included in Chapter IV. In Chapter V, the three forms are examined collectively, and certain suggested educational values, functions, and procedures are discussed. The approach presented in Chapter V presents general guidelines which will permit a teacher-director to adapt methods and procedures for selecting and presenting literature to an audience.

The last step was to establish suggested evaluative criteria for a group interpretation performance. Apparently no attempt has been made to determine these criteria. This study, discussed in Chapter VI, relies extensively on Gertrude Johnson's article "Dramatic Reading and Platform Art Critique," and Keith Brooks, Eugene Bahn, and L. LaMont Okey's book *The Communicative Act of Oral Interpretation*. Also, many concepts were derived from W. B. Chamberlain and S. H. Clark, "Criticism."

Schools are engaged in teaching courses in English, speech, music, industrial arts, mathematics, history, home economics, and physical education, but their prime objective is to teach a personality. At times educators and teachers have lost sight of this larger objective, and perhaps no group has been more negligent than teachers of interpretation. The effectiveness of many interpretative performances continues to be marred by reminiscences of showy elocution and
declamation performances. It is desired that when properly understood and executed, a group interpretation performance will have a lasting value to the interpreters' social, educational, psychological, and aesthetic needs.
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Historically, group interpretation has been assigned various functions. As a part of ancient Greek drama or in plays by T. S. Eliot, group interpretation is regarded as a phase of dramatic performances. Within liturgical rituals, group reading techniques can be identified in chants and responsive readings. Incorporated into Hitler's Youth Movement, group speaking became a propaganda instrument to mold a sense of unity and collectiveness among German students. Some authorities regard any public recitations en masse as group interpretations. This designation would include pledges of allegiance, credal recitations, or oral classroom recitations. The scope and purpose of this thesis exclude these mass recitations or the liturgical and propaganda aspects of group readings. It is concerned only with the educational functions of group interpretation as a public performance.

During its formative stages as verse-speaking or choral reading, proponents of Choric Interpretation made extravagant claims about the

benefits to be derived from group speaking exercises. According to many, verse-speaking had enormous literary value for the appreciation and study of spoken verse. Others emphasized its value as an instrument for vocal training and improvement. Emma Grant Meader records that choral reading was regarded by some as an effective aid in curing stuttering. Others equally enthusiastic, advocated that group speaking activities permitted shy, self-conscious children to develop confidence and poise. The cultural and social values of choral reading received elaborate emphasis. In more recent years, some teachers have regarded staged readings or Readers Theatre as a means for presenting plays with limited funds and facilities.

This thesis observes a more conservative attitude. First, only potential values are considered. This approach seems advisable because it is difficult to obtain satisfactory data measuring literary appreciation or aesthetic skills. Second, although group interpretation and conventional theatre share many techniques and concepts, group performances are not considered as substitutes for dramatic productions.

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2 Emma Grant Meader, "Choral Speaking and Its Values," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXII (April, 1936), 244.

In this chapter, Greek dramatic choruses and platform readings prior to 1920 are discussed as a means for establishing the genesis of techniques now used in Choric Interpretation, Chamber Theatre, and Readers Theatre. Prior to 1920, references in relevant literature to group interpretations are few and then rarely in an educational context. Since very little evidence is available, one can only surmise at the educational activities which prevailed.

Eugene Bahn's definitive article "Interpretative Reading in Ancient Greece," acknowledges, "there has arisen a new speech art called verse-speaking similar to the art of the Greek chorus." Bahn's use of "similar to" is à propos, for verse-speaking choirs are not to be construed as drama, and, as a phase of drama, the Greek chorus should not be regarded as oral interpretation. However, it would be erroneous for a student to deny any relationship between the two art forms. In the ancient Greek culture, mass recitations evolved from the primitive communal recitations and singing during the Dionysian festivals celebrating the grape harvest. According to Bahn, these choric recitations, or "Ballad-dances," were intoned or chanted in a recitative fashion. As tragedy developed and supplanted the mass recitations, choric speaking was retained as an intrinsic characteristic of Greek drama. It is generally conceded that Greek choric drama was

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4Eugene Bahn, "Interpretative Reading in Ancient Greece," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XVIII (June, 1932), 432.

5Ibid., 438.
the archetype for verse-speaking techniques and principles.

Group speaking has prevailed as an element in religious ceremonies in most civilizations. Recitative, antiphonal, and refrain speaking characterized the Hebrew liturgy. Many of the Old Testament psalms were responsively chanted as a part of the ancient Hebraic worship. The Roman Catholic liturgy also makes use of chants and responsive readings. Antiphonal, recitative, and refrain speaking became identified with choral speaking. Even the custom of robing the speakers and arranging the chorus in light, medium, and dark voices was adopted from church choral choirs.

Although no specific evidence was observed which indicated that elocution teachers made use of group readings, several indirect references seem to indicate that some form of group speaking was practiced. In discussing Readers Theatre, Wilma Grimes and Alethea Mattingly cite this account from Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia*.

Another species of dramatic reading has of late years been practiced in private companies assembled for that purpose. It differs from that just mentioned (one person reading a play) by limiting each individual to the reading of the part of a single character. In this entertainment, as on the stage, the characters of the drama are distributed among the readers according to their supposed talents; and each being furnished with a separate book, either the whole play, or certain selected scenes from one or more, are read by the performers sitting around a table, whilst others of the company serve as the audience. The reading is performed by each in his best manner the part allotted to each is often nearly committed to memory, and such gestures are used as can be conveniently executed in a sitting-position posture. . . .

Higher efforts are here required . . . in order to keep the auditors
alive to the interest of the scene, thus divided and stript of all that aids delusion, mutilated of its complete action. On these occasions . . . sometimes dresses are assumed or modified the more nearly to approach theatrical exhibition.  

Virginia Sanderson affirms that the techniques of verse-speaking had no relationship to the "old fashion group recitations."  

Rose Walsh relates a vivid picture of a group recitation by the Senior Elocution Class at the commencement exercises of "selected Seminaries for young ladies" at the turn of the century.

In flowing white dresses, drilled to perfect poise, graceful bodily movement and good speech unison, they recited The Legend of the Organ or Aux Italian, now high, now low, now louder, now softer, now slower, now faster, and awed admiring relatives and friends, although no one knew just why, this group work was accepted and applauded as a part of the very superior training received at such private schools.

Furthermore, research revealed that the techniques now regarded as Readers Theatre and Chamber Theatre were present in the staged readings of the Elizabethan Reading Society under the direction of William Poel. The Reading Society was active from 1875 to 1879. In 1879, the society reorganized as the Elizabethan Stage Society.

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8Rose Walsh, "Whither the Speaking Choir," Ibid., p. 127.
Poel's contribution to group interpretation and to Shakespearian theatre deserves additional research, not only from the standpoint of techniques, but from the viewpoint of notable actors and teachers who were influenced by Poel's methods. Among those named in connection with the Elizabethan Reading and Acting Societies are Elsie Fogerty, Lillah MacCarthy, Charles Laughton, Sir John Gielgud, and Lord Gordon Bottomly.

William Poel was an actor and director. After touring the English countryside with a program of solo readings from the works of William Shakespeare one summer, he organized an amateur group which "toured the country during the summer months giving costumed recitals" from Shakespeare's plays in town halls and school buildings. These performances proposed to present a reading of the actual texts of the plays. In 1875, Poel became associated with the Elizabethan Reading Society, an organization of students founded at University College, London. The performers sat on a platform and read the texts of Shakespeare's plays without cuts or omissions.

In June, 1897, The Daily Chronicle, London, reviewed the techniques of the Society.

In front of dark drapery, forming a species of screen sat about a dozen ladies and gentlemen in nineteenth century evening attire, who representing the characters of the play, rose at their respective cues and delivered the lines allotted them, the

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majority with books in their hands. Below the platform sat Mr. Arnold Dolmetsch and three lady assistants, who played the incidental music upon instruments of Shakespeare's time. 10

Poel's platform readings received critical acclaim from George Bernard Shaw.

Again if we watch the amateur performances of Elizabethan drama with which Mr. William Poel does much good work, we find these performers who are members of the Shakespeare Reading Society. . . acquit themselves much better in point of delivery than average professional actors. 11

The effectiveness of the Elizabethan Stage Society was regarded by Shaw as a continuation of the Reading Society's techniques. He states again, they were "a novelty as a theatre to which people can go to see the play instead of the cast." 12

Robert Speight indicates that Poel's approach was not theatrically oriented. "The addresses [Introduction] given at the performances chosen for these readings do not immediately suggest the theatre . . . they strike a note of adult education and sober self-improvement, equally remote from the modern or the Elizabethan playhouse." 13

Another reference by George Bernard Shaw alludes to the fact that

10Ibid., p. 74.


13Speight, Andrew Poel, p. 74.
not only were the principles now acknowledged in Readers Theatre prevalent, but other group reading techniques similar to Chamber Theatre, were also being used during this

Years ago, comparing the effects of Much Ado as performed by the Lyceum and as read through by a number of amateurs seated in evening dress on the platform of the London Institution, I found the amateurs' performance was more vivid and enjoyable, and that the illusion though flatly contradictory by the costumes and surroundings, was actually stronger. I happened to witness, too, a performance of Browning's Luria under circumstances still more apparently ludicrous. It was acted - not merely read - in a lecture theatre at University College against a background of plain curtains, by performers also in evening dress.14

It can be inferred from the preceding resume that the principles and techniques now considered as group interpretation of literature were practiced prior to this century. However, since few details are available and these are not specifically in an educational context, it is necessary to regard group interpretation as an instructional innovation of the Twentieth Century. Until Charles Laughton and Paul Gregory produced *Don Juan in Hell* (1951), journal articles discussed group interpretation exclusively as an educational vehicle.

During the first three decades of this century, speech teachers were struggling for sanctions in the academic world. For interpretation to become accepted as a legitimate speech art, it was necessary for the teachers of oral interpretation to rid the discipline of the elocutionary

reputation. Resistance came from within and from without the speech field. In the thinking of many people, oral interpretation meant an exhibitionary "reading," complete with imitations of "bugles, bird notes, bells, moaning, groaning, and tremolos." This bias eventually carried over into group readings. Attackers "found it [choric speaking] artificial, mechanical, smacking of exhibitionism or undeniably dull." Apparently this attitude prevailed well into the 1940's.

Speech was generally accepted as an academic discipline by the mid 1930's, and to define goals and functions for the speech arts and English courses, A Committee for the Advancement of Speech Education in Secondary Schools published a course of study in *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*. Acting, reciting, and oral reading were assigned to the realm of English teachers. No reference is made to group interpretation. In the same issue, Gladys Borchers listed four elements of speech: voice, diction, language, and thought. The first two clearly belong to the realm of speech, but the last two presented "confusing


issues of jurisdiction" according to Borchers. In most instances
textbooks and articles considered choral speaking as a means for
teaching poetry in the elementary grades. For all practical purposes
group interpretation was at an impasse by the 1940's. This remained
the status of group interpretation until the First Reading Quartette
toured the United States with George Bernard Shaw's *Don Juan in Hell*,
followed by the reading of Stephen Vincent Benet's *John Brown's Body*.
From these performances, group readings have again become popular with
American audiences. This popularity has led to much experimentation
among speech teachers. Notable among these are such innovators as
Robert Breen and Leslie Irene Coger.

When one considers the references to the Greek choruses,
Andrew Poel's Reading Society, Austin's *Chironomia*, and the group
recitations of the elocution classes, perhaps it is advisable to state
that group interpretation had no beginnings. Perhaps there were only
modifications and refinements of techniques and methods already in
existence. Whatever the evolution, the form of group interpretation
now termed verse-speaking, or choric reading, appeared in Germany
and England between 1920 and 1925.

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18Gladys Borchers, "An Approach to the Problem of Oral

19John Dolman, Jr., *Art of Reading Aloud*. (New York, 1959),
p. 18.
Wilhelm Leyhausen organized a speech choir at the University of Berlin about 1920. He and his choirs toured throughout Europe. These choirs were organized on the same principles observed in the English and American speaking choirs. They were conceived as "an organ of human voices, divided into soprano, alto, tenor, and bass voices." The repertory of Leyhausen's choirs consisted of classic Greek drama. After Leyhausen's retirement, Herta Reclam assumed the directorship, and has continued the traditions outlined by Leyhausen. It was not evident from Reclam's article whether she or Leyhausen instituted the practice of using professional actors in solo parts while students performed in the choirs. Leyhausen's ideals are retained in the Delphiads which he organized in 1950. These Delphiads are held so that student groups "interested in choric poetry and universal dramatic literature" throughout the world "can meet to perform, discuss their concepts of choric speaking, and learn from each other." Apparently there are organized choric reading groups in almost every Western country.


21Ibid., p. 286.

22Ibid., p. 284.

23Ibid.
The elocutionists in England, as in America, left their mark on the public reading of literature. John Masefield, recounting the founding of the Scottish Association for the Speaking of Verse, relates that the elocutionists, "made a child in a pinafore on prize day, a thing that strong men fly from screaming." Masefield and his wife founded the Oxford Recitation (later the Oxford Festivals) contest in verse-speaking in 1923, after hearing a group of Marjorie Gullan's verse-speaking experiments at the Edinburgh Musical Festival. These Verse-Speaking Festivals were still being held in 1938.

Under Gullan's direction, choric speaking became an established art form, and her presentations set the pattern for other verse-speaking choirs. The group of speakers were divided into light, middle, and dark voices, and generally spoke in unison or antiphonal arrangements. Mona Swann was also a major influence in the English verse-speaking movement. Mary Major Crawford makes the following comparison between Gullen and Swann.

24 John Masefield, "With the Living Voice," an address given at the First General Meeting of the Scottish Association for the Speaking of Verse, October 14, 1924.


Miss Swann tries to get unity of thought, while retaining individuality of expression. She does not aim at a perfect choir, but to lead each child to desire the perfect thing. Miss Gullan's aim is different. Her ideal is perfection in the speech choir. Therefore, she attacks the problem directly. She trains. Miss Swann strives in general for an easy conversational tone. Miss Gullan's choir gives an effort a little less near speech, more like recitative.28

From England the concept of verse-speaking spread to America about 1925. Both Gullan and Swann conducted classes in the United States, and by 1936 choric reading was established as a cultural and educational influence. Active leaders in the choric reading movement were Wallace B. Nichols, Marion Parsons Robison, Agnes Currin Hamm, Virginia Sanderson, and Marguerite DeWitt.

Marguerite DeWitt appears to have been the most active personality within the choric speaking movement in America. She organized the Oral Arts and Crafts Center in New York City, and the emphasis of this center seems to have been the verse-speaking choir. About the same time DeWitt was a member of the National Recovery Council. She implies at that time (1934) there were many active efforts in group interpretation scattered about the United States on college campuses and as community projects. She implies that choric drama was the experimental form in these projects. Her vision was to see government-sponsored group reading projects organized in communities where unemployment and poverty were widespread. Particular emphasis

was given to group reading as a cultural and educational media in community projects and in settlement houses. Public schools did not seem to be directly concerned in DeWitt's thinking.  

Marguerite DeWitt developed lilts (rhythmical, song-like verses) for group work under a system defined as "euphony," which was designed to produce "utility of pleasant sounds phonetically." She emphasized the Greek chorus concepts to heighten the effect or to supplement the unfolding of the story in drama. She continued by listing such plays as *Man and the Masses*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Rock*, *Green Pastures*, and *Porgy and Bess*, which could be adapted to choric speaking performances, but she does not explain how these adaptations should be accomplished. It is puzzling to note that as ambitious and influential as DeWitt appears to have been from her articles, her influence does not appear in speech journals. This warrants further investigation.

