



Introduction

This is a book about the rhetoric of written composition that arose in American colleges after 1780 and about its development as a culture, a theoretical apparatus, and a teaching practice down to relatively recent times. Although this story began to be told in detail during the last decade, let me tell you how I happen to be recounting my piece of it. When I began to study rhetoric, back in the mid-1970s, graduate students were all quickly made aware of the distinguished work that had been done in rhetorical history during the previous century. Starting from the original nineteenth-century German scholarship and English commentary up through the admirable contemporary work of George Kennedy, Wilbur Samuel Howell, James J. Murphy, James Golden, Edward P. J. Corbett, and Brian Vickers, I traced the history of Greek and Roman rhetoric, patristic and medieval rhetoric, Renaissance and Restoration rhetoric, eighteenth-century and modern rhetoric.

What's wrong with this picture? Something, I slowly became aware, was missing from rhetorical history. It was, of course, the nineteenth century. As those who were trained before 1980 know, that entire century was almost completely excluded from traditional rhetorical history. After Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric* in 1828, if one were to have believed standard histories, there *was* no rhetorical activity (outside of the jiggling of a few stray elocutionists, the only habitants of this waste ground) until Burke's *Counter-Statement* of 1931 or I. A. Richards's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* in 1936.

At that point, these histories suggest, the whole enterprise miraculously comes back to life and thrives into our own day. As Daniel Fogarty put it in 1959, “with few exceptions of any moment in rhetorical theory, Whately was the last rhetorician until the nineteen-twenties” (*Roots for a New Rhetoric*, 20).

This position is, of course, outmoded and is increasingly being shown as such. It is the result of the first modern rhetorical histories having been written by scholars in speech departments, which were formed in reaction to the poor treatment speech teachers had received in the developing departments of English. As a result, speech-based histories tended to valorize oral discourse—and to downplay written rhetoric, which is the great contribution of the nineteenth century. It came to seem to those of us trained in the 1970s that there *was* no nineteenth-century rhetoric, primarily because there were so few important developments in oral rhetorical theory.

Speech departments, however, no longer control rhetorical scholarship as they once did. Rhetoric at many schools today is in the process of moving from speech to English departments, and scholars of rhetorical history are gradually being made aware of the complexity and importance of this period and this strand of composition-based rhetorical history. Old attitudes die hard, however, and the argument for early rhetorics of written discourse must still be made. During the late 1980s when Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg were putting together their fine anthology, *The Rhetorical Tradition*, I was one of the historians asked to act as a reader, and I wearied Pat and Bruce with my welkin-rending cries for more nineteenth-century material. At one point when they were for giving the nineteenth century especially short shrift, I wrote to them:

Your claim seems to be this: after heady new developments from 1590 through 1828, the field of rhetoric just *shut down* for a century, that *nothing* of real interest or importance happened between 1828 and 1928. For rhetoric, there *was* no nineteenth century. There were, of course, incredibly important nineteenth centuries for chemistry, history, biology, philosophy, psychology, literature, sociology, mathematics, philology—in fact, every other modern discipline was *formed* by the nineteenth century. But not rhetoric. Despite the considerable theoretical arguments it produced, it will seem in this anthology to have generated no important thinkers for a hundred years. Despite the ubiquity of rhetoric and the fact that it had attracted some of the best minds of the period, it will appear that you saw no ideas of importance propounded. The discipline was apparently not affected by its changing culture, nor did it affect the culture in any important sense. It just vegetated, meriting only ten pages of quick, shallow gloss

as transition from 1828 to 1928—and most of that gloss will be taken up with discussion of fields only tangentially related to rhetoric—fields with more cachet, more status.

Poor rhetoric. A field without a history for a whole century when every other field was being created. If you were outside observers of this field, knowing nothing about it, can you easily imagine that it could exist as claimed? That there could be *any* field for which the nineteenth century did not exist?

I went on in this vein for months, and Pat and Bruce eventually relented, to the point of including forty pages (including fifteen pages of Nietzsche) of post-Whately, pre-Bakhtin material out of the 1,282 pages of *The Rhetorical Tradition*.

Clearly the argument that indeed there was rhetorical history between 1828 and 1928 needs continually to be made. Several books have made that argument during the past decade, and made it well. James Berlin's *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges* and *Rhetoric and Reality* have provided readers with thoughtful introductions to nineteenth- and twentieth-century composition-rhetoric. Sharon Crowley's *The Methodical Memory: Invention in Current-Traditional Rhetoric* and Nan Johnson's *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America* have delved deeper into specific questions of theory and influence, tying nineteenth-century work inextricably into the older rhetorical tradition. David Russell's *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870–1990* is a splendid example of the tracing of rhetorical influences outside English or speech department walls, and Winifred Bryan Horner's *Nineteenth-Century Scottish Rhetoric: The American Connection* shows how painstaking textual scholarship of a traditional sort can elucidate connections between European and American rhetorics of the period. Albert R. Kitzhaber's groundbreaking 1953 dissertation, *Rhetoric in American Colleges, 1850–1900*, was finally published in book form and made available to general readers. John Brereton's documentary history *Origins of Composition Studies* has given us easy access to many original sources. In addition, scores of articles, chapters, and more recent dissertations have illustrated the importance and complexity of this period and these materials that had been long scanted by traditional rhetorical history.

I place this book in that argumentative tradition. I do not mean it to be only about the nineteenth century or only about composition, though those areas do bulk large in these pages. I mean here to write a story of people who have studied and taught writing in American schools since the early nineteenth century, to illuminate some elements of that tradition of

written rhetoric. I try to show how this composition-rhetoric grew out of and interacted with concurrent cultural trends, as American college and university teaching were shaped by pressures that were economic, political, and theoretical. I mean also to look more closely at specific elements within American composition-rhetoric, trying to determine why some survived and others did not, trying to explore what our theories and techniques of teaching have said about our attitudes toward students, language, and life.

