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3 Composition-Rhetoric, Grammar, and Mechanical Correctness

Throughout most of its history as a college subject, English composition has meant one thing to most people: the single-minded enforcement of standards of mechanical and grammatical correctness in writing. The image of a grim-faced Miss Grundy, besprinkling the essays of her luckless students with scarlet handbook hieroglyphs, is still a common stereotype. Neither is it unearned; only in the last twenty-five years have composition instructors seriously begun to question the priority given to simple correctness in college-level instruction. We have already discussed some of the forces that turned "rhetoric" into "composition," transforming instruction in oral techniques of persuasion into written multimodal techniques. But what was it that created composition-rhetoric's narrow concern for convention on the most basic levels, transmogrifying the discipline of Aristotle, Cicero, Campbell, into a stultifying error hunt? In this chapter I want to examine some of the social and cultural forces that shaped nineteenth-century rhetorical pedagogy and resulted in the obsession with "grammar" and mechanical correctness that defined Consolidation-period and Modern composition-rhetoric.

Comparing nineteenth-century American rhetoric to that of all other countries, it becomes clear that the required course in English composition is a uniquely American institution. It is also unique within American college education itself. More than any other college subject, composition has been shaped by perceived social and cultural needs; less than any other college subject it has been informed by a genuine body of knowledge crying out to be disseminated. As a result, we need to examine American culture as it surrounded and shaped college rhetoric, and the economic and ideological forces that this culture brought to bear on the teaching of writing.

Part of this cultural baggage has always revolved around the relationship between class and "good grammar," and we cannot understand composition-rhetoric unless we understand its relations with grammar, a very wide background term. The relationship of teaching composition to the various bodies of knowledge and prejudice called "grammar" has always been problematical, but the relationship of composition-rhetoric to these areas at the college level is positively byzantine. The different meanings and cultural baggage associated with the term "grammar" have for the past century and a half been important in determining the pedagogical development of composition-rhetoric, however. And to understand the development of American composition I would like to unpack some of them in terms of their relationship with American culture.

Attitudes Toward Language in the Early Nineteenth Century

During the first fifty years of the nineteenth century, the new nation of the United States was striving to define itself as a culture. Populist elements were increasingly powerful after 1800. Jeffersonian and then Jacksonian democracy had produced an ethic of egalitarianism that extended into all areas of national life, including education and language. During the earlier part of the century, Americans tended to be almost contentious in their rejection of imposed hierarchies of social value. This was a unique cultural situation, and it was due partially to the American educational structure. After the American Revolution, primary education was available to all classes as it had never been before, and except in very rural areas, most children were given a chance to learn basic literacy skills. By 1831, when Alexis de Tocqueville made his tour of the United States, he saw thousands of public elementary schools—but relatively few colleges.[1] As Tocqueville put it, "there is no other country in the world where, proportionally to population, there are so few ignorant and so few learned individuals as in America. Primary education is within reach of all; higher education is hardly available to anybody" (*Democracy in America,* 55).

The equality of prospect that Tocqueville marked as the most obvious feature of American democracy was to have several effects upon the national attitude toward language use. Most people were taught reading and writing in elementary school and emerged at the age of twelve or so with all the

schooling they were to see; thus grew up a (relatively basic) common denominator of expression.[2] For a time, it seemed that linguistic class distinctions would disappear. As Tocqueville put it:

> when men are no longer held to a fixed social position, when they continually see one another and talk together, when castes are destroyed and classes change and merge, all of the words of a language get mixed up too. Those which cannot please the majority die; the rest form a common stock from which each man chooses at random. . . . Not only does everyone use the same words, but they get into the habit of using them without discrimination. The rules of style are destroyed. Hardly any expressions seem, by their nature, vulgar, and hardly any seem refined. (480)

Tocqueville visited a nation in which elementary schools were emphasizing grammar instruction as an abstract mental discipline and where only a very few men could aspire to college training, a training that led nearly inevitably to the closed circles of pulpit and bar. Such college-educated men were too few and too specialized to provide a real linguistic aristocracy, and thus for a time the common denominator prevailed in language.

Nineteenth-century America, however, was a culture in transition, and the linguistic leveling that Tocqueville reported was beginning to melt away even as he published his first volume of *Democracy in America.* The period 1830–1870 saw the rise of forces that would gradually overcome the egalitarianism of the earlier part of the century. At some point after 1840, the social common denominator stopped falling and began to rise as a class system reasserted its importance. Americans became newly aware of and concerned about their speaking and writing habits.