Toward the end of the depression years on many college campuses, choral speaking was a part of speech and English curricula, either as a course or as a co-curricular activity. Some instructors were beginning to experiment with various methods of presentation. Alice W. Mills


30Ibid., p. 8.

31Ibid., p. 1.

32Ibid., p. 2.
relates one such experiment. She states that her choir wore "long, golden robes, similar to the Greek chorus. Subtle lighting effects were used to heighten the lofty lines of Euripides' choruses from *The Trojan Women.*" In the same article Mills recounts that group reading programs included selections from the Psalms and nonsensical verse spoken in unison and antiphonal groups with solos, duets, and trios.

Although choric reading retained its chief characteristics of mass recitation of poetry by robed choirs divided into light and dark voices, some directors experimented with lighting effects, costumes, and other stage techniques for heightening effects. However, they often expressed a sense of guilt for doing so. Esther Galbraith presented three standard selections for a high school assembly program. In this program, she made extensive use of lighting, costumes, stage techniques, and pantomimes. In describing the presentation, Galbraith says apologetically:

Costuming and stagings as elaborate as were provided on this occasion were not always approved by directors of speaking choirs, but with our immature audience, interest and appreciation of the poems were much enhanced.\(^35\)

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34*ibid.,* p. 65ff.

More conservative people did indeed disapprove of this type of presentation. Marjorie Gullan affirms, "when treating poetry, they need not be dramatized by the use of colored lights or stage properties and costumes, or of poses and acting by the speaker." 36

Between 1926 and 1936, journal articles discussed the potentials of verse-speaking choirs in glowing terms. Writers were optimistic about the cultural and educational possibilities of choric readings. Group interpretation was conceived as an educational medium with vast social and psychological values. For many, choral speaking provided a means for re-establishing poetry to an influential position in literary studies. Research revealed that by 1939 choric reading or verse-speaking had not fulfilled these hopes. The demise of choric reading can be traced only through isolated lines and paragraphs in journal articles. Articles concerning the subject became defensive in tone, and for some unestablished reason, choric reading began to fall into disrepute. 37 One possible reason for its decline is suggested by Muriel B. Newton. "For many, Choral Reading has deteriorated into verbatim recitations of poems by groups. For others it has been used for sound effects rather than interpretation." 38

38Muriel B. Newton, The Unit Plan for Choral Reading (Boston, 1938), Forward.
Charlotte Lee suggests another reason. "It is frequently the habit of enthusiasts of choric speaking to think of this technique as an end in itself." Marjorie Gullan suggests that there was a "growing tendency to harmonize in speech choirs which was incompatible with natural speech." In 1938, R. H. Robbins warned speech teachers that there were those who were distrustful of the whole movement, because some in the field made "indiscriminate use of the choral techniques on each and every poem, merely because choral speaking [was] fashionable." Some speech teachers and administrators regarded choric speaking as a quick means for a teacher to present large groups of untrained pupils in a public program. Agnes Currin Hamm states that "several instances have come to my attention recently which can only make one fear for the future of Choral Speaking." Hamm then narrates an account of a young woman who began a speaking choir after her brother passed information to her about choral speaking which he had gleaned from hearing three lectures. Another young lady who had been


40Gullan, Speech Choir, p. 12.


in a speaking choir for three months volunteered to organize a speech choir for her school. On another occasion, a principal informed his speech teacher she was to begin a choral speaking choir after he had heard a choir, and then decided he wanted one in his school. He felt any speech teacher could teach choral speaking because "there didn't seem much to it."43

Teachers of choric reading sought a definitive concept of the art form, but apparently this concept never developed as group interpretation began to be rejected by more and more teachers. Ray Irwin observes that by 1935 nearly forty books had been written exclusively on choral interpretation, but after 1940 only a few articles appeared in periodicals.44 Although the decline of choral speaking was evident, speech textbooks continued to include a discussion of choric reading techniques. Interestingly, the traditionally robed choir, reciting en masse with symphonic, or orchestra, techniques was still evident with the San Jose College Speech Choir in 1963.45

It would be incorrect to assume that group interpretation of literature completely disappeared from speech activities. However, it was so poorly conceived, it ceased to be regarded with particular importance. The movement, for all practical purposes, was dormant

43Ibid., p. 225.


until 1951. Ray Irwin's observation should be noted.

My studies have not led me to an explanation of the demise of choral readings. The fact is that nothing has been written about it recently and it has been dropped from many college curricula. What appears to be happening is that it is being replaced by a form of play production known as Readers Theatre, a new sort of interpretation that is enjoying a lively renaissance.46

During the era of decline, there existed a form of interpretation identified as staged play readings. However, the staged readings were generally regarded as a part of dramatics and not interpretation. Kay Arthur Sturman gives a detailed discussion of staged readings.

Staged readings are nothing new, of course. For years Stanford University has been using this method for various purposes, one of which is to try out prize-winning verse drama of the Maxwell Anderson contest. George Savage tests his new plays in this way while he is working on them. At Vassar, 'reading-rehearsals' of the Greek tragedies are given regular productions. Many colleges and universities give readings with full casts, but in most cases they are done in the 'walk-on' manner. The real 'staged reading' however, includes only as much business as may be done above the table at which the actors sit. There is no pretence of action. The only standing member of the cast reads all the stage directions from his rostrum, which is placed behind the actors' table, and which is equipped with a special reading lamp . . . When not actually reading, the actors must sit with their heads bowed, raising them only when entrances are announced by the stage reader . . . Suggestions of characters in the costume of the actors may be used. . . emphasis placed on the interpretation of lines takes precedence over coordinations of movement with speech.47


In 1940 Charlotte Lee published an article explaining an "innovation in group expression." Her innovation designated as "kinetic projection," was choric reading with rhythmic bodily movement. Cornelius C. Cunningham's book published in 1951 included a discussion of "Choric Speaking," by Charlotte Lee and "Choreographic Reading," by Robert Breen, which would lead one to assume that interpreters were experimenting with group interpretation techniques which would prepare the American public for a revival of group interpretation as Chamber Theatre and Readers Theatre.

Perhaps the most important event in the field of group interpretation was Paul Gregory's and Charles Laughton's First Drama Quartette. When this group toured the United States and England, it received expansive critical acclaim. Although the vehicle, Don Juan in Hell, was a play and recognized actors filled the cast, John Mason Brown concedes, "This theatrically unorthodox production was in the nature of a reading." In Theatre Arts, John Houseman writes, "Charles Laughton long sought and finally found a perfect vehicle in the


'reading' of classic and modern literature.⁵¹ Of the many contributions made to the speech arts, the Gregory-Laughton experiment gave respectability to group interpretation.

In the wake of the Gregory-Laughton productions, teachers of interpretation began to try this "new" program technique. As these teachers wrote about their experiences, many articles began to appear in speech journals which treated the art of group interpretation from many aspects. To define their concepts, teacher-directors discussed various methods of presentation with such designations as staged readings, multiple readings, concert readings, group readings, platform readings, and interpreters theatre. The particular methods were not new art forms as revealed in Austin's Chironomia and William Poel's Elizabethan Reading Society. Adelphi College in Garden City, Long Island, "established a regular readers' theatre in 1949."⁵² Sturman's article previously cited would establish the use of Readers Theatre techniques as early as 1941. Although Readers Theatre is now regarded as interpretation by its proponents, the art form was generally used as a part of dramatic activities and presented by actors. Discussions of this interpretative form appear in theatre magazines, or are indexed under "drama". An identical situation exists with Chamber Theatre


productions. As a consequence, a student observes a period when the position of group interpretation was uncertain. To some authorities, Readers Theatre and Chamber Theatre were regarded as theatre, while to others they were truly interpretation. The consensus now points to a common interpretation-theatre background, and considers Readers Theatre and Chamber Theatre as interpretation, not a dramatic production.

This viewpoint constitutes a maturing attitude within the speech arts. Writers in the field of group interpretation are avoiding the errors made by advocates of verse-speaking who viewed the art form as an end to itself. Currently writers are recognizing group interpretation as a means to an end, and that group productions have something to contribute to all the speech arts.

In its current status, group interpretation is an established part of the interpretation curriculum. There is an ever increasing amount of literature in the field, specifically as Readers Theatre. Directors are continuing to experiment with meaningful presentations through Choric Interpretation, Chamber Theatre and Readers Theatre. There has been a desirable shift of emphasis from a display of readers technique to the presentation of an author's emotive, intellectual, and aesthetic ideas to an audience.
Chapter Summary

Group interpretative techniques originated with communal recitations during the primitive Dionysian festivals of ancient Greece. From these beginnings, the Greek classical tragedy developed, retaining the choric element. Group recitations have been a part of liturgical rituals from the earliest times. Isolated references reveal that the techniques now evident in group performances were observed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Techniques generally employed in group performances are evident in Andrew Poel's Elizabethean Reading Society, Austin's Chronimia, and group recitations by elocution classes. Organized efforts in group interpretation as an educational instrument began in England under the direction of Marjorie Gullan and in Germany under the direction of Dr. Wilhelm Leyhausen. During the 1930's choral speaking (verse-speaking) was the recognized form of group interpretation. Choric reading seemingly had a promising future, but due to misconceptions and abuses, by 1940 it had begun to fall into disrepute. Evidence indicates that several college groups regularly used staged readings of plays as a part of their dramatic activities. Scattered experiments by such people as Charlotte Lee and Robert Breen brought new emphasis and respectability to group interpretation. These experiments were dramatically exploited in the Paul Gregory-Charles Laughton reading productions. Although there was a time when the position of
group interpretation shifted between theatre and oral interpretation, it is now generally recognized that the methods incorporated in Choric Interpretation, Chamber Theatre, and Readers Theatre are interpretative techniques.
CHAPTER III

A PHILOSOPHY FOR GROUP INTERPRETATION

John Gassner asserts that "the modern theatre has been characterized by a freedom" and that "the flexibility of dramatic and theatrical convention is recognized everywhere." ¹ This same principle also characterizes contemporary group interpretation. As evidenced in Chapter II, group interpretation can no longer be regarded as choric reading per se. Directors have ambitiously experimented with various presentational methods and techniques. Having no specific guidelines, directors of group productions have been left to their own self-expression, which has resulted in performances that vacillated between nearly conventional theatre and austere script-in-hand group readings. These experiments have produced some very imaginative group performances, but they have radically modified the concepts of group interpretation.

This diverse and creative experimentation has not been without problems. A basic problem is the variety of terms used to describe the various experiments. To define their individual concepts of group interpretation, directors have used an assorted catalogue of terminology.

¹ John Gassner, Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama (New York, 1966), p. 10.
The result is an array of conflicting and confusing nomenclature. A cursory survey of articles and books discussing group interpretation reveals such nomenclature as multiple readings, concert readings, staged readings, theatre readings, ensemble readings, Readers Theatre, and Interpreter's Theatre. The many individualistic concepts just did not take into account the tremendous inventiveness of writers.  

On occasions the confusion of nomenclature has been extended into the types of material best suited for group performances. This is the second problem created by the experimentation in group interpretation. During the golden years of the verse-speaking choirs, narrative or lyric verse was the only literature deemed suitable for group recitation. However, with the renewed interest in group interpretation, directors have freely mixed methods and literature. For example, one of the most entertaining Choric Interpretations directed by this writer was Arthur Guiterman's poem "Pershing at the Front." The poem was presented by four boys costumed in army fatigues and helmets. The readers used marching pantomime as suggested by the text, and their eye contact shifted between onstage and offstage focus. They spoke direct discourse in solos and the narration in ensemble. This particular production was called Choric Interpretation, but it included many elements which will be identified as Chamber Theatre. Another

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time, in a Chamber Theatre production of Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery," passages were interpreted with synchronized speaking, an element of Choric Interpretation. It is evident, then, that there are no specific lines of distinction between techniques and types of material to be selected.

As the traditional concepts of group interpretation were altered and as directors of group productions continued to experiment with styles of presentation, serious questions concerning the purpose, nature, and attributes of group interpretation began to arise. This is a third problem brought about by the varied experimentation with group interpretation: What constitutes this particular art form? To answer this question, directors began to publish their observations and experiences, and from these published observations, a general philosophy of group interpretation has begun to be formulated. Valuable discussions of the philosophies, objectives and techniques, and scripts are now being included in several textbooks. A list of the more important textbooks include Leslie Irene Coger and Melvin White, *Readers Theatre Handbook*; Chloe Armstrong and Robert Brandes, *The Oral Interpretation of Literature*; Wallace Bacon, *The Art of Interpretation*; Charlotte Lee, *Oral Interpretation*, (third edition). Charlotte Lee refers to an unpublished manuscript on Chamber Theatre by Robert Breen which should be of vast importance when and if it is published.
Although these textbooks contain many areas of concord, several points of contradistinction are evident. For instance, the interpretation-theatre duality of group interpretation is unanimously recognized. Also they acknowledge the experimental nature of group interpretation. Obvious areas of differences are observed in the divisions of styles. For example, Bacon subdivides his chapter on group interpretation into Choric Interpretation, Chamber Theatre, and Readers Theatre. Lee observes Bacon's terminology, but considers Choric Interpretation as a segment of oral interpretation and Readers Theatre is discussed as a theatre oriented activity. Coger and White ostensibly identify Chamber Theatre and Readers Theatre as homogeneous modes of group interpretation. Armstrong and Brandes discuss group interpretation as staged readings. They define Theatre Readings as staged readings of drama and Chamber Theatre as staged presentations of other forms of literature. These latter authors do not regard Choric Interpretation within the realm of staged readings. There is agreement among these authorities that verse literature constitutes the repertoire for Choric Interpretation. Observing Breen's definition, the consensus among the authors regards narrative prose fiction as the only literature to be adapted for a Chamber Theatre performance. There is a wide divergence of opinion concerning the types of literature suitable for a Readers Theatre performance. Charlotte Lee regards dramatic literature (drama) as the only material to be interpreted in Readers Theatre. Coger
and White deem any literature which expresses a character delineation with or without a narrator within the realm of Readers Theatre. Other authorities, observing Don Geiger's philosophy, feel that any literature deserves to be presented in a group performance without consideration of mode or style of presentation.

From the preceding discussion, it should be evident that no single nomenclature or philosophy will embrace all the concepts of group interpretation. Although many advances have been made in defining principles, concepts and philosophies continue to be altered. A director and his interpretative group are still free to find new experiences with literature. Perhaps this is the most rewarding and stimulating aspect of a group production for the participants.