My claim throughout this book is that there *is* a new rhetorical tradition that arose in the United States during the nineteenth century to try to inform an ever increasing demand for literacy skills for the professional and managerial classes. This is a tradition customarily referred to as “current-traditional rhetoric,” and indeed, the original title of this book was to have been *Current-Traditional Rhetoric*. I found, however, that as I worked through the chapters one by one I was becoming less satisfied with that widely accepted term for the subject accumulating under my pen. Finally, I simply could not underwrite the term any longer, and in this book I have ventured to suggest a new term, “composition-rhetoric.” Let me speak briefly to the reasons for this seemingly wilful refusal.

“Current-traditional rhetoric,” as it has been popularly used over the past fifteen years, is a term based on one first proposed by Richard Young in his 1978 essay, “Paradigms and Problems: Needed Research in Rhetorical Invention.” Young in that article referred to the older forms of composition teaching and theory as based in a “current-traditional paradigm,” a term he derived by adding a hyphen to a term first invented by Daniel Fogarty in *Roots for a New Rhetoric* in 1959. Fogarty was no friend of the composition strand of rhetoric and was anxious to see it supplanted by a new philosophical rhetoric; he called the entire teaching tradition up to that point “current traditional rhetoric” (117). This was not an important term for Fogarty, and little had been made of it before Young’s formalization of the phrase reified the concept at a propitious time for new nomenclature. Popularized by the students in Young’s 1979 NEH Summer Seminar, many of whom were to become luminaries in their own rights, “current-traditional rhetoric” became the default term for the tradition of rhetoric that appeared specifically to inform the composition courses of the latter nineteenth century and the twentieth century up through the 1960s. Historical studies of composition pedagogy since the eighteenth century were beginning to appear, and historians often collapsed Young’s “paradigm” with Fogarty’s “rhetoric” in order to have a name for what they were writing about. “Current-traditional rhetoric” as a term seemed to indicate both the outmoded nature and the continuing power of older textbook-based writing pedagogies.

The term was almost unquestioned for many years, although C. H. Knoblauch delivered a thoughtful critique of it at the 1984 Modern Language Association Conference, in a paper called “The Current-Traditional Paradigm: Neither Current, nor Traditional, nor a Paradigm.” Young, said Knoblauch, had stripped Fogarty’s term of its intellectual seriousness in order to criticize a classroom tradition he disliked. The “current-traditional paradigm,” he charged, was not really a rhetoric at all:

No major rhetoricians, ancient or modern, have been named as its originators or perpetuators; no works, aside from textbooks, have been identified as constituting it; its concepts have never been formally analyzed or proven systematic. . . . What Fogarty attempts in his book is a linking of school rhetoric to the larger cross-currents of Western thought which are his primary focus, advocating some purposeful changes in the first to accord with his sense of progress of the second. What Young attempts, by contrast, is a portrait of rhetoric from the restricted vantage-point of the classroom. (2)

Knoblauch’s critique fell on stony ground, however, since at that time, historians knew little about the nineteenth century except what *was* in classroom textbooks. “Current-traditional rhetoric” became a convenient whipping boy, the term of choice after 1985 for describing whatever in nineteenth- and twentieth-century rhetorical or pedagogical history any given author found wanting. Got a contemporary problem? Blame it on that darn old current-traditional rhetoric. (No, I do not exempt my earlier work from this charge.)

I have more recently come to believe, however, that the almost unquestioned acceptance of Young’s term has left the field with a stock phrase that was never completely accurate and has become even more problematical since Young’s essay appeared fifteen years ago. What we have reified as a unified “current-traditional rhetoric” is, in reality, not a unified or an unchanging phenomenon. It developed over time; the written rhetoric of 1830 is not that of 1870, which is not that of 1910, which is not that of 1960, which is certainly not that of 1995. It evolved differently in different settings: schools, colleges, universities, Lyceums, literary societies, Chautauquas. The developing tradition of written rhetoric was not monadic, was *never* the rhetorical tradition as a whole; it was always a strand unto itself, reliant upon some elements of the earlier oral rhetoric but also filled with materials that would have been meaningless to oral rhetoricians.

“Current-traditional rhetoric,” as usually used to describe the reactionary and derivative nature of the textbook tradition, is not “current” in

any ongoing sense of development. Since 1960, the older forms of written rhetoric have been “current” only in the sense that they still existed and were passed along and taught. To the degree that “current-traditional rhetoric” has been defined and commented upon by those in composition studies, it has been universally condemned as no longer current *enough*. Many “current-traditional” ideas are, after all, no more current than the design of the *Titanic*.

Neither is it “traditional” in the sense of adhering to or developing organically from the older, orally based rhetorical tradition. Nan Johnson and Sharon Crowley have shown how nineteenth-century rhetoric grew from eighteenth-century epistemology, but the composition-and-textbook “tradition” usually associated with current-traditional rhetoric owes less to Campbell and Blair than it does to pedagogical lore, sheer invention, and *sui generis* theoretical pronouncements made between twenty and two hundred years ago. Unlike the older rhetorical tradition, it did not exist in any coherent form before 1800. As a body of information, written rhetoric was brought into being between 1800 and 1910.

Since, therefore, the methods and theories associated with teaching writing in America after 1800 are neither changeless, nor unified, nor seriously “current” in today’s scholarly field, nor strongly related to traditional rhetoric, I propose in this book to eschew the term “current-traditional rhetoric” and to refer instead to older and newer forms of *composition-rhetoric*. History enthusiasts will recognize that I have appropriated this term from the title of a forward-looking but not very successful secondary school textbook produced in 1897 by Fred Newton Scott and Joseph V. Denney. Like Scott and Denney, I use the term to identify specifically that form of rhetorical theory and practice devoted to written discourse. Writing, of course, had always been a small but necessary part of the older rhetorical tradition, but composition-rhetoric after 1800 was the first rhetoric to place writing centrally in rhetorical work. Although composition-rhetoric was by no means the only strand of rhetoric evolving between 1800 and 1900 (it was related to though increasingly separate from the oral rhetorical ideas that coexisted with it throughout its history, as Johnson has shown in her *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric*), it was the strand that would burgeon. While oral rhetoric sank into desuetude after 1860, composition-rhetoric waxed, producing the most widely taught course in American colleges after 1900, Freshman Composition.

As opposed to the popular perception of “current-traditional rhetoric,” I do not wish to paint composition-rhetoric as essentially degraded or utilitarian. Composition-rhetoric as it existed in ever evolving forms in

America does, I believe, represent a coherent tradition of conceptualizing the elements of correct and successful writing, trying to teach students how to find them in extant prose, and encouraging students to create them in their own prose. Contra Fogarty, who thought “current traditional rhetoric” had no philosophy, I see composition-rhetoric as a genuine rhetoric, with its own *theoria* and *praxis*. Contemporary scholars have strongly criticized earlier forms of it as being pedagogically destructive, but we should also remember that many things we still find useful in writing pedagogy were evolved before 1960.

Composition-rhetoric is a modern rhetoric, quickly changing and adapting, driven by potent social and pedagogical needs, and running on the rails of an ever cheaper, ever quicker, and ever more competitive printing technology. Thus we can never speak of “composition-rhetoric” without stipulation, for it has existed in a variety of forms and constantly evolved. The composition-rhetoric of the schools was different from that of the colleges, which was not that of the universities. The rhetoric of men’s colleges was different from that of women’s or coeducational colleges. That of each decade was subtly changed from that of the decade before. So in this book I will be referring to older and newer forms of composition-rhetoric, of school and university rhetorics, of women’s rhetoric and men’s. To do otherwise would be to reduce the formidable complexity of the situation.

Let me make a quick sketch here of the eras of composition-rhetoric this book means to cover. I am aware that characterization by period represents a sort of taxonomic lowest common denominator, and that it gives less of an impression of analysis than do conceptual taxonomies. Several conceptual taxonomies of this period already exist, however, and I want here to point out how periodization can show us something new about the development of rhetorical ideas. Although I don’t want to suggest that composition-rhetoric was absolutely different in any of these periods from its state in previous or succeeding ones, I think an argument can be made that composition-rhetoric developed both as theory and practice through these periods and that each one presents a useful differentiation. Neither do I want to try to make any sort of disingenuous claim that composition-rhetoric is “just like” any of the more familiar disciplines that emerged in modern form out of the nineteenth century. It is not, primarily because the development of composition-rhetoric between 1885 and 1910 was externally imposed. It was a field decreed necessary and continued by social fiat. No other college discipline I know of has had anything like this history. College courses of study have traditionally emerged from the accumulation of a body of knowledge, which is gradually formalized and finally developed to the point where it

produces experts who can teach it. Philosophy, history, mathematics, all of the sciences from the oldest to the newest, have evolved using this model. But composition-rhetoric did not, and thus these constructed eras do not mirror the development of any other discipline very closely. Here are the eras I think can be usefully differentiated.

Early American Composition-Rhetoric

Although composition of speeches to be memorized and orally delivered has always been a part of the rhetorical tradition, the oldest forms of composition-rhetoric to be discussed here originated in the mixed rhetoric classes of the period 1800–1865, which were organized to teach students both oral and written discourse. These courses, which professed what I will call Early American composition-rhetoric, did not develop in a direct way from earlier purely oral rhetoric courses, although there was some overlap. In spite of Hugh Blair’s influential belletrism, there did not exist before the Early American period any serious body of knowledge about how good writing could be successfully taught. The older discipline of rhetoric did contribute some of the ideas and definitions that were in general suspension, but no one was certain how to grid older orally attuned rhetorical concepts to the problems of writing. There was nothing but a teeming marketplace of disparate ideas, which began to appear permanently in competition, since there were no ways to prove their competing claims true or false.

Early American composition-rhetoric courses were usually taught using a combination of the belletristic-stylistic rhetorical theories of Blair’s 1783 *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* and of the newer writing-oriented teaching methods pioneered by John Walker in his 1801 public school book *The Teacher’s Assistant in English Composition*. These early composition classes were asked to write fortnightly rhetoricals—themes and regular subjects—on relatively abstract assignments like “Fame” and “Trust Not Appearances.” They read and analyzed essays by Steele and Johnson, and later Hazlitt and Lamb. As the theoretical side of composition-rhetoric blossomed later in the period, students were often asked to memorize complex discourse taxonomies and lists of stylistic values and formal conditions. They were made to learn lists of figures and tropes and use them programmatically in their essays. Many such courses contained large sections of grammar, usually based on Lindley Murray’s very popular *English Grammar* of 1795.

Early American composition-rhetoric was increasingly in transition as the period went on, and by 1860 it was unitary only in a limited sense.