A second aspect which creates an element of confusion for spectators and performers is that group interpretation lacks its own attributes and traditions. While sharing the objectives and methods of interpretation, group performances draw on many production techniques of theatre. "Theatre and interpretative reading had a common background. In Interpreter's Theatre they are coming together again." Armstrong and Brandes elaborate

Although there are many variations in the methods used to present the staged readings, it is generally agreed that the purpose of the approach is to present good literature in a lively
The staged reading, as the name implies, is a compromise between drama and oral interpretation in which readers adopt a limited amount of the theatre without any pretense of giving a play.\footnote{Chloe Armstrong and Paul Brandes, \textit{Oral Interpretation of Literature} (New York, 1963), p. 289.}

Group interpretation's position as a part of oral interpretation has never been seriously questioned, but there have been critics from within and from without the speech discipline who have challenged the use of theatrical elements in a group interpretative performance. These critics have regarded this aspect of group interpretation as exhibitionary or pseudo-drama. However, in the prevailing atmosphere of freedom, the "interpreter is not limited. He is largely free to adapt such methods as will carry his meaning most effectively."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 18.}

The precedent for employing theatrical lighting and costumes to heighten an interpretative performance can be traced to the beginning of the verse-speaking movement. Some of these early verse-speaking choirs performed in robes designed after the classical Greek chorus. Two Choric Interpretation productions performed at Sherman High School, Sherman, Texas (1966), will illustrate ways in which theatrical effects can be used to assist readers to communicate an author's meaning to an audience. The first selection was Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem "I Like Americans." This poem's language is very direct and
personalized, and it is written with a very informal, female conversational attitude. A formal, unison reading of this poem would not have conveyed the author's conversational atmosphere; therefore, the lines were divided between ten or twelve girls comparable to play dialogue. To further heighten the female viewpoint, the girls chose to set the interpretation in a health spa. The girls wore warm-ups and gym clothes. While performing a variety of body exercises, they presented Millay's poem with a "gossipy" conversational delivery. The second production was "The Hollow Men," by T. S. Eliot. In keeping with this selection's more formal nature, the interpreters appeared uniformly dressed in black trousers and skirts, white shirts and blouses with black turtle-neck dickies. They were statically arranged on multi-level platforms. The futile and fatalistic emotional content of the poem was conveyed through two theatrical effects. A stage setting consisting of platforms set against three stage flats arranged in an abstract formation was used. A symbolic image from the poem was painted on each flat. As an example, one flat had scarecrow images; another a defoliated tree, and the third a symbol of a broken column. Lighting effects were also used to enhance the mood of the poem. A green olivette flood light provided a back light, and blue border lights were used to light the performing area. With both poems, it was felt by the interpreters that these staging effects assisted them to communicate the mood and
attitude of the poems. Comments from spectators seemed to support the performers' reactions.

Turning now to a second theatrical influence observed in contemporary group productions, there is a growing awareness of Bertholt Brecht's and Irwin Piscator's Epic Theatre influence on the general philosophy of group interpretation. In *Readers Theatre Handbook*, Irene Coger and Melvin White apply Brecht's principles to Readers Theatre. 6 In his Chamber Theatre course at Northwestern University, Robert Breen gives particular stress to Brecht's philosophy as background for an understanding of Chamber Theatre procedures. 7 Apparently drawing considerable information from Breen's unpublished manuscript, Charlotte Lee 8 and Wallace Bacon 9 relate Epic Theatre concepts to Chamber Theatre also.

Space does not permit an exhaustive discussion of the Brecht-Piscator influence on group interpretation, so only the more obvious areas will be considered. The fundamental principle noted in Brecht's

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7Information obtained from the class notes of Mrs. Doris Burkett Simpson, ex-student of Dr. Robert Breen, Northwestern University, 1960-63.


Epic Theatre is the alienation, or estrangement, effect. This is not to be construed to mean that the interpreter or spectator becomes alienated, or estranged, from the material in the sense that he becomes hostile to it. John Willett clarifies this concept.

Alienation corresponds to our own stage use of the word effect: a means by which an effect of estrangement could be got . . . It is a matter of detachment, or reorientation: exactly what Shelley meant when he wrote that poetry makes familiar objects to be as if they were not familiar. 10

In epic theatre these estrangement effects might be a narrator-actor speaking off-stage to the audience, banners, projections, sound effects, lighting effects, or set designs. The premise of Brecht's philosophy is to do everything possible to remind an audience they are viewing a play. To do this he proposed to create a detachment and objectivity within his actors and audience by heightening the theatrical effects. Brecht's concept of epic theatre was influenced by the Chinese acting style. In this mode, the emotions of the characters were externalized through attitudes of the actors. The actor was to hold himself remote from the character being portrayed. It was to be an objective portrayal and not one in which the actor lost himself in the character. To accomplish this, three techniques (i.e., alienation effects) were employed: (1) characters spoke lines in the narrative third person, (2) present

events were expressed in past tense, and (3) stage directions were spoken aloud.  

In group interpretation productions Brecht's ideas are used for the same purpose. The alienation effects are used to heighten the literature being interpreted and to remind the audience that the performance is an interpretative experience in which the interpreters and audience can share a common enjoyment. Some of the alienation effects easily recognized in group performances are symbolic costumes and sets, lighting effects, reading stands, stools, and manuscripts. To illustrate the manner in which estrangement effects are used in a group production, reference is made to an unproduced Readers Theatre adaptation of Nikolai Yevreinov's mono-drama, *The Theatre of the Soul*. Technical requirements make this play very difficult to produce in the conventional theatre. For instance, the play requires a gigantic heart to beat throughout the play above the stage floor. In the Readers Theatre script, all staging aspects are excluded, and only seven reading stands and stools are required. To fulfill the play's original staging requirements, extensive use of lighting and sound effects are called for in the Readers Theatre adaptation. A red strobe light is used to communicate the idea of the beating heart. When adapting this script, it was suggested by some students to project a movie of a beating heart behind the readers. This

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idea was rejected, but a film projection would be a type of alienation effect also.

Perhaps more important to group interpretation is Brecht's narrator-reader (actor) concept. This premise is particularly important when non-dramatized prose is adapted for a group interpretation performance. The narrator-reader becomes a vital person in the reading, moving into and out of scenes as the narrative requires. At times the narrator-reader reads directly to the audience, and at other times he shifts his reading to characters onstage, and at other times he may become a character within the narrative. The narrator-reader serves as a fulcrum to place focus onstage or offstage according to the demands of the script and style of production. Although the vehicle is neither Epic Theatre nor group interpretation, the Stage Manager in Our Town is an example of the actor-narrator. Another example is observed in The World of Shalom Alchem.

A third element which tends to create objectivity and detachment for the interpreters in a group production is locus. Locus is the placement, or plane, of eye contact of the interpreters. Usually locus is directed offstage into the realm of the audience. This artistic detachment, or aesthetic distance, proposes to identify a reader with the audience, whereas, an actor being identified with the play, becomes totally immersed in a characterization and thereby
becomes aesthetically involved with the character being portrayed.\textsuperscript{12}

Just as there are elements of Epic Theatre's estrangement effects evident in group interpretation productions, there is a correlation between Epic Theatre dramaturgy and script adaptation for a group performance. Dramaturgy of the Epic Theatre does not permit the construction of a "well-made" play. Rather, the Epic dramas are put together in episodes, or sequences, and each episode may be independent of the others. The end result is a montage or collage effect.\textsuperscript{13} The "web of episode, narrative, lyrical interruption, choral chants and hortatory lectures"\textsuperscript{14} which shape Epic Theatre scripts are unified by the narrator-actor. The resultant effect generalizes ideas and events. It has been said that Epic Theatre seeks to give a "kaleidoscopic view of history."\textsuperscript{15} In Epic Theatre, "the point of view of production could be made more generally intelligible . . . if we call it that of the genre painter and the historian."\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{12}John Dolman, Jr., \textit{The Art of Reading Aloud} (New York, 1956), p. 28.

\textsuperscript{13}Willett, \textit{Brecht on Theatre}, p. 174.

\textsuperscript{14}Willett, \textit{Theatre of Brecht}, p. 114.

\textsuperscript{15}Gassner, \textit{Directions of Theatre}, p. 299.

\textsuperscript{16}Willett, \textit{Brecht on Theatre}, p. 58.
Many group interpretation scripts are put together in the same fashion. Verse, narrative prose selections, letters, diaries, and orations have been placed in conjunction, and a reader-narrator filled in with transitions between selections. Songs and musical interludes have also been included in group production scripts. Events, thoughts, and personalities are telescoped together. Cutting a novel, play, or short story to a one hour or one-half hour presentation telescopes events in such a manner that the audience gets only an impression of a literary piece. This principle can be observed in such group interpretation scripts as The Hollow Crown, In White America, and The World of Carl Sandburg.

While several of Brecht's presentational principles are readily identified in group performances, group interpretation is more nearly aligned philosophically to Erwin Piscator's concept of Epic Theatre. "The Brecht concept was that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason." Piscator on the other hand, asserts an emotionally-intellectually centered performance.

I agree that the 'alienation' ideas would make use of our intelligence and bring us into a closer contact with the facts. I, however, wanted to get hold of the complete human being. I will only separate intelligence and emotion so that I can unite them in a higher level.

17Ibid., p. 22.

In a group interpretation performance, the director and interpreters, in keeping with the objectives and purposes of oral interpretation, not only propose to present an author's intellectual-emotional viewpoints to an audience, but also they will seek to intellectually and emotionally involve the audience in those viewpoints.

Chapter Summary

Two major points have been asserted in this chapter. First, no single term will adequately fulfill the diverse concepts of contemporary group interpretation. Second, group interpretation, lacking any attributes and traditions of its own, is an eclectic discipline sharing objectives and methods of interpretation while employing many theatrical techniques to accomplish those objectives. The most reasonable conclusion is that for a group interpretation performance to be educationally and artistically valid, a teacher-director must accept a pluralistic philosophy for this art form. Adopting this pluralistic philosophy implies the following principles. The teacher-director and the interpretative group are at liberty to experiment with forms and techniques of presentation because there is no single form or style for a group interpretation production. A teacher-director must recognize that group productions may vacillate between interpretative and theatrical techniques, and in doing so, production styles and methods will overlap and interchange between modes.
Furthermore, concepts and principles will continue to change as a group experiments with various presentational techniques and literary selections. This philosophy will permit a director to use whatever means of interpretation that will best suit the context of the literary selection. However, it must be stated that although the teacher-director is at liberty to treat a piece of literature in whatever manner he feels justified, he is not permitted to take liberties with the piece of literature. A carte blanche attitude is indefensible and tends to thwart the purpose of any educationally oriented performance. The final mode and style of presentation is determined by the material to be expressed.

For the above reason, this thesis has attempted to restrict its discussion to certain conventions identified within the group interpretation nomenclature observed by Dr. Wallace Bacon—Choric Interpretation, Chamber Theatre, and Readers Theatre. Most group performances can be classified within one of these three forms while permitting a flexibility of style and literature. Also, consensus among textbooks and journal articles accept these terms as properly designating the modes of group interpretation although individual authorities may differ in emphasis.
CHAPTER IV

MODES OF GROUP INTERPRETATION

The eclectic nature of group interpretation makes it necessary to discuss the three modes, Choric Interpretation, Readers Theatre, and Chamber Theatre, individually and collectively since each form has its own characteristic methods while sharing methods and purposes with the other two forms. In this chapter Choric Interpretation, Readers Theatre, and Chamber Theatre will be delineated and examined in terms of development, characteristic elements, purpose of intention, and general procedures of presentation.

Choric Interpretation

Choric Interpretation continues the traditional mode of group reading. In the past, this mode has been identified as verse-speaking, choral speaking, and choral reading. Most speech textbooks have continued to include some discussion of Choric Interpretation as a part of oral interpretation, although, in recent years, there have been very few journal articles commenting on the style. Furthermore, it has been observed that the more recent textbooks by Jere' Veilleux and Keith Brooks have excluded any mention of Choric Interpretation and
have considered only Readers Theatre as group interpretation.

Traditionally Choric Interpretation has been characterized by a glee club or choral choir organization. Groups were divided into light, medium, or dark voices. Selections were arranged for unison, antiphonal, refrain, and sequential speaking. In 1956, Charles Woolbert and Severina Nelson continued to echo the traditional criteria for selecting material for the speaking chorus. They indicated it should be "literature that has narrative, dramatic and interesting quality. Furthermore this literature should be objective in nature and universal in language."¹ Also when performing, the traditional speaking choirs wore robes fashioned after a choral music group or after the style of the Greek dramatic chorus. Early proponents of choric reading advocated that the speaking choir was to be thoroughly democratic, and the group was to analyze a selection and assign parts without the interference of a director.

We shall require a director, then, just as the glee club and the orchestra require directors. But before the director takes charge, we must, by means of individual study and group wide discussion decide upon the tempo we shall adopt and the pauses we shall observe, and the emphasis we shall employ... The director is merely the executive who carries out the will of the group. The chorus must be thoroughly democratic body until the poem's meaning and the requisite inflections, pauses, stresses, etc., have been decided upon.²

²Howard Seely and William Hackett, Experiences in Speaking (Chicago, 1940), p. 357.
Since most current journal articles relevant to this thesis are concerned with Readers Theatre, it is difficult to determine the contemporary status of Choris Interpretation. However, a survey of textbooks and theses written after 1950, revealed seven characteristic elements of a Choric Interpretation performance.

(1) The literature selected for interpretation is generally presented in a formalized or stylized manner.

(2) Interpreters generally are statically situated, although they are permitted greater freedom of gesture and movement than characterized the traditional forms.

(3) Verse literature continues to be the basic repertory for Choric Interpretation.

(4) There is a minimum of staging effects, but again there is greater liberty than in past years.

(5) Selections are arranged in solo, ensemble, and synchronized speaking. The light, medium, and dark vocal arrangements divided into unison, antiphonal, and refrain speaking are no longer applicable.

(6) Interpreters may, or may not, carry manuscripts.

(7) Eye contact is generally in an offstage locus.

Research has failed to reveal any authority who adequately defines the purpose of the Choric Interpretation style. Most authorities have attempted to describe the form in terms of techniques
and methods of presentation or in terms of the value which the media had for the reader. John Dolman, Jr., states: "One reason for the confusion of purposes, standards, and tastes in the speech arts is the fact that so few people either as performers, or as listeners, have taken the trouble to define the several arts . . . or to distinguish them clearly from one another." For this reason and for the sake of clarity, this thesis proposes the following definition of purpose. Choric Interpretation is an art form which employs ensemble speaking to intensify the imaginative quality of verse literature through aural and visual stimuli. During the era of the verse-speaking choirs, this definition would not have been allowed. In the verse-speaking choirs the entire emphasis was aural, and anything that bespoke of costuming, staging, or theatrical effect was anathema. Within the framework of current interpretation philosophy, group performances have been emancipated from the traditional molds. While the emphasis remains aural in Choric Interpretation, a director and an interpretative group may use various aural and visual means to intensify, or heighten, an author's intended purpose and to give the audience a more pleasurable experience than would be available with the more conventional solo reading.

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4 Imaginative is used in the Aristotlian sense that literature is a portrayal of men's actions and experiences.
While poetic literature continues to be the repertory of Choric Interpretation, it is possible to use choric elements to interpret prose material in Chamber Theatre or Readers Theatre productions. Charlotte Lee provides a comprehensive insight into the problem of selecting material for the Choric Interpretation.

Much of the good literature of all ages is readily adaptable to choric treatment. Let the group find material which first is of sufficient value to be worth the time required to perfect for presentation. Next consider whether the selection is so highly personal that many voices would destroy its real importance. Finally, scrutinize the material to ascertain whether it offers sufficient scope for the manipulation of varying voice quality.

Practice and experimentation will provide a teacher-director sufficient guidelines for selecting material to be presented in a Choric Interpretation performance. A basic listing of suitable poems would include "Cool Tombs" and "Killers" by Carl Sandburg, "Pershing at the Front" by Arthur Guiterman, "The Hollow Men," by T. S. Eliot, "Night Comes to the City," by Claire Boiko, and any selection from James Weldon Johnson's God's Trombones. Granted these are standard selections, but they serve admirably to initiate students into group interpretation.

After selecting the literature it must be arranged for an ensemble presentation. There is no formula for dividing a selection into solo.