Though based in Blair's ideas, the rhetorical theories found in the different texts used by different colleges came to vary more and more widely after 1840; composition-rhetoric thus shows a sort of centrifugal movement throughout the period leading up to the Civil War. In part this fragmentation occurred because the institutional bases of Early American composition-rhetoric were so varied, and were becoming more so. Though the American college scene was small and relatively narrow, devoted to producing doctors, lawyers, and ministers, there were many kinds of colleges, from burgeoning proto-universities like Harvard and Yale to tiny frontier seminaries hardly distinguishable from high schools. Rhetorical theories were fighting for preeminence during this time, and training could be very different from college to college.

One element that does run through college experience during this period is the personal attention students got from faculty. Though not all this attention was kindly, and faculty-student relations were sometimes unfriendly, rhetorical training was usually an occasion for intense interaction between students and teachers. Classes were small, and so essays were often checked and commented on in short office conferences by professors. Recitations were held before the entire class, and, in what was usually an all-male college world, students were also usually members of a literary or debating society that continued the rhetorical training taken up in courses. The college world during this period was an intensely rhetorical world. Before the Civil War, composition teaching proceeded in this intense, culturally supported, small-scale, and often tutorial fashion.

Postwar Composition-Rhetoric

After 1865 American college culture changed radically, and composition-rhetoric shifted with it. The Morrill Act of 1862, which established the Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges, brought a large new population of students to American colleges and helped found the major state universities, which would become important sites for composition teaching over the next five decades. From the province of a small group of elite students, college education became, during this time, much more available to the masses. The colleges were flooded with students who needed to be taught to write, who needed to be taught correctness in writing, who needed to know forms, and who could be run through the system in great numbers. Composition-rhetoric after the Civil War evolved to meet these needs, and in order to do so large portions of it were developed relatively quickly between 1865 and

1885. This is the Postwar period of composition-rhetoric, when scores of competing new ideas were put forward to try to solve the problems of teaching writing.

It was during these two decades that the first great waves of PhDs returned from German universities to establish here the structures of the modern American university. From Germany they brought with them the research ideal, methodologies of detailed analysis, and a scorn for older rhetorical ideas. This Postwar period saw the growth of the modern concept of universities as graduate and professional schools piggybacked on older undergraduate colleges, setting the stage for faculty hierarchies, scholarly specialization, the graduate-student industry, and departmentalization. As a result, between 1865 and 1900 the sites of American post-secondary education changed as they never had before and have not since. During the Postwar period we also see the foundation of a number of all-women's colleges and the rise of coeducation in some established schools, changes that fostered the rise of pure composition classes and helped to diminish the importance of the oral rhetorical tradition.

The size and site of composition courses changed at most colleges during this period as well. Up through the Civil War, most colleges had only a few hundred students, and it was common for college classes to really *be* composed of a whole class—the Class of 1852 or 1836. As colleges grew after the war, courses grew as well, and rhetoric and writing courses grew along with them. Instead of facing a class of thirty-five men, a teacher might find himself striving to grade essays by a class of close to one hundred students. With the rise of the elective system toward the end of period, some courses could be split, but rhetoric generally tended to remain with the old whole-class system—"sophomore rhetoric" or "senior declamation"—and thus the scene was set for the beginnings of a whole-class freshman course.

During this period of composition-rhetoric, the inventiveness of composition teachers and theorists in America bloomed as it had never done before. Rhetorical and pedagogical theories were spun out by scores of competing writers and were launched into the educational system via an ever more sophisticated industry of school textbook publishers utilizing modern printing methods. This is the heyday of such inventive (and yet finally forgotten) rhetorical theorists as David J. Hill, Henry N. Day, Erastus Haven, Charles Bardeen, and John S. Hart, all of whom produced rhetorics proposing wildly variant ideas about discourse education, all of whom saw their ideas rifled and mostly discarded by the more successful authors of the later 1880s and 1890s. This, too, was the period of the first few very popular and successful text authors, including the Scotsman Alexander Bain and the

American Adams S. Hill. The Postwar period saw the first differentiated composition textbooks, the first books identifiable as composition readers and handbooks.

Consolidation Composition-Rhetoric

Between 1885 and 1910 occurred the Consolidation period of composition-rhetoric in America, during which the theories and methods of composition teaching were consolidated in colleges and the plethora of ideas produced by the Postwar period were tested, challenged, expanded, discarded, and subjected to the harrowing interrogation of the first waves of compulsory writing courses at most schools. The consolidation of the field came with startling rapidity after 1885, with the advent of written entrance exams at Harvard in 1874 and the general adoption of such exams at most established colleges. The consolidation of composition-rhetoric did not take place because true theory or practice drove out false, but because pressing social problems demanded solutions. When more than half of the candidates—the products of America’s best preparatory schools—failed the Harvard exams, a great outcry went up. Trumpeted throughout the nation in newspapers and magazines, “the illiteracy of American boys” became an obsession. College freshmen could not write. This situation could not be allowed. Secondary curricula must change. Teachers must be proselytized. Principals must be warned. Schools must be put on notice.

But though the change in secondary curricula did eventually come, it was not quick enough for Harvard. Adams Sherman Hill, who administered the entrance exam at Harvard, was not satisfied that freshmen were improving quickly enough. He proposed, in the middle 1880s, that Harvard institute a temporary course in remedial writing instruction—just until the crisis had passed—and require it of all incoming freshmen. This was done. The course, not to be dignified with a title, was merely called English A. It was the prototype for the required freshman course in composition that within fifteen years would be standard at almost every college in America. English departments settled into place a two-tiered hierarchy of literature and composition, and freshman “programs” arrived toward the end of the period, standardizing the course and placing it into the hands of those who would teach it henceforward: graduate students, low-level instructors, and beginning professors.

At the same time that institutional structures were consolidating to support composition teaching, the structures of intellectual transmission were falling into place to consolidate rhetorical theory. After the whirling

centrifugal generation of competing ideas and theories during the Postwar period, the Consolidation period was centripetal, winnowing down the scores of genres, stylistic qualities, taxonomies, forms, modes, levels, and types into a tested and usable set of teaching tools. Teachability by untrained teachers became an important criterion of whether a theory or pedagogy survived, and many interesting ideas disappeared while others became hegemonic. The textbook industry in a recognizably modern form was born, belching forth popular texts in huge steam-driven batches of tens of thousands, and these textbooks assumed ever larger roles in disseminating information and training new teachers.

With the advent of Freshman Composition, the melee of competing theory that had been “written rhetoric” was radically simplified. A criterion of choice had been found: teachability. The complex taxonomies and systems of the Early American and Postwar periods melted away, and in their place a few skeletal concepts remained, embroidered differently by different writers but essentially the same. Between 1885 and 1910 what would become Modern composition-rhetoric was shaped and made smooth by the mechanisms of a modernized, centralized textbook marketplace. These ideas were various, but they had in common an attraction for taxonomy and simplicity. They included the four modes of discourse (narration, description, exposition, and argument), the methods of exposition (process analysis, definition, comparison/contrast, classification, and so on), the three levels of discourse (diction, sentence, and paragraph), the “narrow-select-develop-outline” invention structure, the conception of the organic paragraph, the rhetorical and grammatical sentence types, and the static abstractions of Unity, Coherence, and Emphasis. None of these ideas, the very heart-ideas of the composition course after 1910, had existed except sketchily before 1865.

Meanwhile, literacy issues were widely discussed in the new popular magazines and in a growing professional literature of education. Professional organizations like the MLA were formed, and paradigmatic writing programs like Harvard’s and Michigan’s provided models for all other colleges. The first composition-based celebrities came into being, and the theories and pedagogies they espoused became the nationally accepted methods. The very influential theorists of the 1890s—John Genung, Barrett Wendell, and Fred Newton Scott—introduced pedagogies and rhetorical ideas that still have currency in the teaching of writing a century later. But the consolidation of the field by external forces was to have a heavy price.

Modern Composition-Rhetoric

Most issues in composition methodology were decided, one way or another, by 1910, and after 1910 we emerge into what I call the Modern period of composition-rhetoric, a period of relative stasis that is usually associated with the pejorative uses of the term “current-traditional rhetoric.” The Modern period of composition-rhetoric is defined by the almost absolute reign of a freshman composition requirement and the habits and industries that grow up around such a dominant institution. During this time, freshman composition programs take on their current forms, under the general direction of but somewhat autonomous from English departments. The huge courses are taught in multiple sections by “section hands” who are either graduate assistants or instructors, many of whom are frustrated literary specialists who teach writing only because compelled. During the Modern period, it becomes a truism that student dislike for Freshman Composition is exceeded only by the dislike of its teachers.

Theoretically, the Modern period features a heavy reliance on the relatively few rhetorical ideas that lasted through the heavy winnowing of the Consolidation period. These rhetorical ideas are often subsumed into pedagogies that valorize formal and mechanical correctness—what will come to be called the “product” approach to teaching writing—and are given little credence or validity by scholars outside the field of freshman composition. These familiar concepts—the modes of discourse, the methods of exposition, Unity, Coherence, and Emphasis, the levels of style, the select-narrow-expand invention system, and subset outlining—are put forward in a series of textbooks remarkable for their unanimity of view on and their similar treatments of these canonized concepts.

One of the results of this narrowing of theory was to make the teaching of writing an intellectual backwater after 1910. On the level of form and methods, composition-rhetoric was forced by cultural pressures to insist more and more strongly on formal and mechanical correctness after 1900, and this formal obsession became the hallmark of the course. Classes were much larger, and personal conferences were usually impossible, so the typical pedagogy became assigned daily and fortnightly themes, which were turned in, marked up in red ink for the perceived problems each one evinced, and returned to the students, who were either expected to repair all the marked errors or merely to move on to the next assignment and do better. Subjects were nearly always assigned by the teacher, and they were usually devised in a strict adherence to some taxonomic scheme like the modes or methods.

Students were nearly always asked for only one draft, which was the one turned in. During the Modern period, mechanical correction methods like correction charts—and eventually handbooks—began to appear to help teachers “correct” student papers more efficiently. Logistical problems of overload that rhetoric teachers had never faced before the 1890s led to new pedagogical methods, and formally, Modern composition-rhetoric tended toward mechanistic solutions to these problems.

This is not the place to rehearse all of the results of Freshman Composition as a phenomenon within the developing socioculture of American academia. For our purposes, we need only note that Freshman Composition, being a really new college subject, presented its teachers with organizational and pedagogical problems that were not well solved in its early days. Literature became the future for promising scholars in the new departments of English. Composition became known as a low-level grind, as a grueling apprenticeship, as a kind of teaching to pass through as quickly as possible.

By 1910, Modern composition-rhetoric was firmly in place, carried forward almost exclusively in textbooks, which represented the only organ of tradition in the field of composition teaching. There, though it was criticized by the journals that began to spring up in the early part of the century, this static form of composition-rhetoric flourished and spread to generation after generation of new composition teachers—usually graduate students—who knew no other rhetorical or pedagogical way. As Young put it, describing his “current-traditional paradigm,” this was a rhetoric consisting of

emphasis on the composed product rather than the composing process; the analysis of discourse into words, sentences, and paragraphs; the classification of discourse into description, narration, exposition, and argument; the strong concern with usage (syntax, spelling, punctuation) and with style (economy, clarity, emphasis); the preoccupation with the informal essay and the research paper, and so on. (“Paradigms and Problems,” 31)

In addition, Gary Tate has identified as other key elements in this form of rhetoric “a focus on expository writing, a belief that reality is located in the external world, a denial of the personal voice of the student writer, a simple-minded prescriptiveness, an emphasis on reason to the exclusion of the other human faculties, a devotion to a simple, linear view of the composing process, and a belief that the primary job of a writer is to transfer to the page ideas that exist already in the mind” (“Current-Traditional Rhetoric,” 1).