5Charlotte Lee, "Choric Speaking," Making Words Come Alive, Cornelius C. Cunningham (Dubuque, Iowa, 1951), p. 188.
duet, ensemble, or unison speaking. The director and the Choric group must experiment with various vocal groupings to find the most satisfactory arrangement. Wallace Bacon concludes that arranging a selection into vocal groups depends upon "the nature of the selection itself." When Sherman High School, Sherman, Texas, presented God’s Trombones (1966) as a Choric Interpretation performance, the material had been arranged before it was presented to the interpretative group. There was no effort to arrange the selection into the traditional form. The script was divided for solo, duet, and quartet voices and a combination of voices in sectional and cumulative readings. The final production script evolved after six to ten weeks of rehearsal, and in many sections the script bore little resemblance to the original arrangement. The group found that each performance required some rearrangement of voices and groupings. John V. Irwin and Marjorie Rosenberger alert a director to a danger that exists when one is adapting a selection to any group interpretation presentation.

There is . . . the temptation to divide too often merely to give a large number of persons opportunity to perform. There must be a reason for dividing into solos or small groups.\(^6\)

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As a general principle all staging aspects for Choric Interpretation are formalized or stylized. Interpreters usually remain in a static position, and gestures, when used, are synchronized in the same groupings as vocalization. In this manner bodily action becomes formalized. There is a degree of symbolic gesture adapted from modern dance. Directors of Choric Interpretation performances, who are contemplating the use of stage props or stage lighting, would do well to study impressionistic, expressionistic, and stylized theatrical staging. In this way a group can heighten a poem's intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic qualities. Choric Interpretation also extracts techniques from the classical theatrical style which uses plastic linear planes and lines to create its heightening effect.

Some authorities have attempted to derive a standardized number of interpreters to be presented in a choric production. Again the selection itself dictates the number of voices to be included. Some have said that twenty-five to fifty-five readers should be used in a Choric Interpretation performance, but experience indicates that two to twenty voices in concert is more realistic.

The question is often asked, "Should interpreters in a Choric Interpretation production hold manuscripts?" This seems to be a matter of personal choice. Some directors feel that the manuscript is an important estrangement effect and that the illusion of reading can be
created only when the manuscripts are present. Others prefer a
group to perform without the aid of a script.

The problem of reading locus is another factor requiring
attention. Locus is the plane or placement of the readers' eye
contact. This can be the most distracting element of group
interpretation. Most authorities assert that locus should be placed
in the realm of the audience, preferably, somewhere in the area
above the heads of the people in the last row of the room. With this
principle drilled into the interpreters, they stare at a point on the
back wall of the room without ever looking or seeing the audience.
The other extreme is that a group is not given a locus, so the
performers as individual readers establish locus their separate ways.
If a principle is needed to establish proper locus, perhaps the best
advice that can be given to a choric group is to have them look out
into the audience and establish visual contact with the spectators.
In this way the production becomes personalized, and the group is
able to draw the audience closer to the author's ideas.

Obviously, Choric Interpretation belies the old thought that
it was a quick and easy program device. A properly rehearsed Choric
Interpretation performance is time consuming and poses two primary
problems to a director and the interpreters. First, there must be
vocal and bodily synchronization within the group, and the group must
maintain a natural fluency between solo and ensemble speaking.
Vocal and bodily synchronization must receive careful consideration since a Choric Interpretation performance emphasizes a group of personalities communicating as one. There is no factor in Choric Interpretation more important than getting a group of voices to speak together intelligibly. No group of visual components can carry an author's meaning against a garble of cluttered voices.

Synchronization goes deeper than just voices. It includes bodily attitudes, starting and stopping together, and focus of eye contact.

A group of readers must read as one. A clutter of uncoordinated voices will drown out a reading and an audience is left bewildered and annoyed; a set of unrelated interpretations being mouthed at one time will be equally destroying.

Wallace Bacon suggests the idea of orchestration as a means of compensating for this difficult problem. Evelyn Seedorf emphasizes Choric Interpretation as "a regimentation of sounds which require a discipline of articulators, based upon automatic kinesthetic responses." Seedorf's emphasis is particularly important for obtaining an effective interpretation. She implies the regimentation of discipline is based on certain physical responses. To develop a synchronized interpretation, each interpreter will need to discipline himself to a single cause.

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8Bacon, Art of Interpretation, p. 207.

9Ibid., p. 307.

An interpreter surrenders his individual will for the benefit of the group. Individuals must learn to hear and sense the responses of the group. It becomes an automatic feeling within the group only after lengthy hours of rehearsal. An esprit de corps will also assist a group in producing a synchronized performance.

A second difficulty confronting a Choric Interpretation performance is the problem of developing fluency between readers. Bacon again identifies this problem. "An unrehearsed chorus will tend to finish a choral passage and then simply wait, at ease, until the solo reader has finished his lines; then, they will plunge in again."11 In order to develop a fluent flow of reading in a choric production, interpreters must "remain in the scene" by maintaining locus throughout the performance. The interpreters are "reading" even when they are not speaking. Next, a director can gain a great amount of fluency simply by requiring individual readers to be responsible for knowing (memorizing) the entire selection.

In summary, Choric Interpretation represents the traditional mode of group interpretation, and it is identified by an ensemble interpretation of verse literature. This verse literature may be heightened by selective formal or stylized stage techniques. Choric Interpretation exists for the purpose of presenting verse literature to an audience through aural and visual stimuli. Choric Interpretation

11Bacon, Art of Interpretation, p. 308.
enjoys a wider scope of material and a greater flexibility of interpretation techniques than once characterized the verse-speaking choirs. The problems inherent within a Choric Interpretation performance can be remedied by close cooperation between director and interpreters. These problems include such items as maintaining synchronized vocal and bodily presentation and developing a unified flow of interpretation between solo and ensemble divisions.

Readers Theatre

The increasing number of Readers Theatre production scripts and textbooks which include a discussion of this mode of group interpretation attests to its growing popularity. In turn, this popularity has precipitated an increasing number of journal articles which attempt to define the mode and the type of material to be presented. Research revealed that the Readers Theatre nomenclature has been applied to almost any form of group interpretation performance. It is speculated that eventually the term Readers Theatre will become the accepted nomenclature applied to all group reading productions. This observation was confirmed in a letter by Leslie Irene Coger. 12

The general style for both amateur and professional Readers Theatre productions was established by the Laughton-Gregory productions of Don Juan in Hell and John Brown's Body. These productions

presented three and four interpreters dressed in formal evening attire, seated on stools. In *John Brown's Body* the readers were supported by a chorus. Nevertheless, there is unanimity among directors and writers that Readers Theatre enjoys a maximum degree of performance flexibility. There is no one way to present literature in a Readers Theatre production. The material itself determines the ultimate techniques to be employed. Melvin White and Leslie Irene Coger have done much to clarify the real nature of this group interpretative mode, and in *Handbook for Readers Theatre*, they list six characteristic elements of the style.

1. Scenery and costumes are not used, or are only selectively implied.
2. Action or physical movement is merely suggested by the interpreter.
3. A narrator, speaking directly to an audience, usually establishes the basic situation of theme and binds the segments together.
4. A script is in evidence somewhere, usually carried by the interpreters.
5. There is a continuing effort to develop and maintain a close, more personalized relationship between performer and audience.
6. The audience's attention is concentrated upon the literature through aural appeal.  

Any confusion that surrounds Readers Theatre stems from the fact that no single definition will suffice for all the aspects observed by different groups. Some misunderstanding certainly exists because


14Ibid., p. 19.
many of the earlier articles treating Readers Theatre appeared in theatre magazines or considered the medium as "the group interpretation of drama." Current production scripts and journal articles reveal that Readers Theatre performances vacillate between near conventional theatre to the other end of the continuum approaching conventional reading script performances. However, authorities are careful to point out that Readers Theatre is not theatre, and it is not a dramatization of literature. Readers Theatre proposes to present a group reading of any literature, with or without delineated character, and with or without the presences of a narrator, in such a manner as to establish locus off stage into the minds and imagination of the audience. This definition of purpose appears to have merit because a definition which describes Readers Theatre as presenting only material involving delineated characters would exclude many of the Readers Theatre productions performed by interpretative groups. Other definitions proposed by authorities would encompass both Choric Interpretation and Chamber Theatre performances.

The flexible nature of Readers Theatre permits a director enormous possibilities for selecting and adapting material to the medium. The repertory of material which can be adapted to a Readers Theatre performance is limited by the director's personal literary


16Bacon, *Art of Interpretation*, p. 311.
knowledge and imagination. Plays, novels, stories, and poems that emphasize strong character and plot development have the greatest affinity to this medium. Authorities consistently outline the following basic guidelines. Plays which depend on stage business for effect are less suitable for Readers Theatre than plays in which the dialogue element has greater dominance. Novels, short stories, or other prose selections should contain a high dramatic objectivity. Poetry, when used, should contain strong narrative overtones.

From the standpoint of literary exposure, Readers Theatre offers interpreters an opportunity to present to an audience literature that could not ordinarily be performed in any other manner. Many short novels, experimental plays, and radio scripts could be easily adapted to this style of presentation. Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* and John Steinbeck's *The Pearl* are examples of short novels that would adapt well to Readers Theatre. Yevreinov's play, *The Theatre of the Soul*, has previously been cited as a play practically excluded from conventional theatre, but well within the realm of Readers Theatre. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's narrative poem, *Evangeline*, contains elements that would adapt well to this group performance style. As a final word regarding the selection of material for a Readers Theater production, a director should keep these essential criteria in mind.
The literature should above all provide provocative ideas and interesting characters in intriguing action; it should contain rich language with evocative overtones; and it should be capable of being cut to a reasonable time limit and still preserve its essential unity, a wholeness of expression. Ideally, literature chosen for this medium will promise the audience with an enduring experience.\(^\text{17}\)

There are two basic approaches for arranging material for a Readers Theatre performance. In the first approach a director will select a novel, play, or long poem, then cut it to the required performing time. To cut a longer work, key scenes should be retained with little editing. It should retain its unity, but scenes and events may be rearranged for coherence. Plot tension and relief should be carefully built into the reading performance. The second approach is to combine several individual pieces into a thematic arrangement to produce a collage or montage effect. Examples of this type of script would be *The Hollow Crown* and *The World of Carl Sandburg*. This approach is more difficult and requires greater skill at adaptation than cutting a longer selection because the longer work has unity and climax already developed into its text. However, when a director assumes the task of putting together a variety of material for a production, care must be used to develop unity and coherence into the script. Contrast and conflict must be woven into the fabric of the collage. At times the adapter is required to write transitions or bridges between scenes or episodes. The mere mechanical process of collecting and

\(^{17}\text{Coger and White, *Handbook*, p. 16.}\)
selecting material for a thematic approach probably accounts for the
dearth of manuscripts developing a theme. The difficulties involved
in this type of script should not deter a director from employing it,
because this approach has the possibility of being the most creative
and original of the two methods of script preparation.

Staging for Readers Theatre should be psychologically drawn
rather than literal. The imagination of the audience should be left
free to fill in costuming and set details. The emphasis is on suggested
staging elements. Under Milkwood is a standard example of a Readers
Theatre script that has been performed many times with hats to convey
different character costumes. In the most characteristic Readers
Theatre productions, five or six readers are seated on high stools
behind reading lecterns. Manuscripts are held by the interpreters or
are placed on the lectern. Keith Brooks makes a particularly important
observation about the seating arrangement for interpreters.

If the seating arrangement varies from the traditional
straight line or semi-circle, it does so to point psychological
distance between and among the characters or ideas being
suggested. In this case readers could be located on different
levels or at varying distances from each other. These
locations might suggest to the audience, degrees of conflict
or harmony between and among the characters or ideas.
Note that the function of such arrangement is to suggest
psychological distance rather than a literal association.18

Perhaps the most disturbing element for an audience in a Readers
Theatre experience results when the production moves too close to
conventional theatre. Often an audience is not prepared to accept a

combination of lecterns, stools, and manuscripts with costuming, lighting effects, or projections. Wallace Bacon's appraisal of staging techniques offers an adequate summary.

Readers Theatre may indeed use costumes. It may use makeup. It may employ entrances and exists. It may use lights. It may use scenery. It may use props. It ought, we think, to use books for locating the performance. It ought to limit costume, makeup, lights, scenery and props in the interests of keeping the scene essentially onstage, though it should not prohibit them (as a matter of definition) and hence run the risk of impoverishing the experience of the audience.¹⁹

There are three inherent difficulties in a Readers Theatre performance that must be recognized and met by a director. The first problem has to do with the shifting of locus on and offstage. The second problem facing a director is the manner which interpreters will move into and out of scenes. The third problem is one that requires an interpreter to read several parts.

Grimes and Mattingly identified the matter of locus in this manner. "One of the difficulties of the interpreter . . . is to keep a sense of characters talking to each other and yet not bring the scene onstage."²⁰ Keith Brooks sees this problem as one in which the interpreters psychologically project the scene, the situation, and the

¹⁹Bacon, Art of Interpretation, p. 314.
characters into the realm of the audience.

'Locus in Readers Theatre is generally located offstage, and readers will not interact between themselves onstage. Rather they will place the scene out into the audience, and their interactions will meet at a predetermined level or plane. This conception is perhaps the most difficult concept for a group of student-interpreters to grasp. It has been observed in some Reader Theatre productions that those interpreters who have had some experience with conventional theatre, either as a performer or as a spectator, will tend to permit their theatre orientation to interfere with their interpretative experience. When this occurs, the Readers Theatre production resolves into total emotional involvement and characterization. At other times it has been observed that young interpreters have a tendency to overplay locus, in that to locate a selection in the minds of the audience, they fix their eye contact on the back wall with no perceptual contact with the audience. This is the other extreme and is just as bothersome to the audience as too much onstage focus.

To generalize the principle, locus for Readers Theatre is identical to Choric Interpretation, however, there are many factors that will tend to pull the scene onstage. Some of these factors are the readers' emotional involvement, staging effects, the absence of scripts, and a high degree of literal presentation through bodily movement, costuming, and makeup. This is not to infer that an onstage

locus is never employed, for there are occasions when the material requires onstage focus. Bacon asserts that it is impossible to maintain offstage locus throughout an entire performance. Bacon makes this assertion for two reasons. First, he indicates that sometimes a group will select material that emphasizes something to be seen, and the interpreters are required to place it on stage lest its absence destroys the effect of the literary selection. Second, since most audiences are conditioned to the conventional theatrical onstage locus, the strain of trying to maintain the interpreters' concentration of offstage locus throughout a performance may be distracting to an audience.

In the final resolution, locus for a Readers Theatre performance must come from a director assisting the interpreters to become aware of the subtle nuances of the literature being interpreted and react accordingly. Proper locus comes as a result of the interpreters developing a feel for the literature.

Perhaps the most apparent factor in guiding the audience to visualize and experience the scene are the concentration with which the readers themselves visualize the scene and the way they listen to one another. If the interpreters are truly seeing the characters in an action in their minds, the audience is likely to do the same. It is the ability to be in the scene imaginatively that enables readers to project that scene to the audience.

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22Bacon, *Art of Interpretation*, p. 316.

23Ibid., pp. 312, 316.