And so things remained for almost half a century. While literary studies proliferated and evolved research methods, journals, bibliographies, and respected scholars, composition-rhetoric remained a scholarly backwater and

a professional avocation, a drudgery, and a painful initiation ritual. The Modern era of composition-rhetoric was informed by practice being divorced from viable roots, left without any means for exploring its field knowledge, condemned to endlessly reinvent the wheel. Writing was the most often taught of college subjects and by a great measure the least examined. Composition was the only college-level course in which the teachers generally gained all their knowledge of the field from the same textbooks they assigned to students. Textbooks themselves emerge during this time as the absolute arbiters of classroom content and practice. Ever more sophisticated in their intent to aid the teacher, they finally reach a point of teachability that can relegate teachers to mere grading assistants to the all-potent text. Textbooks appear in new specialty forms, ranging from the old-style “rhetorics” that contain both theory and exercises, to handbooks to help teachers explain formal errors, to workbooks to give students practice exercises that need no human guide, to anthologies and readers that provide models and grist for discussion.

The Modern period lasts through 1960 or so, after which its tenets are challenged by a variety of rising theoretical and pedagogical movements that had begun in the 1940s. The critique mounted by these disparate movements results in a rather rapid shift after 1960 into the Contemporary world of composition-rhetoric, which is defined by being informed by scholarly work in a new discipline, composition studies. Part of the definition of the Modern period is that it is marked by the slow development of a group of discontented writing specialists, a Loyal Opposition that waxes and wanes, but always powerfully questions the status quo of current practice. Although true scholarly interest in composition-rhetoric had almost completely died out after 1900, leaving the field in the hands of a few stalwarts based around Fred Scott’s Michigan program, a small but continuing scholarly discourse was established in 1911 with the founding of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and its journal, *English Journal*. Throughout the Modern period, this loyal opposition to the composition establishment continued to publish essays that interrogated the status quo, and after 1945 their numbers and power increased greatly, leading to the dissolution of the Modern unity. Though it was not until after World War II that many tenets of Modern composition-rhetoric were challenged institutionally, at that time the questioning of its received wisdom became vociferous and newly powerful.

There have been several strands to this contemporary interrogation, which has today been institutionalized as the new discipline of composition studies. One of them, the product of a traditional group of academically

based scholars, proposed that composition-rhetoric had taken a wrong turn in the nineteenth century in terms of its content. The needed reforms, this group proposed, would involve rediscovering the wisdom of the nearly lost older tradition of classical rhetoric, or paying new attention to the canon of invention, which had been downgraded by composition-rhetoric, or of using new linguistic methods to teach sentence construction. This group of reformers in their earlier incarnations were called the New Rhetoricians. In a later avatar they are associated with a resurrection of Deweyan ideas and today are often called social constructionists. They forced the evolution of Contemporary composition-rhetoric in the direction of new theory.

A slightly later group of scholars identified themselves with the scientific bent in modern research, and they proposed that composition-rhetoric needed to be placed on a firmer research footing. Better-designed experiments and studies would discern what writing really was, what readers really expected, what teaching techniques actually worked. Usually referred to as empiricists or cognitivists, these scholars moved Contemporary composition-rhetoric toward epistemological questions, definitions of problems, data-gathering.

The final strand of post-World War II reform in composition was concerned not so much with what students were taught as how they were taught. In the minds of these teachers, the problem with composition-rhetoric went deeper than mere issues of content, and the received methods of teaching writing were not merely inefficient or unworkable. The way in which composition was taught, to these theorists, was at best a bad method. At worst it was actively destructive, leading to desiccation of the student's creativity, to useless fear about meaningless (and probably fictional) entities such as *Emphasis* and *The Paragraph of Comparison and Contrast*, to writer's block paranoia about mechanical issues, and to dead, imitative, ponderous student prose that attempted to mimic the dead, imitative, ponderous prose of academia. These reformers, often referred to by the shorthand notation of "writing-process theorists" (or, by their critics, "expressivists") have probably been more genuinely subversive of the methodology of Modern composition rhetoric—and the creation of its Contemporary pedagogical form—than either of the other groups.

Under the triple censure of these reformers, composition-rhetoric has changed in the last three decades more quickly and in more ways than at any time since the period 1870–1900. It is not, however, my central purpose here to examine in any depth the more recent history of the discipline of composition studies and its effects on Contemporary composition-rhetoric. There is plenty enough complexity in the story of composition-rhetoric as it

developed between 1760 and 1960, which is roughly the period covered by this book. I will not tread very far into the Contemporary (or should it be called the Postmodern?) period of composition-rhetoric here, since we are still much involved in it and have little basis for historical conclusions.

Those looking for a straight chronological history here will, I fear, be disappointed. It does not start with Adam Smith in 1749 and proceed confidently through the years to *Research in Written Composition* in 1963. Such a book might be imaginable, but I am not intelligent enough or knowledgeable enough to write it. Composition-rhetoric exists at the intersection of what a society reads and what it feels it should be able to express, and there is simply too much happening, too many complex connections to be made between composition-rhetoric and the ongoing culture and society that formed it, for me to believe I can provide a coherent “whole picture” that is not unconsciously reductive. Instead I will give you thematic pictures of specific issues in culture and theory that were important in shaping the field as it has come down to us. There is much in this story that has been well told by other authors, and I will try in this book to relate parts of the tale that have not yet been explored.