A second situation that will confront a director is the problem of developing an effective means for getting interpreters into and out of scenes. The general practice for establishing entrances and exits in Readers Theatre performances is to have the readers turn their backs to the audience when they are not reading. When the cue for a reader to make an entrance approaches the interpreter merely turns to face the audience. To have interpreters actually enter and exit on cue is too distracting to be employed. Some directors prefer to have the interpreters raise and lower their heads to indicate entrances and exits. Other directors employ the "freeze" effect, while others use lights to illuminate interpreters indicating entrances. It has been found that readers can remain alive to the reading and not be in the scene. This sense of aliveness can be achieved by the readers "listening" to the other readers. This listening can be done by the readers as they maintain locus as an observer. Again, rehearsals will provide the time to work out these technical and psychological problems of Readers Theatre.

The third problem confronting a director is one that can cause considerable confusion unless handled tactfully. An audience may have difficulty identifying with one reader who interprets more than one part. "It is a mistake to assume too quickly that in a Readers Theatre performance one interpreter can easily handle many parts."  

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This change of character can possibly be accomplished with the same techniques used to indicate entrances and exits for Readers Theatre. In this way readers may turn their backs to the audience or drop their heads to indicate they are no longer in the scene. On cue they will turn back to the audience or lift their heads in the attitude of the next character. At times the readers may alter their posture to indicate a change of characters. Perhaps the best interpretative technique is for the readers to put themselves into the attitudes of the different characters, and develop a degree of emotional involvement. As they become involved in the reactions of the different characters, the interpreters will take on the attitude of the character which will result in facial expression, bodily poise, and vocal characterization.

To summarize Readers Theatre, these facts have been asserted. Readers Theatre represents the most popular style of group interpretation. The medium proposes to locate the emotional and intellectual content of an author's literary creation in the mind of the audience. This is done through the aural appeal. The style of Readers Theatre was set by the Laughton-Gregory productions and in most Readers Theatre productions manuscripts are present. Lecterns and stools are generally used. All types of material—novels, plays, short stories, diaries, journals, and letters—have been adapted to Readers Theatre. A long work is usually cut to fulfill a time element, or a group of selections are put together in a thematic program. Directors and interpretative
groups are permitted much flexibility of style and approach. Three
basic problems confront a director. Locus is usually directed off-
stage, but at times it may shift to an onstage focus. The audience
may have difficulty identifying with one reader who is required to
interpret several parts. Then the director must determine how the
exits and entrances of the characters will be achieved.

Chamber Theatre

Possibly Chamber Theatre poses the greatest difficulty for a
teacher-director who attempts to use this form of group interpretation
for the first time. The difficulty stems from the lack of published
material concerning Chamber Theatre. Those who have discussed the
style have singularly acknowledged Robert Breen as the creator of
Chamber Theatre. Charlotte Lee refers to an unpublished manuscript
by Breen, but as yet this manuscript has not been issued. Apparently
the only information Breen has published about Chamber Theatre is a
Course of Study prepared for the American Educational Theatrical
Association. (This discussion of Chamber Theatre relies extensively
on that Course of Study for its facts.) Also a person researching
material for Chamber Theatre finds that those who have written about
the subject have not made sufficient distinction between Readers
Theatre techniques and Chamber Theatre techniques. There has been
an obvious overlapping of techniques and program material. Coger and
White found this to be true as they collected information and scripts for Readers Theatre Handbook. This problem will very likely continue until some writers specifically delineate these two modes of group interpretation.

Observation and research have indicated six characteristic features which identify a Chamber Theatre performance.

1. Chamber Theatre moves closer to conventional theatre than Choric Interpretation or Readers Theatre.

2. The medium makes extensive use of staging devices and alienation effects.

3. Scenes are purposely located onstage.

4. Interpreters do not carry scripts, but rely on memorization.

5. An author's point of view is carefully retained through a narrator-reader.

6. The repertory for Chamber Theatre is narrative prose fiction.

Chamber Theatre has been described as "a group story telling technique-- an attempt to present narrative fiction as it is written rather than the traditional play form." Wallace Bacon describes

26Letter received from Leslie Irene Coger, January 15, 1968.

Chamber Theatre as "a method of staging prose fiction, retaining the text of the story or novel being performed by locating the scenes on stage."\(^{28}\) Citing from Breen's unpublished manuscript, Charlotte Lee states:

> In Dr. Breen's words, 'The techniques of the Chamber Theatre were devised to present the novel, or narrative fiction, on the stage so that the dramatic action would unfold with full and vivid immediacy as it does in a play, but at the same time allowing the sensibility of the narrator, or the central intelligence in the form of a character, so conditions our view of that action that we who listen and watch should receive a highly organized and unified impression of it.'\(^{29}\)

Generalizing from these authorities, then, it is possible to ascertain a reasonably acceptable definition of purpose for Chamber Theatre. It is a method of presenting narrative fiction prose to an audience in such a way that the narrative element, author's point of view, and dialogue are retained in the immediacy of the conventional play. The only changes in the literature are those required by a time limitation, the number of readers, and the stage facilities.

Breen identifies three advantages for Chamber Theatre.

1. Chamber Theatre may use... all the dramatic devices of a play... but a Chamber Theatre production has the advantage of dispensing with these devices for the reason that in a well written story the narrative description may surpass any scenery, properties, etc., that could be shown.

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\(^{28}\)Bacon, *Art of Interpretation*, p. 323.

2. Chamber Theatre ... has advantages over the presentation of a conventional play, for though one character may sometimes speak about himself in third person, reporting to the audience in presentational style what is in his own mind and heart, or he may speak to another character in indirect discourse, but with the emotional tone of direct discourse.

3. Though simultaneity of speech and action found in a play is also present in a Chamber Theatre production, the latter has the added advantage of telling the audience what the character is thinking or how he feels at the same time.30

The definition of Chamber Theatre reveals its restrictive nature. The novel or short story selected must meet the demands of any literature adapted for group presentation. The nature of the material itself should govern the presentational form. As in Choric Interpretation and Readers Theatre, material for Chamber Theatre should have evocative qualities and it should have interesting characters caught up in interesting and vital action. Stories with lengthy exposition and description must be excluded from a Chamber Theatre treatment or receive extensive cutting and rearrangement. Bacon offers a guideline for selecting a novel or short story for Chamber Theatre that ought not to be ignored.

On the whole Chamber Theatre works best with fiction in which the interaction between narrator and characters is strong, and in which the psychological interest is high.31


31 Bacon, Art of Interpretation, p. 320.
Chamber Theatre presents narrative fiction to an audience in its original form with only minor cuts and omissions to provide smoothness of thought or to fulfill a time limitation. It may be necessary to rearrange events, but the past tense narrative and the author's point of view, style, and form are rigidly retained.

Breen feels there are two ways of telling a story. One is through narrative fiction and the other is through the dramatic form of a play or poem. According to Breen, Chamber Theatre takes advantage of both. Dramatic literature, again referring to Breen's concepts, has the advantage of making an event or events as if they were occurring here-and-now, while narrative fiction has the advantage of explaining the thinking of the characters. When adapting material for a Chamber Theatre production these two ideas must be kept in mind. The central intelligence of an author's attitude will be retained, while the characters' action and dialogue are presented in the sense of immediacy recognized in conventional plays.

When adapting a short story or a novel for a Chamber Theatre production, narrative, expository, or descriptive passages are assigned to the narrator-reader or to one of the characters as indirect discourse. The narrator-reader is a service character of the author. This interpreter provides the means for retaining the author's point of view and perspective of the story. Breen identified four possible

32Class notes of Mrs. Doris Simpson.
points of view from which a story can be told. (1) A story can be
told in first person by a major character who narrates his own story.
(2) The action of the major character can be reported in the first
person by a minor character. (3) Action may be told in the third
person by an omniscient observer who reports what the characters
think and feel. (4) The objective observer relates the action of the
characters from a distance and can only speculate about character
motivation.

Adapting a selection to a Chamber Theatre performance
demands that the adapter use selective judgment.

The question of who is to say what in Chamber
Theatre is a question requiring a cautious, delicate
answer. It is no simple matter of parceling out lines
so that each character will get approximately an equal
number. (There is no question about direct discourse;
it is the passages in indirect discourse that require
considerations). 33

An adaption of "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson will illustrate
how one story was adapted to Chamber Theatre. The author's point
of view in this story is that of a disinterested observer reporting only
external events. The internal psychology of characters is not
developed. Internal reactions and feelings are revealed only through
externalized reaction among the characters. In this adaptation the
performance used two narrators. The first narrator commented and

33Breen, "Chamber Theatre," p. 52.
34Bacon, Art of Interpretation, p. 323.
presented exposition of past events. His interpretation was external, casual, and completely uninvolved with the plight of the characters. The second narrator was more involved in the story as he presented narration of present events. His reactions were akin to those of the characters in the story. The bodily attitude of the narrators attempted to present these viewpoints. The narrators were placed at opposite sides of the stage. Both narrators carried scripts. At times they held the scripts in their hands, other times they placed them on lecterns. The first narrator focused his eye contact out to the audience with only casual and disinterested glances at the characters and their situation. By leaning on his lectern, this narrator's posture was able to convey his complete detachment from the characters. The second narrator, however, focused his eye contact on the characters and their situation. He identified with their dilemma. When this narrator did read to the audience, it was in such a way to draw the audience into the scene and to create a sense of involvement and sympathy for and with the characters. Characters within the story spoke dialogue and at times vocalized their bodily actions and thought. At one place one of the characters broke scene and walked down stage to speak directly to the audience. On occasion, there were lines which were spoken in choric fashion.

Staging in Chamber Theatre develops a higher degree of literalness than Readers Theatre or Choric Interpretation. In doing
this it tends to make fuller use of the conventions of a theatrical performance. Costumes, set pieces, background, and makeup are used, but a director must "still try to keep these elements to a minimum." Because Chamber Theatre must not be regarded as a dramatization, the aesthetic sensitivity and imagination of the director will be called upon to determine the fine line of demarcation between a degree of literalness and dramatization.

In the adaption of "The Lottery," for example, the script called for an abstract background to represent the outlines of houses and buildings. A banner with the word "lottery" was placed in the up stage area. The characters' costumes were to represent a rural, unsophisticated people. Character makeup was not suitable in the performance because interpreters were required to read more than one part. Two set pieces, a small black box and a stool, were used. These pieces were decided upon because the black box is an important motif within the story. The stool was a utility piece to set the box on. Although there were other essential motifs, as the slips of paper drawn from the box or the stones used for the killing, it was decided to omit them because they were too literal.

In Chamber Theatre . . . characters move freely about the acting area. Their circle of concentration shifts from the scene created around them in direct discourse, during which they speak directly to each other and 'play' together, to the audience area for much of the indirect discourse. Thus the dramatic devices of plot, character

\[35\textit{Ibid.}, p. 319.\]
action, dialogue, and climax unfold with full and vivid immediacy.36

In the adaptation of "The Lottery" referred to previously, these principles were observed, but the stage movement and gestures were restricted by a stylized presentation. This sense of stylization was decided upon because there is within this story a feeling of communal action. The stylized movement offered a means for building to a climax that might not have been obtained in any other manner. At the beginning of the production characters are permitted a degree of individual movement, but as the scene shifted away from the many characters and began to focus on one individual, the element of unified action among the townspeople became more prominent. The communal reaction builds to the climax with the line, "... then they were upon her." At this point the entire group surrounded the central figure, and the interpreters' synchronized movement pantomimed the throwing of stones.

Bacon alerts the director of a Chamber Theatre production to one of two problems that exists in this mode of group interpretation. He states that staging aspects used in a Chamber Theatre presentation must be carefully handled or the production "tends to violate the temporal mode of fiction by making the scenes two vividly presented."37

36Lee, Oral Interpretation, p. 219.

37Bacon, Art of Interpretation, p. 320.
The delicate balance between interpretation and dramatization must be maintained. To compensate this "too vivid" presentation a teacher-director must use selectivity in deciding on the appropriate interpretative devices. Also the teacher-director must seek to develop a thorough understanding of the narrator's role in Chamber Theatre. The "heart of Chamber Theatre ... is the careful, intelligent use of the narrator through whom the author controls point of view." 38

A second problem that must be recognized in a Chamber Theatre production is related to the first one. The interpreters must retain the author's point of view in the immediacy context of the performance. This can be accomplished by a technique Breen labels as "strain" in Chamber Theatre. To create this strain, characters may speak aloud thoughts addressed to and about themselves. At times the interpreters may speak directly to the audience. Other times they speak to the narrator. As the interpreters comment, move, and react among themselves, they are controlled and guided by the author's point of view and perspective which is maintained by the narrator-reader. The narrator also serves as a fulcrum between direct and indirect discourse and for shifting locus on and offstage.

To summarize Chamber Theatre, it is a mode of group interpretation that seeks to present non-dramatic prose fiction to an

38Lee, Oral Interpretation, p. 219.
audience with the immediate here-and-now of conventional theatre. Material selected for Chamber Theatre is adapted with minimum cuts, and the author's point of view is rigidly observed. In this form of group interpretation, there is a high degree of literal staging and bodily action among the characters. The key figure in a Chamber Theatre production is the narrator who maintains the sense of interpretation and who controls and presents the author's point of view. Directors of Chamber Theatre will need to maintain proper balance between the sense of interpretation and dramatization. Also they will need to retain the author's viewpoint in the element of immediacy that pervades a Chamber Theatre production.
CHAPTER V

EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGES AND PROCEDURES

Educational Advantages

As Wallace Bacon suggests, "the single reader is, and doubtless will remain the center of training in courses of Interpretation."¹ Some educators might question the educational validity of an activity that apparently duplicates other course work. Contrary to the proponents of verse-speaking and many of the early exponents of Readers Theatre, a group interpretation production is time consuming, and a well-rehearsed program will consume as much time as a full-length dramatic production. In addition, it may appear inconsistent in an academic field which proposes to develop individuality to require individuals to surrender their individuality for the benefit of a group. Therefore, it is necessary in this chapter to discuss some of the educational aims, values, and procedures for a group interpretation production which will justify its inclusion in the speech arts curriculum.

A teacher who attempts to employ a group performance, either as a part of the regular classroom activity or as a co-curricular activity must

avoid the pitfalls that engulfed the elocutionists and the verse-speaking choirs. Giles Gray asserts that the demise of elocution was not the result of its theory being inherently wrong, nor was it the teachers and speakers who based their principles on those theories. The demise came because elocutionists divorced it from "content and lost all contact with the other canons or rhetoric." Proponents of verse-speaking followed the same course. While deploring the mechanical and exhibitionistic techniques of elocution, choric reading remained ineffectual because it resolved into artificial and mechanical displays of synchronized voices, rhythmically inflected on monotonously overused exercises. While some proponents of verse-speaking extolled its virtues as a quick programming device, others viewed it as a panacea for teaching literary appreciation and vocal skills. Even some of the early journal articles dealing with Readers Theatre express its value as a substitute for conventional theatrical performances.

As conceived in this thesis, group interpretation performances will not supplant solo performances; nor are they a panacea for teaching speech skills; nor are they a substitute for conventional theatrical productions. A group performance is only one means for presenting a

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literary selection to an audience in an interesting and entertaining manner. Any decision to employ a group performance in a speech arts curriculum must be determined by three educational criteria. First, there must be time available in the established speech activity program. Second, a production must meet a teacher's own educational objectives. Third, the group activity must fulfill the life needs of the students. It is, therefore, necessary to discuss in this chapter the manner in which a group interpretation performance will fulfill these three stated requirements.

**Available Time**

Most speech teachers at the secondary level do not have the time adequately to undertake any additional activities. The crowded speech arts program in most high schools with its diverse and complex structure including speech sciences, public speaking, oral interpretation, and dramatics, and the related forensic and dramatic co-curricular activities, makes this first requirement singularly important. If group interpretation is to be educationally sound, it must fit into the framework of the existing courses of study. Not only must the teacher be considered, but the students' time must be considered also. The interpreters must have time to fulfill the requirements of a rehearsal schedule.
According to Zelda Horner Kosh, any speech training serves three general purposes. (1) It provides opportunities for students to improve their speech skills. (2) It provides specialized speech training and enrichment for the talented students. (3) It provides remedial speech work for all students. There are several possibilities for satisfying these three purposes in a group interpretation performance. One possibility is to use a group production as a co-curricular interpretation workshop. Such a workshop, if held early in the school year, or as a summer workshop, would provide early preparation and involvement for the speech-dramatic talented students or the forensic squad. Conceived within the framework of an organized interpretation class or a speech fundamentals class, group interpretation can serve as an indirect remedial speech training and re-enforcement activity. Obviously there are times when a teacher would desire to include a group activity as a group session in literary analysis and interpretative instruction.

Margaret Neilson suggests another possibility. "Although Readers Theatre is in the area of interpretation, it will be obvious that it affords a valuable teaching tool for the theatre classroom." From these


suggestions, it is evident that a group interpretation performance has educational value because it can be included into an existing curriculum as an activity approach for studying interpretative skills or as a unit in applied speech principles. As a supplementary activity within the speech curriculum, a group production fulfills the time requirements.

**Teacher Objectives**

The second criteria stated concerning a teacher's decision to employ a group production in the speech curriculum was the teacher's own educational goals. From observation, it has been ascertained that most interpretation teachers have the following general goals. (1) Oral interpretation teachers seek to teach students skills that will enable them to present an author's experience to an audience. (2) Oral interpretation teachers will seek to develop acceptable speaking skills within the students. (3) They seek to involve the non-talented speech students in an artistic performance. (4) They seek to expose many people to the best in world literature. (5) They seek to assist the students to develop into mature and stable individuals.

Many students enter an interpretation class without having had an opportunity to develop an appreciation of literature, and consequently they lack the ability to communicate that literature to others. For these students, literary appreciation is associated with the prosaic "dissect-a-poem" method of literary examination prevalent in many high school
literature and speech classes. Literary analysis becomes merely an assignment to define words and locate the author's symbolism. Literary criticism becomes an end to itself, and students are left wondering what value there is in having found an author's meaning and metrical structure. Furthermore these novices often associate interpretation with the dull, artless classroom recitations of a poem or short story. At the other extreme many non-speech oriented students associate reading and interpretation with the "notorious" contest "dramatic interpretation" performances so aptly described by Gertrude Johnson. "It is neither good reading nor vertible acting, but which sets agape the half-educated with wonders of its aims and attitudenizing; its pseudo-heroics and pseudo-pathos." Also, for many students vocal drills and exercises have no importance except that they are directed by a teacher. They become monotonous drills of little value. The interpretation teacher must overcome these adverse concepts and motivate students to see the importance of literary analysis and technical drills. A group production can be an important instrument for the teacher of interpretation in accomplishing this need.

Although very little pedagogical testing or writing have been done

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in this area, close observation reveals that the "crude but effective pressure of having an audience" has tremendous potential for encouraging students to learn speaking skills while learning the principles of literary criticism. Don Geiger further supports this viewpoint.

... preparation for performance requires the closest possible study of the piece itself; because the student's oral reading show him the value of making such analysis; because a public performance encourages responsible and pleasurable study; and because his readings carry the student 'beyond' analysis. 8

Before a group can present a literary selection to an audience, both the performers and the director must have a thorough understanding of the literature to be presented. When students know they are responsible for presenting an author's literary experience to a critical audience, they are motivated to delve into the piece of literature more than if it were a classroom assignment. In a group performance most of the literary analysis is accomplished through an indirect approach so that often students are not obviously aware they are involved in a literary criticism activity. The approach made in a group interpretation production is similar to that made in rhetorical criticism and play analyses. Agnes Knox Black affirms the principle that "technical training must go hand in hand with close, persistent

8 Ibid., p. 15.
and liberal study of noble literature." A group performance is a means for implementing this principle, for while the students are gaining impressions of an author's work, they are provided a means for giving expression to that literature. Since group interpretation emphasizes the aural aspects of the literature, a group production requires careful attention to vocal responses. The interpreters are motivated to develop precise and intelligible vocal presentations. In this atmosphere, vocal drills, and exercises become important to the interpreter because they see an end purpose. In summary, it can be said that a specific performance date and the idea of performing before an audience provides a motivational stimulus which gives meaning to literary criticism and for studying inflection, articulation, vocal tempo, and phrasing.

If the student is to be taught to extract meaning and to assist in its communication, he will be most effectively motivated if he can be convinced that something of educational value is thereby accomplished.  

Another aim for a teacher of oral interpretation is to involve a great many people in a pleasurable experience with great literature. Perhaps these people will not be as totally involved in a literary selection presented by a reading group as were the audiences of

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Vachel Lindsay who chanted and recited the refrains of the poet's work as he read his poetry. However, in a group interpretation performance there is, ideally, a sharing of literature. Angelo Pelegrini asserts that "when something is read aloud--and read effectively--what is really happening is that many are reading as one." Applying this principle to a group activity, Leslie Irene Coger describes Readers Theatre as "a medium in which two or more interpreters orally reading from prepared scripts cause an audience to experience literature." Not only does a group interpretation performance permit the audience and readers to share a literary experience, but there is evidence that an audience responds more favorably to a literary selection presented in a group interpretation than in a solo reading. One of the few controlled experiments in this area was made by Daniel Witt. From his investigation Witt drew this conclusion. "Readers Theatre as a form of presentation of dramatic material brought not significantly less intense response, than did acting in terms of seriousness, ethical values and aesthetic values."

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Although no controlled experiments have been done in the area of retention and literary experience, subjective observation seems to indicate that when students have performed in a group interpretation performance they have a more decisive grasp of the literature used, and they retain that understanding to a greater degree.

This principle has been demonstrated by a group of interpreters at Sherman High School (1966) which presented a Choric Interpretation of James Weldon Johnson's poetic sermons *God's Trombones*. Many of these interpreters involved in this production were able to recite lines and passages from this script two years later. Some readers were even capable of reciting entire selections from the adaptation. It was also observed that many of the students were able to call upon their experiences in this production for research papers and study helps in American Literature courses as they studied poetry. A similar observation was made as two advanced speech classes studied "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson. These students were able freely to use and discuss such technical terms as story motifs, author attitude, and point of view.

It should be evident at this point that a group interpretation performance has value because it meets the second educational criteria stated. A Choric Interpretation, Readers Theatre, or Chamber Theatre production can assist a teacher of interpretation to meet specific
instructional goals. These performances are valuable because they motivate students to analyze the literature in order to derive the meaning of the selection and then develop interpretative skills that the readers can express the meaning to an audience. Furthermore, not only do audiences favorably respond to the shared literature, but interpreters more fully retain the literature presented. The objectives relating to the shy, reticent student and the life needs of the students are not discussed at this point because they are more directly related to the third criteria to be discussed.

**Student Needs**

The third educational aim stated focuses on the needs of the student. An oral interpretation teacher must never forget that as he teaches subject matter, he is also helping to mold and shape a personality. The objectives set up for a course of study center on life needs of the student. Various authorities have identified these student needs in a variety of ways. Cecile DeBanks indicates that a group interpretation performance has value because it meets certain social, psychological, educational, and vocational needs of the interpreters. Leslie Irene Coger identified basically the same needs. She stated that a group reading "develops the performers psychologically,

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emotionally, mentally, and socially." A thesis of this sort cannot fully discuss all of the ways a group production fulfills the students' basic life needs. Certainly there has been very little investigation into this area beyond superficial observations.

As a gregarious personality, the adolescent needs to have a specific social identity. The high school student needs to be identified with a special group of peers. A group interpretation performance can fulfill this need as the individual interpreter works toward a communal goal. Through this common effort a student finds that his personal opinions and ideals are challenged and evaluated by others. In turn the students learn to analyze and evaluate the reactions and opinions of other students. Furthermore, a student develops a sense of social loyalty and responsibility that is not available in solo performances. Through a group interpretation performance the esprit de corps becomes particularly strong, and students learn to share success or failure.

Next, a group performance can meet certain psychological needs. There is a sense of achieving in a well planned and produced group interpretation experience. This sense of achievement is particularly important to the adolescent as he searches for self identity. This has been dramatically illustrated among the shy and reticent students, who have not performed well in solo performances. The case of Bobby H.

in Sherman High School's production of *God's Trombones* is an example. Bobby was extremely shy and often avoided his classroom solo performances. At his own volition, he tried out for the Choric Interpretation performance. Bobby did not have an exceptional voice, nor was it a forceful voice. However, his voice contained a very soft, resonant quality which was very good for the solo part of Christ in "The Crucifixion." Bobby was assigned the part with some reservations, but he became so involved with the part, that perhaps his performance developed into the most emotionally moving experience of the entire program. His first public performance was before an audience of about four hundred people, and this experience proved the key which began to break down Bobby's natural reticence and shyness. After this group experience, his solo performances were always completed on time.

Another area is the educational need of the students. Students can adjust their own philosophy and attitudes after those philosophies and attitudes have come in contact with the ideas of many other individuals. Through a group interpretation performance, a student comes in contact with the ideas of various authors and with the ideas and philosophies of the other performers. In the area of communicative skills a student's vocabulary is enriched, and he is required to learn correct pronunciation and articulation. It is imperative for a group of readers to develop precise and intelligible voice techniques. The need
for precision increases proportionally to the number of voices combined in an ensemble. Other education factors could be related but these will suffice for illustration.

The students' emotional needs represent a fourth area that can be met by a group interpretation performance. Although a speech student is able to identify the emotional attitudes within a literary selection, these students often are embarrassed to express those emotional attitudes in a solo performance. When their individuality is glossed within the group, students are more prone to give a selection its full emotional meaning. In this way a student is able to give expression to his feelings without fear of ridicule or embarrassment. It should be evident from the above discussion that a group interpretation performance does have certain values for meeting the individual needs of the student.

In conclusion then, a group interpretation performance fulfills the three educational criteria stated at the opening segment of this chapter. (1) A group interpretation performance will fit into the established speech program. (2) A group interpretation activity will fulfill the instructional goals of a teacher of interpretation. (3) A group interpretation performance will meet the life needs of the students.

Selecting Literature for Group Interpretation

Having established the value and desirability of a group
interpretation performance, it is necessary to discuss the means for implementing the various aspects of a group performance into the speech arts curriculum. In producing a group production, a director will observe two procedures. The preliminary procedure involves selecting the material that will be interpreted. The second procedure considers the actual preparation and rehearsal necessary for presenting the literature to an audience.

The current philosophy that regards all literature as having dramatic, or imitative, consistency might signify that all literature can be used for a group interpretation vehicle. Although it has been demonstrated that most any literary form can, and has, been used in a group production, it must not be assumed that every piece of literature will satisfactorily adapt to a group presentation. It has been asserted throughout this thesis that the first criterion for selecting any material for a group production is the material itself. The author's work of art must benefit from the group treatment if it is to be acceptable. The production should offer the literature something that it could not otherwise obtain in a silent reading or a solo performance. From various writers and through experimentation it has been realized that for group interpretation, poetry with universal appeal and narrative implications adapts more successfully than poetry with strong personalized implications. Plays which rely on stage action and business for their impact will adapt less readily than plays which depend primarily upon dialogue
for their impact. Narrative conversational prose adapts better to a group performance than didactic expository or descriptive prose.

A second criterion that should be examined before a particular piece of literature is used is the interpreters' maturity and interpretative skills. Grimes and Mattingly recognize the interpreters own temperament and ability as one of two limitations on a performance.16 W. M. Parrish makes a similar observation and recommends that in any interpretation class the students should be started "with the simple then go on to the more complex and difficult."17 The implication here is that the inexperienced group of interpreters should not attempt complex or involved literature. This literature must stir the imagination of the readers, and it must be within their interpretative capacity.

A third criterion essential to the selection of appropriate material is the audience. It has been stated that a production must be accepted by the audience if it is effective. This implies that a literary selection chosen for a group presentation will be influenced by the audience's maturity and aesthetic tastes. Often a teacher states that a selection must be in taste. This taste is determined by the audience, not the director or readers, so it is necessary for the director and performers to carefully evaluate their community and


potential audiences. In a very thorough discussion of audience responses, Jéré Vielleux offers the following insight.

A group of very inverse individuals who have strong personal feelings, prejudices, and opinions, who should disagree about almost everything, often will find themselves, upon hearing a poem, play or story well interpreted, in unanimous agreement not just about the quality of the interpretation but also about the value projected by the literature. In effect their responses as an audience were primarily to their own feelings rather than to the interpreter or to the literature. They responded individually and subjectively to the universal and affirmative feeling which the skill of the author and interpreter had aroused in their own hearts.  

A fourth criterion to be observed by anyone selecting material for a group production is the occasion. Gertrude Johnson states that questions of time of day, place of program and type of audience must be considered in the programming (adapting) of literature for group interpretation. In a scholastic atmosphere, most any of the standard authors or pieces of literature will be acceptable. New works can be tried out. However, outside this atmosphere the more artful and dramatic programs would be out of place. At a men's civic club luncheon, for example, a more entertaining or thematic approach would seem more appropriate.

In order to determine more specific directions for selecting literature to be used in a group production, two principles are


suggested. It must be understood that this phase of a group production will be teacher-director oriented. This position seems feasible because the teacher is best qualified for the responsibility since he has a wider association with literature and has had greater experience and knowledge of the techniques involved. First, consideration should be given to all types of literature from all literary history, not just a teacher's personal preferences. For example a director who continually selects only contemporary literature for group interpretation and ignores the literature of the romantic era fails in his purpose as a teacher of interpretation. Also, too often, solo interpretation performances subsist on the literary selections found in a speech textbook or what is popular on the forensic circuit. A group production offers an opportunity to break this mold as the teacher-director attempts to bring the best of world literature in contact with the greatest number of people. A wide and varied selection of material will potentially expand the literary horizons and knowledge of the students participating.

There is a second specific principle that should be observed by the director as he selects material for a group production. The director should consider material that would not ordinarily be presented,

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or that might not be feasible to present in any other manner. There is a vast repertory of great drama that comes within this category. Through a group interpretation performance, programs adapted from old radio scripts are possible. Also there are many selections studied as a phase of literature courses which could be presented and used in a team teaching situation between speech and English departments. Children's stories, fairy tales, folk tales, myths, and legends could be presented for elementary groups through Readers Theatre or Chamber Theatre. Many of the avant garde authors and the many new poets could be considered as sources for group interpretation. This discussion can only suggest sources for literature that might ordinarily be overlooked in the experiences of many high school students. After the material has been selected, then the teacher-director would decide on which mode of presentation would best suit the literature.

To summarize this segment, four criteria have been presented. First, the literature must be enhanced by any group treatment. Second, the literature must be suitable to the maturity and interpretative skills of the interpreters. Third, the literature must be suitable to the maturity and aesthetic tastes of the audience. Fourth, the literature must be appropriate to the specific occasion that it will be presented. Next, two guiding principles have been suggested. First, a teacher-director should consider material from all literary
periods so that the interpreters and audiences' literary experiences will be heightened. Then a teacher-director should consider material that might not or would not be feasible to present in any other medium. In the light of this discussion, it can be concluded that any decision to present a particular piece of literature in a group interpretation production rests ultimately, not in the technique or mode of presentation, but in the piece of literature. "Technique must serve the material, not vice versa." 22

Rehearsal Procedures for Group Interpretation

Most oral interpretation textbooks include two major divisions, techniques of literary analysis and techniques of expression. Following this twofold division most interpretation courses of study segment the art of oral interpretation into "Getting the meaning from the printed page," and "Interpreting meaning from the printed page." Activities in the first segment include study of literary forms and composition, determining authors meaning, imagery, values and style of writing. In the second unit, techniques of expression are studied in detail, pitch, force, quality, etc. Too often, perhaps, students do not connect the activities as segments of a total process.