Composition-rhetoric is neither a stagnant survival nor any of a hundred proposed revolutions. It exists, as it always has, as an ever shifting balance between the old and comforting and the new and exciting, the ways of lore and the ways of theory, the push of societal pressure and the inertia of academic traditions. In the first section of this book we shall look at some of the cultural grounds against which composition-rhetoric was created, partly from the older rhetorical tradition and partly from novel secondary pedagogies. In the second part of the book we shall focus more on specific pieces of the field as it evolved. Though it is a commonplace to say that composition history is written from a critical viewpoint, in this discussion my intention will not be to deride or condemn, but to understand. If history teaches us anything, it is that our own understanding of our historical moment is always necessarily limited. “As I am now, so you shall be,” suggests the old New England gravestone, and it is a lesson in humility that we do well as historians to learn.

Examining the history of composition-rhetoric allows us to see our discipline, which seems sometimes to be spinning centrifugally to pieces, as what it truly is: the current avatar of a tradition of studying and using discourse that is as old as literacy and probably older. The ways in which we think of ourselves and our work, the respect we give each other, the degree to which we think of other researchers and practitioners in composition studies as kin, as “our folks”—these are for me central issues in practicing

history. When I sat down to try to write these chapters, one of my central (if tacit) purposes was to provide a shared past, a story of ancestors. I am trying here to build a fire around which we can sit and discover that we do know the same stories, and dance the same dances. Historians may not be the shamans of the field, but we are the storytellers, spinning the fabric that will, we hope, knit together the separate, private stories of the researchers, the theorists, the teachers in classrooms.

We need shared stories because our self-definition is tenuous at best. Although on the one hand composition-rhetoric can trace its lineage back through rhetoric for 2,500 years, on another more pragmatic level we are barely a century old, one of the newest of college subjects. After a quick survey of the field, it is certainly easier to see composition-rhetoric as an arriviste—with all the opprobrium that term implies—on the scene of higher learning today than it is to connect it more carefully to the great tradition of rhetoric. As sociologists of the field as well as historians, we must deal with perceptions as well as with reality; and the general perception of composition is that it is a recent and questionable discipline with a shallow and inauspicious past.

Knowing our history as rhetoricians is particularly useful today, I think, for reasons illustrated by Stephen North in his *Making of Knowledge in Composition*. Only thirty years into the history of the “modern” field of composition (I am here dating the foundation of composition studies as a serious research discipline back to 1963—an arguable point, I realize), we are already pursuing research paths so disparate that many thoughtful people have feared the discipline may fly apart like a dollar watch. Social constructionists criticize cognitivists. Marxists deride expressivists. Social science-based researchers refuse to cater to “uninformed” readers. Theorists cannot easily speak to each other. Philosophers feel ignored by empiricists, experimenters resent the criticisms of rhetoricians, and teachers feel despised by everyone. It is for this reason, I submit, that part of the intellectual task of composition studies today is to understand the story of composition-rhetoric and use that knowledge to attain unity as a discipline.

In order to effect this unity, we must share our stories. If some of them, even recently, are sad or ridiculous stories, we need to know that, too. Indeed, the successes and heroes of composition-rhetoric may be less instructive than its failures and excesses. Helen Thomas’s bizarre theories about the paragraph being as formal and algorithmic as a geometry theorem are just as important to learn about as Porter Perrin’s progressive condemnation of drill books. The attempted flirtation of wallflower composition with sexy linguistics in the 1950s may not be something we enjoy considering the mean-

ing of, but it is an instructive tale. Like it or not, these have been the ideas that have driven composition-rhetoric. We cannot begin to know ourselves or our current situation without them.

But why is such unity necessary? Why bother? Why not let the centrifuge spin, whipping theorists and empiricists and teachers into separate little boxes? Because we need each other to provide a larger meaning for all our work. We need the communality provided by historical knowledge because of both the peculiarly troubled nature and the unequaled moral power of composition studies as a college discipline. We use our knowledge in unique ways in studying and teaching composition, and we have always thought that our mission was nothing less than to save the world. Composition-rhetoric, for better or worse, is *our* rhetoric, and to know its story is to know our own.

A word about the kind of work I have tried to do here. Though I hope I am not overtly “coughing in ink,” as Yeats characterizes dryasdust scholarship, readers of contemporary historiographies will quickly see that the history in this book is (to use currently popular terms) “antiquarian” rather than “critical.” It means to construct coherent explanations for historical facts and causality, taking archival research as a starting place and consistent control. In that sense it is not “radical” or “subversive” history, and I suppose that means I am (sigh) an epistemologically conservative historian. Yet as I look back on the series of impulses and enthusiasms over the fifteen-year period that went into the making of this work, I see in myself a more complex movement through historiographic theory, one that the current work of revision has perhaps elided.

I began writing about the history of composition teaching in America (with “The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse” in 1980) with a not very well hidden agenda of reforming current practice through reviewing the genesis of its pedagogy. My training had been New Rhetorical; the foundation of composition studies as a discipline was in full swing; and criticizing the older methods of teaching writing that had been handed down to us was an almost automatic task for one beginning historical study. The theme of my early work was taken almost completely from my admiration for Albert Kitzhaber’s historical writing—as filtered through the emotions of a twenty-nine-year-old who had a decade earlier been marching at the Student Strike of 1970. It was a simple theme: our composition predecessors were fools, and we now see through their mediocre work and can transcend it, thus ushering in the millennium. Gathering my data almost completely from textbooks, it was easy to keep up the mood of impatient dismissal I

now see in much of that early work. It was certainly critical history in the popular sense of that term.