Interpretation is a fusion of impression and expression of literature. It is illogical to separate the two processes. An author's

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work is concerned with life experiences, and a literary work represents the author's responses and interpretation of those experiences. Assuredly the author responded to these experiences as a whole person, physically, psychologically, and emotionally. As interpreters, student readers react or respond to these experiences. Communication of literature can only be accomplished when the students have responded as a whole person, mentally, physically, and emotionally. Two authorities bear out this conclusion. Geiger states, "... the formed attitude of the poem becomes the oral interpreter's own, only when he has had a total organic, emphatic response to the poem." Grimes and Mattingly assert that "from both philosophical and psychological points of view the body mirrors the lip of the mind ... the two cannot be separated." A student's oral performance is a culminating response to the author's literary experience. Furthermore, an author reveals nuances of meanings and attitudes that cannot be expressed by words alone. These nuances and attitudes can only be expressed by the inflected sound and tone, or muscle tone and facial expressions.

A group interpretative performance provides a means for retaining the two interpretative processes in a total learning experience.


During the rehearsal process, students express literature to gain an impression. For instance, one day of rehearsal might emphasize word study. As the interpreters are reading, a director can stop the reading at the word or words he wishes the interpreters to understand. Then he asks, "What does (X word) mean?" In this manner students learn a word in the author's context. At another time rhyme scheme or rhythm as it relates to tempo and phrasing might be studied. There are times when kinesthetic studies will assist the students to grasp the attitude or imagery of a selection. They pantomime the sound of a word thus permitting a teacher to teach gesture and bodily reaction while the interpreters "get the feel or attitude" of sounds. The logic of this approach is supported by Don Geiger. He states, "ordinarily the students improve most in both textual understanding and expressive action when he works on text and oral interpretation simultaneously."25

No single approach will fit every form of literature. The different styles, Choric Interpretation, Readers Theatre, and Chamber Theatre, will alter the approach to be made in rehearsal. The students' abilities and experiences will cause the procedure to vary. Student-interpreters analyze and adapt a piece of literature for a performance by discovery through rehearsal, as the teacher-director indirectly guides that discovery process. Perhaps the most comprehensive

approach to the analysis, adaptation, and rehearsal of a group production is suggested by C. C. Cunningham.

In the process of instruction of oral interpretation, the psychological procedure to be followed is this; first, attention will be given to certain aspects of the "total effect" achieved by the writer. Second, parts of the whole will be examined and recognized as guides to detailed techniques of interpretation. Third, the whole will then be reconstructed in terms of the techniques of the oral interpreter as they are guided and controlled by his now alert awareness to all that the writer has done with the parts as he has put together to make up the whole.

Before discussing this psychological approach, it is necessary to digress and suggest some controlling factors concerning the rehearsal procedures for a group interpretation production. First it has been observed that a group interpretation performance must have one person who is responsible for the total effect. This is usually the teacher although an advanced student could act as a director. Whoever it is, the director must make final production decisions. The success of any group activity depends on the judicial guidance of a director. While acting as a controlling force within a production, a director must allow for the interpreters' initiative. The rehearsal period is a time for the group to try out various presentation techniques, so no technique or script adaptation should become so rigid that the group could not develop an interpretation. To accomplish this goal, a teacher-director will use an indirect approach to the performance. The author's meaning and methods for expressing those

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meanings should be "discovered" by the students. The teacher-director guides the interpretation with suggestions and leading questions. Since a director is responsible for the total interpretation effect, the teacher-director must know when to permit free expression and experimentation, and when to make the final production decisions. From observation it can be asserted that there is a possibility for a director to over-direct a group interpretation production. Through practice a teacher-director can learn the correct process of stimulation without dictating.

A second factor governing the preparation period is the matter of a rehearsal schedule. A rehearsal schedule should be set up and followed. This schedule should set up deadlines for obtaining specific objectives at each rehearsal period. It should be geared to lead progressively to the final performance date. A teacher-director may not desire to give a rehearsal schedule to the student-interpreters, but the schedule should certainly be a reality for the director.

A third factor to be considered about the rehearsal period concerns the orientation process. Observation has revealed that students who are participating in a group interpretation for the first time must undergo a period of theoretical orientation. Simple exercises and selections should be employed to acquaint the uninitiated students with the vocabulary, style, and techniques involved in a Choric Interpretation, Readers Theatre, or Chamber Theatre production. This
orientation period permits the students to develop an understanding of the objectives and techniques of a particular interpretation medium. This orientation period falls within Cunningham's first phase of the psychology process.

To return to this psychology approach as it applies to a group interpretation performance, the rehearsal period is divided into three phases. Each one overlaps the other two. In the first phase student-interpreters are exposed to the literature selected for the performance. In the second phase, the actual preparation is accomplished. The literature is examined and the interpretative techniques are tried out. In the third phase the group of interpreters concentrate on the proper total effect. The succeeding discussion offers some suggested general procedures that may be observed in the rehearsal period.

During the first phase of the rehearsal period, the interpreters receive their initial exposure to the literature to be presented. At the first reading, the material should be read for the interpreters own enjoyment and appreciation and to gain their initial reaction to an author's ideas. This reading should be presented with little comment. The teacher-director will need to decide what means will best bring about this appreciation and enjoyment. The teacher might read the material, or several experienced student readers might be employed. Possibly a recording of the literature might be best. At times a teacher may
desire to combine this first reading with a tryout session. During this first phase the individual parts are assigned and the general outline of the program is decided upon.

In the second phase of the rehearsal period, attention is given to developing an understanding of the literature and deciding on the specific interpretation technique to be employed. It is during this phase of rehearsal that the group will make a thorough investigation of the material. The literary analysis should be motivated by the interpretation techniques, and a director will need to include time for this analysis within the rehearsal schedule. This second phase is also the time to experiment with various interpretative methods. Appropriate locus must be established. Staging devices and physical arrangements must be decided upon. Bodily movement, if used, must be blocked and rehearsed. Careful attention must be given to vocalization, precision, and intonation in order to achieve the proper effect. The director and interpreters must work together to develop an artistic balance between the aural and visual aspects of the interpretation. The subtle qualities of the material must receive careful attention through a sense of natural and spontaneous communication.

In most cases an author took painstaking care over several weeks or months to create a short story, novel, or poem, and it is irrational for a director to assume that a group of interpreters can recreate that literature in one or two practice sessions. Where the first phase
of rehearsals might be accomplished in one or two sessions, the second phase will require as much time as ten to fifteen rehearsal hours for a thirty minute interpretation program.

The third phase of rehearsal seeks to create the total effect. During this phase the parts are put together and polished for the performance date. Set pieces are constructed and arranged for. Final decisions on dress are made. Lighting effects and sound effects are completed and rehearsed. This is not to infer that a group waits until the last week of rehearsals to begin working on these staging aspects. The general outlines and suggestions have probably been written into the script, and committees have been working on them as the group has been rehearsing. It does mean that during the third phase, staging procedures and oral presentation are finalized and rehearsed to the fine peak of perfection for the performance. This last phase will vary, but usually it covers the last five or six rehearsal sessions.

Summary

In this chapter there has been an attempt to consider some of the production procedures for a group interpretation performance. Group interpretation, while making definite contributions to the students' total development and while supplementing the other speech arts, is a time consuming activity that seemingly duplicates other speech activities. Any teacher of interpretation must decide if there is time
within the existing course of studies to justify the complexities of a group interpretation program. Also, the teacher must examine his own educational aims to determine if a group performance will accomplish those objectives. Examined carefully, a group interpretation program provides an enrichment activity for the talented speech students, while engaging other students in an enjoyable literary and interpretative experience. It becomes a motivational instrument for teaching technical literary criticism and speech skills.

This educational process takes place within a specific developmental arrangement. First the material is selected on the basis of the interpreters' maturity and skill, and the audiences' aesthetic taste and maturity. Also the specific occasion must be considered, but, foremost, the decision to use a particular piece of literature in a group performance rests within the literature itself. The author's experience must be enhanced by the treatment. All types and forms of literature should be considered for selection, and only after the material has been selected will a director decide upon the method of interpretation.

Once the literature has been selected, it must be carefully rehearsed for presentation. The director acts as a controlling force who guides the interpretative process. Definite rehearsal goals and deadlines give the production progressive direction. Finally the rehearsal period is arranged into three phases. The first phase
introduces the novice interpreters to the theory and techniques of group interpretation, and the interpreters gain their initial reaction to the literature to be presented. The second phase breaks the production into particular interpretative techniques. The interpreters analyze the literature while they work on presentational techniques as locus, staging, dress, vocalization, or artistic communication. The last phase of rehearsals considers the entire interpretative approach in order to polish the performance for presentation to a live audience.
CHAPTER VI

EVALUATING THE GROUP INTERPRETATION PERFORMANCE

Perhaps the most exciting phase of group interpretation is the many possible performance techniques permitted by the three modes of group readings. The interpreter "is largely free to adapt such methods as will carry his meaning most effectively." This freedom, of course, must be done purposely and tastefully. A comparison of three Readers Theatre productions of John Brown's Body will serve to illustrate the varied possibilities for a group production. Performance A is a description of the Charles Laughton production. Performance B was presented at Southeastern State College, Durant, Oklahoma, during the Summer Semester of 1966. Performance C was presented at Grayson County Junior College, Denison, Texas, during the Spring Semester of 1967.

Performance A used three professional actors, two men and one woman, a choral group, and two dancers. Stage pieces included two chairs, a bench, a "red-topped balustrade," and chairs for the choral group. The cast was dressed in formal evening wear. The three readers moved freely about the stage, unrestrained by manuscripts. They kneeled, sat, or stood as the script required. Lights faded in

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and out to localize scenes. The actors were "vitally in a scene" during the performance.  

Performance B was presented on an open stage with four student performers, two men and two women. The interpreters sat on stools and "read" from manuscripts placed on lecterns. A choral group sat on a two-level riser positioned at upstage left. The dancers were omitted. General lighting was used throughout the performance, and no attempt was made to shift scenes. The readers and choir wore formal evening dress. Focus was offstage, and the four interpreters' movements were restricted to the immediate area about the stools. They either sat or stood. However, during the Robert E. Lee episode, one male reader moved away from his stool and crossed to the right downstage area to create psychological distance.

Performance C was presented on a large proscenium stage. Stage pieces consisted of a raised platform enclosed by a railing at stage right. Two sets of risers gave access to the platform area. Across the upstage area, white flats of contrasting widths were placed judiciously to provide exits on and off stage. At times two stools were brought on stage and placed in front of the platform. Four interpreters, two men and two women, were used in this production. A choral group was seated at stage left, enclosed by a low railing.

The four readers were dressed in formal evening dress. The women wore dresses of matching design, one white and one black. The men in the choral group wore black trousers, white shirts, and black ties. The women in the chorus wore similar costumes, black skirts, white blouses, and black ribbons about their necks. The interpreters read without manuscripts and made offstage entrances and exits on cue. Focus was to the audience. At times the readers spoke from the platform; at other times they stood downstage; and at other times they sat on stools placed immediately downstage of the platform. Extensive lighting effects were used to localize scenes and for atmospheric effects. The chorus remained in semi-shadow throughout the performance.

It would be difficult to determine which performance, A, B, or C, was the most effective. There are too many variables in an artistic performance for a critic to determine absolute measurements. Each interpretive performance is characterized by its own literary idiom. Each interpretative approach has its own purpose. Any artistic performance is transitory, and therefore, effectiveness is difficult to determine since there is nothing with which to make comparison. One can generalize by saying that effective interpretation is sharing a literary experience with an audience, and that the group has not shared that experience unless the audience has accepted it. Stating the same principle another way, "when a listener becomes involved in a literary
experience as the reader intended him to become involved, the communicative act has been effective." The very nature and presence of an audience excludes a group interpretation performance from any comparative judgment. An audience being composed of individuals with many different levels of maturity, psychology, and aesthetic tastes cannot be controlled, yet an audience ultimately determines the effectiveness of any interpretation production.

In an educational atmosphere, however, there must be some attempt to measure the effectiveness of an interpretation performance. W. B. Chamberlain and S. H. Clark assert that criticism of any production is the final test of an artistic performance. The eclectic nature of Choric Interpretation, Readers Theatre, and Chamber Theatre makes this doubly important. It is not enough to merely say that a group interpretation production will meet certain needs or obtain certain educational objectives. A teacher needs some measuring device for meeting those needs and obtaining those objectives. Specifically in an educational activity, a teacher-director must have some way for gauging student progress. Since there are none available, it is the purpose of this chapter to attempt to foster specific

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evaluation procedures and critique sheets for a group interpretation performance.

If a critic is to arrive at a fair and objective judgment concerning a group interpretation performance, he must have an understanding of the performance objectives and a knowledge of the elements which make these objectives possible. In either a Choric Interpretation, Readers Theatre, or Chamber Theatre production, an evaluation must be made concerning the production in terms of the literature's purpose and style. To accomplish this a critic will need to know much about all literature and to know something specifically about the literature being performed. Since, in most cases, the introduction element, which is expected with a solo interpretation, is omitted from the group performance, critics will need to listen more effectively to grasp the purpose and intent of the author, while the interpreters will need to be certain that they make this purpose and intent evident in the production. Perhaps a critic will be required to gain access to the script or literary work in order to fully understand the production techniques used. Choric Interpretation techniques cannot be evaluated with the same attitude as a Readers Theatre performance. In like manner, Readers Theatre and Chamber Theatre performances vary greatly in presentation styles. Evaluation, then, requires that critics have an understanding of the media, performance style, and the purpose of

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the literature being interpreted.

A second requirement for a fair and objective evaluation requires that the judge develop good aesthetic tastes. W. M. Parrish states that there are "greater temptations to excesses, vagaries, and vulgarities" in the field of public speech than in other fields of endeavor. Unfortunately there are no ready answers for determining aesthetic taste. Gail Boardman makes this comment:

Taste is the keystone of art. It embraces good judgment, naturalness, and simplicity. It prohibits exaggeration of any kind—in voice, manner, movement, and so forth. The interpreter must be sincere in order to gain sincere and genuine response. Repression is better than over doing.

This ideal may serve to guide a critic in judging a group performance. The artful and "gimmicked" production for the sake of avant garde or the shock treatment approach to literature are out of place and represent a lack of taste in the educational medium.

A third factor for an effective evaluation is sincerity on the part of the critic. Underlying any evaluation in the educational context should be the element of constructive judgments. The speech arts curriculum exists for permitting a student to develop creative initiative and better communication techniques. Before performers can, or will

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6W. M. Parrish, "Concerning Taste," Ibid., p. 207.

7Ibid., p. 204.

accept, the judgment of a critic, the critic must establish his sincerity for assisting those performers to improve their techniques and understanding. To provide a fair and beneficial evaluation, then, a critic must know something about the literature being performed and the style of performance; a critic must make his evaluations based on good taste in a performance; and his judgment must be determined by his sincerity to aid student interpreters to perform better.

There are two general types of evaluation. The first type is a general effectiveness evaluation. This type is based on the general response of a single critic, or the audience, to the material and performance. This is a subjective approach which is based on the "likes" or "dislikes" of the spectators. This method, though obviously not a scientific or technical approach, is important because one "critic cannot speak for the total listener responses." In this form of evaluation listeners respond in a general way to items as the appropriateness of material and adaptation, the appropriateness of staging devices, the appropriateness of vocalization and physical response, and the overall effectiveness of the production.

Whereas the effect criterion is an expression of the popular approval or disapproval of a performance and does not have exact or scientifically determined judgments concerning the merits of the work,

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the technique criterion is based on specific judgments from which personal taste and feeling have been largely eliminated. The technique criterion is based on specific predetermined criteria. For instance, a critic is asked to determine the degree of effectiveness for such items as vocal techniques, use of gestures and physical responses, lighting effects, or unity and coherence of a script. It is imperative for the critic to "respond to each of the items in terms of the literature being read, keeping in mind that what is appropriate in one piece of literature is not necessarily appropriate in another selection."

Thus far, this chapter has discussed the need for evaluative criteria for a group interpretation performance, the qualities of a critic, and the types of evaluation. Before actually preparing a critique form for group interpretation, it was necessary to determine some standards or objectives for an evaluation sheet. Brooks, Bahn, and Okey state the first standard. "Regardless of the scale or check-list it must be usable." Second, rating sheets should have a definite purpose. Third, they should seek explicit responses. Fourth, critique sheets should be adapted to the performance and the interpreters.

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11Brooks, Bahn, and Okey, Act of Interpretation, p. 405.
12Ibid., p. 412.
Critique sheets unfortunately have the position of being final arbitrators for standards of expression. It is not within the scope or purpose of rating sheets to erect absolute mechanical standards of expression. The elements included for evaluation are to be adapted to the individual performance and "always to be modified by personal properties as temperament, tastes, and also by special circumstances, as relations of speaker and audience, occasion, and especially by the purpose in the utterance." With this principle in mind three critique forms are suggested and are included at the end of this chapter. Each one is prepared for a specific purpose, but each one attempts to include items for evaluating as (1) the selecting and adapting the literature to a group performance, (2) the manner and techniques of presentation, and (3) the over all effectiveness of the group interpretation performance.

These critique sheets have been modeled after the principles set forth by Gertrude Johnson in an article "Dramatic Reading and Platform Art Critique." Also, Brooks, Bahn, and Okey's book has solidified the organizational form.

The first form (page 119) is a general effectiveness rating scale. Points are evaluated on a given continuum. This form proposes to elicit a general response from observers without specific criteria. It


seeks to evaluate a group interpretation performance based on "the understanding and appreciation of the literary experience communicated." ¹⁵

The second critique form (page 120) is concerned with more specific criteria aimed at determining the appropriateness or effectiveness of the methods used to present the literature to an audience. It requires an observation report based on a variety of factors. It is felt that this form should be used by individuals who have some knowledge of the speech arts.

The third form (page 122) is a special form which seeks to evaluate the performance of an individual interpreter. As the preceding critique form, this evaluation sheet requires specific responses to several interpretation factors. Possibly this form would provide a teacher-director with a rating scale that attempts to measure progress and achievement.

Summary

Criticism serves as a final step in the interpretative experience. Some criteria for a group interpretation performance is needed in order to determine the effectiveness of a production while measuring achievement and effectiveness of aims and techniques. For a critique to be valid, a judge must know and understand both the techniques involved in a particular performance and the literature being presented. The critic's own good taste, sincerity, and knowledge of judicial standards

¹⁵Brooks, Bahn, and Okey, Act of Interpretation, p. 403.
will assist him in making the critique fair and objective. Evaluation criterion are classified into two categories. The first is a subjective response to the material and the performers which results in a general effectiveness evaluation. The second criterion is based on more technical and specific performance criteria. This criterion attempts to evaluate the degree of effectiveness. Any evaluation sheet used should be practical and should have a specific purpose. Responses to the criteria on a rating scale should be adapted to the particular performance and the group of interpreters.
GENERAL EFFECTIVENESS RATING SCALE FOR
GROUP INTERPRETATION

Title of selection: _______________________________________________________
Name of director: _______________________________________________________
Type of interpretation:  
Choric Interpretation ___ Readers Theatre ___ Chamber Theatre___
Type of program:  
Single work ___ Thematic ___

1. The program was  
   boring ___  
   enjoyable ___  
   very enjoyable ___

2. The purpose of the production was  
   vague ___  
   evident ___

3. The literature  
   lost meaning ___  
   was unaffected ___  
   was enhanced ___

4. The theme and the purpose of the literature was  
   missing ___  
   vague ___  
   evident ___

5. Vocal and physical interpretation was  
   forced and artificial ___  
   lifeless ___  
   animated ___  
   spontaneous ___  
   and natural ___

6. Voices were  
   cluttered ___  
   unintelligible ___  
   intelligible ___  
   distinct ___

7. Staging devices  
   hindered interpretation ___  
   could have been omitted ___  
   assisted interpretation ___

8. Total performance was  
   not effective ___  
   effective ___  
   very effective ___

Comments: 
Critic__________________________
GROUP INTERPRETATION PERFORMANCE CRITIQUE SHEET

Name of selection: ____________________________
Name of director: ______________________________
Type of interpretation:
   Choric Interpretation   Readers Theatre   Chamber Theatre
Type of program:     Single work      Thematic

SELECTION OF MATERIAL

Choice of material:
1. Was it appropriate to readers' maturity and ability? ___
2. Was it appropriate to audience's aesthetic taste and maturity? ___
3. Was it appropriate to the occasion? ___
4. Did the material have sufficient worth to justify the time necessary to rehearse and present the program? ___

Adapting the material:
1. Did the script have unity? ___
2. Were the transitions smooth and purposeful? ___
3. Did the transitions provide the script with necessary coherence? ___
4. Was the purpose and intent of the literature retained? ___
5. Was the reading balanced among the readers? ___

INTERPRETATION OF MATERIAL

Vocal responses:
1. Did voices have clarity, precision, and distinctness? ___
2. Did voices have projection, force, and volume? ___
3. Did voices have appropriate quality and characterization? ___
4. Did voices have appropriate emotional intensity? ___
5. Did individuals pick up cues with proper pacing and timing? ___
6. Did voices have a sense of spontaneity and naturalness? ___
7. When group spoke in ensemble, were voices synchronized? ___

Physical responses:
1. Were gestures and physical movement meaningful? ___
2. Was physical responsiveness kept in realm of suggestion? ___
3. Did readers react, through facial expression and muscle tone? ___
4. Did gestures and physical action seem spontaneous and natural? ___
Staging devices:

1. Were set pieces situated for best psychological effect?  
2. Was reader placement aesthetically balanced?  
3. Did clothing contribute to the interpretation?  
4. Was there proper illumination?  
5. Was proper atmosphere maintained by lighting?  
6. Were sound effects beneficial?  
7. Was locus properly established?  
8. Was onstage and offstage focus appropriate?  
9. Were "entrances" and "exits" handled efficiently?  
10. Was the degree of suggestion or literalness appropriate to the performance?  

GENERAL EFFECTIVENESS

1. Did the literature benefit by the production?  
2. Was the presentation appropriate to the material?  
3. Was the performance entertaining and interesting?  
4. Did the group work together in ensemble?  
5. Were readers emotionally and intellectually alive to the material?  
6. Did the production have purpose and meaning?  
7. Was the mood, purpose, and content of the literature evident?  
8. Did the production have adequate climatic tension and relief?  
9. Did the performance have the illusion of "first time?"  
10. Did the readers seem to react emphatically to the literature?  

COMMENTS:
INDIVIDUAL INTERPRETER PERFORMANCE CRITIQUE

Name of interpreter: ____________________________
Name of selection: ______________________________
Type of interpretation: Choric Interpretation _____ Readers Theatre _____ Chamber Theatre _____
Type of selection: Single work _____ Thematic _____

ATTITUDES AND PREPARATION
1. Was prompt for all rehearsals
2. Attended rehearsals regularly
3. Took direction and criticism cheerfully
4. Used direction and criticism to improve interpretation
5. Met assigned line and production deadlines
6. Respected suggestions and comments of other interpreters
7. Worked to create an artistic and unified performance

INTERPRETATION
Vocal responses:
1. Quality and characterization
2. Volume and projection
3. Tempo and pacing
4. Intensity and force
5. Intelligibility and enunciation
6. Pitch and inflection
7. Phrasing and pauses
8. Sustaining
9. Spontaneity and naturalness
10. Motivation and meaning
11. Mispronounced and misarticulated words
12. Comments

Physical responses:
1. Naturalness and spontaneity
2. Motivated and meaningful
3. Degree of suggestion
4. Focus
5. Use of manuscript
6. General comments

GENERAL TECHNIQUES
1. Maintained a sense of listening and responsiveness
2. Projected emotions with restraint
3. Picked up cues properly
4. Did not distract attention from focal point of attention
5. Was emotionally and intellectually alive to performance

Critic __________________________
The stated objective for this thesis was to describe specific objectives, procedures, and forms of a group interpretation performance in the speech arts curriculum. To accomplish this purpose, this thesis has examined three modes of group interpretation as single styles of production and as a collective art form. There has been an effort to examine group interpretation from three aspects, historical, philosophical, and as an educational procedure.

Viewed from a historical perspective, group interpretation is not an innovated production technique, but rather it represents a refinement and reassessment of existing techniques. Apparently there were forms of group play reading in existence during the Eighteenth Century. Some forms of group recitation were practiced as a part of elocution classes. Many techniques now evident in Readers Theatre productions were a part of the productions of the Elizabethan Reading Society (1875). Staged play readings were employed on several college campuses during the 1930's and 1940's. Certainly many of the early techniques of group interpretation are borrowed directly from the classical Greek dramatic chorus. Since there were no formal efforts or major articles directly relating to group interpretation until 1920 to 1925, it can be asserted
that group interpretation productions are a product of twentieth century educational procedures. As versespeaking or choric reading, group interpretation did not fulfill its expectations, and during the 1940's it fell into general disrepute. Perhaps the most important events in the development of group interpretation as an art form were the Paul Gregory–Charles Laughton productions of Don Juan in Hell and John Brown's Body. These two productions created a popular revival of group interpretative procedures. This renaissance of group reading stimulated many interpretative experiments in high school speech courses and in many college speech departments. Also there has been a surge of writing discussing group interpretation as Readers Theatre in professional journals and speech textbooks.

A study of the theoretical and philosophical aspects of group interpretation reveal that it is a polyphyletic art form. It combines some of the techniques and procedures of conventional theatre with the objectives, forms, and repertory of interpretation. As Leslie Irene Coger and Melvin White state, "... theatre and interpretative reading have a common background. In Readers Theatre they come together again."¹

As directors of group interpretation experiment with interpretative methods, they assigned a variety of titles to the forms. This practice emphasizes the diverse nature of group interpretation but these concepts

just cannot account for the vast inventiveness of authors. Most authorities recognize the influence of Bertholt Brecht's Epic Theatre concepts on the theoretical aspects of a group interpretation performance. The episodal nature of scripts, extensive use of a narrator-reader, and various estrangement effects represent a sampling of the more characteristic elements of Epic Theatre observed in a group production. As Epic Theatre attempts to aesthetically detach the spectators from the literature, group interpretation attempts to objectively project the literature offstage into the realm of the spectators. The readers and the audience share in the literary experience.

Each of the three group modes has its particular purpose and characteristics. Choric Interpretation represents the traditional style of group interpretation. This mode attempts to present verse literature to an audience through ensemble vocal arrangements. In this form the literature is arranged for solo and combined vocal presentations. Readers are usually arranged statically, and the style employs general synchronized vocal and physical interpretations.

Readers Theatre is the more popular form of group interpretation. Accordingly, this terminology will probably come to include all group interpretative performances. Readers Theatre proposes to present literature with or without a narrator, and with or without delineated characters, to an audience. In this style, a group employs stools, lecterns, and manuscripts to heighten the reading atmosphere of the
performance.

Of the three styles, Chamber Theatre moves closest to conventional theatre. General consensus acknowledges Robert Breen as the creator of this art form. Chamber Theatre proposes to present a short story or novel to an audience with the immediacy of a theatrical presentation. This style retains the author's point of view of the selection which is controlled by the selective use of a narrator-reader. Chamber Theatre heightens the literature as the interpreters read in character, indirect discourse is presented as direct discourse, and at times readers focus action on stage and at other times interpreters read directly to the audience.

As an educational procedure, a group interpretation performance offers a teacher of interpretation various advantages. First, a group performance can be adapted to an existing speech arts curriculum. It can be used as an enrichment device for the speech talented students, while performing as an indirect approach to remedial speech skills. A group interpretation contains a motivational value that is not offered by solo classroom interpretation performances. The psychological pressure of performing before an audience causes students to take more care in understanding an author's literary experience and to develop better presentation techniques. Acting as a valuable training instrument for the speech arts, group interpretation also satisfies certain life needs of the interpreters. It develops communal loyalty, while developing in the
students an ability to give and take criticisms. They find their ideas and opinions challenged by others and, thus the students are able to evaluate their own personal values.

The educational methods involved in a group performance attempt to retain the interpretative procedures, impression and expression, in a single process. Students develop the techniques of impression as they learn the techniques of expression. A teacher-director guides the learning experience through an indirect approach. Students discover, not only an author's meaning, but also ways that this meaning can be presented to an audience in an interesting and entertaining manner.

The first step in this educational process is to select the literature for a group performance. This step is primarily a teacher oriented activity. Literature used in a group production should be selected on the basis of the interpreters' maturity and interpretative skills, the aesthetic taste and maturity of the audience, and the occasion for the performance. Foremost in this step is the literature itself. A selection must benefit by the group treatment. Techniques must serve the literature being interpreted.

The second step in the learning process is rehearsing and preparing the material for a performance. This step is organized into three phases suggested by C. C. Cunningham. The first phase requires students to study the literature as a total effect. During the second phase
the parts of the complete selection are examined so students may have a more complete understanding of the selection in its entirety. During this phase a group experiments with presentational techniques that will best convey the author's meaning. In the third phase, the interpreters polish and perfect the performance for presentation.

In an educational atmosphere there must be some method for measuring program effectiveness and student achievement. Since no measuring devices have been established for group interpretative performances, this thesis attempted to form suggested criteria and evaluation forms. Each teacher-director will need to adapt these forms to specific situations. Three general areas for evaluation are considered. The first area is the material used. Is it appropriate to the interpreters, audience, and occasion, and does the production enhance the literature? The second phase evaluates the vocal and physical interpretation. Are the vocal and physical responses natural and spontaneous? The third phase is the general effectiveness of the production. Did the performance accomplish its projected purpose?

In conclusion, this investigation has suggested three general observations concerning group interpretation. First, variation and experimentation will continue to characterize group activities. Certainly, part of the popularity evident with group interpretation is centered in the freedom the medium permits a teacher of interpretation. Second, Readers Theatre nomenclature will probably become the accepted
terminology applied to any group performance without consideration to form, style, or approach. Third, additional research is needed in two areas discussed in this thesis. (1) The effectiveness of group interpretation productions as an educational medium needs to be evaluated by specific objective rating scales. This research would give credence, or discredit, to the subjective claims made concerning the inherent values of group interpretation as an art form. (2) There needs to be a thorough examination of the Epic Theatre principles as they apply to group interpretation performances.
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