But, unfortunately for the purity of my Manichaean vision, I kept reading. I began to read the old journal articles and professional books; I began to know the voices, and I began to see the outlines of what our disciplinary ancestors were trying to understand and were up against. By the middle 1980s I knew more about the cultures, and the societal pressures, and the conditions under which people often worked, and the struggle that teaching writing has always been. And, to tell the truth, my earlier mode of critical dismissal, which was based on a shallow reading of one kind of source, became something I could no longer maintain. The more deeply I looked, the more I could see myself and my colleagues and friends in the words and works of people in 1930 or 1905 or 1870—people for whom, just as for us, times were always clangingly modern and pressures were always great, paper grades were always due, and tomorrow was always mysterious. Who was it who said that to understand all is to forgive all?

Then came a point in the later 1980s when I deliberately turned my gaze outward, away from the development of theory and pedagogy in vacuo and toward the cultural matrix that supported the teaching of writing. It was in this later work that I once again began to move more toward a sort of critical history—investigations of class, social structure, economics, and gender that make up most of the first section of this book. I have not, even in these chapters, gone as far toward ideologically based critical historiography as many people feel contemporary historians should. Such history begins with certain critical assumptions (Marxism, say, or American feminism, or Lacanian psychology) and uses them as an instrument with which to approach archival material. I have not done that here.

I am certainly aware of the arguments of revisionist historiographers, and I must admit I worried over whether or not to turn my book into subversive history. But even if I were starting the book over from scratch, I am not sure how I could address myself to the critical sort of history some readers would apparently like to see. Should it be a poststructuralist bash at the benighted rationalist attitudes or the oppressive patriarchal values that have underlain comp courses? Susan Miller has already done a pass at that in *Textual Carnivals*. Should it be a Marxo-constructivist exposé of the fact that writing instruction has always been in the service of hierarchy, elitism, and a vision of capitalist individualism? The late Wallace Douglas and the late Jim Berlin did a great deal of that sort of work. Should I try for a purely feminist analysis of composition history like Sue Carter Simmons, or an everything-must-go postdeconstructive line like Victor Vitanza? Underly-

ing my interior dialogue about these questions was my fear that unless I foregrounded my ideology and theoretic, the sophisticated critical discourse that more and more makes CCCC sound like MLA would dismiss my book as, in fact, undertheorized. In an academic world that valorizes theory the way ours does today, this is a pretty awful charge, one that carries much unspoken baggage: undertheorized work is naive, politically immature, ill-read, unenlightened, culturally backward.

In defense of my decision to write this book as history instead of historiography, I can only say that *reading* history has taught me one overwhelming lesson, and that is the transitory nature of the current wisdom. Choosing and promoting a theoretical perspective as your own personal Master Trope—the terministic screen through which you propose to look at everything—pins you in time, wriggling like a bug on a board. It will sooner or later relegate your work to the realm of the Historically Interesting. Where are the Archetype Critics of today? The Chicago Formalists? The Socialist Realists? In our field, for that matter, where are the Pure Cognitivists? The Macrorieite Third Way People? The Sentence-Combining Mafia? The Composition Empiricists? (I know—they're at their old stands, *RTE* and *AERA*, but they sure don't run the show the way they did in 1984, say.) People aren't still reading Herodotus or Gibbon today because of the way they foregrounded their historiographic theories.

If I were to have written this book to conform to one or another of the currently popular theoretical/critical stances (many of whose points, I should say, I agree with, since I live here in this cultural and historical moment, too), I would be afraid that the simple-minded story I hope to tell would get lost in the ideology, would end up serving the theory. I simply have not wit enough to foreground an ideology and also tell the story of what I found and all the complexity I perceive in it. Anyway, the ideologies and theories have plenty of servants already. They don't need my story, too.

This is not to say, of course, that this narrative has no theory behind it. Of course it does. It is based on an essentially rationalist and even empirical kind of traditional textual historical research, assumes Aristotelian causality, and accepts a Deweyan pragmatic epistemology. It drifts toward Marxist class analysis now and then, but finally backs away from any overarching theory of history, either progressive or cyclical. The narrative reflects a politics traditionally called liberal (which now, I suppose, is usually characterized as conservative). Though culture and society—both macro and disciplinary micro—are charged and criticized in several ways throughout, the critique is conducted from the stance of what Richard Rorty calls “banal politics,” a deliberate refusal to adhere to any totalizing theoretical or ideo-

logical vision of the desirable. (Perhaps this is just another way of saying that the book is, ineluctably, in spite of my hopeless romance with Platonism, a work of postmodernist thought.)

This book seems, then, to be a narrative based on found and on sought archival materials, ordered chronologically on the basis of discrete themes, and interrogated—where they are interrogated—from a limited set of consistent questions based in personal observation of things as they are in the present. I want mostly to tell a story, to identify and pin down as much basic textual evidence as possible, so that further discussion from a theoretical base can then proceed from shareable data. This commitment to narrative and to archival fact means I have had to make constant decisions about what does constitute believable evidence; and in that very basic sense, this book is a critical work.

I make no pretension, however, to have produced a work of criticism. I hope that many different kinds of analysis will be brought to the stories I try to limn here by different critics, and that the carnivals, aporias, dialogues, false consciousness, tropes, gender inequalities, ideological mystification, power relations, and postrational integration that I only sketch or suggest here (or, even more interestingly, fail to sketch or suggest) will be taken up more completely by my partner in crime, the reader. In other words, to use a dichotomy I learned as a first-year master's candidate (and which has probably been discredited while I wasn't looking), this book means to be a work of scholarship rather than of criticism. Whether it succeeds at that goal or not remains to be seen.