The reasons for this awakening interest in correctness of usage and the niceties of grammatical construction are both cultural and pedagogical. Culturally, the period 1820–1860 was the American Renaissance, an era that saw the rise of a secular literary-intellectual culture in America. For the first time, the New World produced writers and poets who could stand with the best of the old—and who also wished to stand separate from the old. Tocqueville's comment that "American authors may fairly be said to live more in England than in America," might seem accurate for 1831, but by the 1840s it was rapidly becoming outdated with reference to writers such as Irving, Hawthorne, Poe, Emerson, and many others. The frontier was being pushed westward, and eastern cities were developing cosmopolitan attributes, generating indigenous intellectual elites and atmospheres, far removed from the rough-and-tumble agrarian equality of the earlier part of the century. Classes, based both upon wealth and upon education, were beginning to

form—and where there is class distinction, linguistic distinctions are not far behind.[3]

In addition, the character of school instruction in language was also changing. Grammar instruction in the United States became an important aspect of primary education as the primary schools themselves became more common after 1800. Rollo Lyman tells us:

> English grammar gained momentum as the hold of Latin Grammar weakened [during the post–Revolutionary War period], and by the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century it became so generally taught that the common term grammar school, formerly applied to the secondary school of the Latin-grammar type, was now by common consent used to designate an intermediate school with English grammar as its central study. After 1825 the prominence of English grammar became gradually more marked, until it reached its height about 1850–1875.[4] (*English Grammar,* 5)

Lyman calls the period around 1860 "the heyday of grammar," and it is no accident that it coincides with the first great period of American linguistic insecurity.

In order to understand how grammar has affected teaching writing, it will first be necessary to look briefly at the way traditional grammar was taught in America prior to the rise of modern linguistics. Around the time of the American Revolution, the study of formal English grammar became a popular subject in the common schools of America. The year 1775 is the date set by Lyman for the beginning of a fifty-year rise of vernacular grammar in elementary and secondary schools (5). The study of the classical languages had always been central to the more elitist European educational system, but in the new United States, English grammar replaced the study of Latin grammar among the earlier school grades as Latin and Greek ceased to be the core of every curriculum. Soon grammar was so much at the center of elementary study that elementary schools became known as grammar schools, an appellation that exists even today. Study of English grammar reached its peak influence around 1850, at a time when grammar was the main subject of a pupil's first six grades.

Before 1850 or so, early grammar instruction had nothing to do with composing essays or even with constructing sentences. It was a formal discipline that demanded a great deal of rote memorization of terms, complex analyses of given sentences, and suspicious patrols through other sentences searching for errors. As Charles C. Fries put it, the basis of this early formal grammar study was very different from modern linguistic science; it had as its end not "*description* for the sake of *prediction*" but "*analysis* for the sake of

classification" ("Linguistic Science,"152). Grammar was not, in any sense, a creative field of study; rather, it was meant as a mental discipline, training the mind for rigorous thought.

Most centrally, grammar as a discipline had little to do with composition per se, though they were often taught together.[5] Before 1850, traditional grammar teaching methods were threefold, and none of the three traditional pedagogies was concerned with the development of writing skill. First, pupils were made to memorize the parts of speech, all the rules of declension, conjugation, gender, number, case, degree, tense, mood, person, and countless others. Second, they were forced to apply and demonstrate these rules in oral exercises called "parsing," which asked pupils to give definitions and applicable rules for every word in a sentence provided by the teacher. Here is an example of a sentence partially parsed, from what was the paradigmatic grammar text for nineteenth-century America, Lindley Murray's best-selling *English Grammar* of 1795:

> "We should be kind to them, who are unkind to us."
>
> *We* is a personal pronoun, of the first person, the plural number, and in the nominative case. (*Decline it.*) *Should be* is an irregular verb neuter, in the potential mood, the imperfect tense, and the first person plural. (*Repeat the present tense, etc.*) *Kind* is an adjective, in the positive state. (*Repeat the degrees of comparison.*) *To* is a preposition. *Them* is a personal pronoun, of the third person, the plural number, and in the objective case. (*Decline it.*) *Who* is a relative pronoun, and in the nominative case. (*Decline it.*) (333)

The example goes on, but the point is made. The third sort of grammar exercise was introduced by Robert Lowth in his *Short Introduction* of 1758, and was used by every major grammar textbook through 1850. It consisted of the teacher's providing examples of ungrammatical sentences, either orally or in written form, and asking pupils to correct the ungrammaticality and then state the rules and definitions by which the repair was made. These false syntax exercises fostered a spirit of anxiety and suspicion about grammar that was not long in pervading the entire linguistic culture of the new nation.[6]

This sort of teaching of formal grammar in American elementary and high schools reached its high point around midcentury and then began to lose popularity. It was becoming apparent to teachers and thoughtful parents that grammar as it was commonly taught had few demonstrable effects. Gradually more teachers and school board officials began to see the mental discipline claims of grammar instructions as will-o'-the-wisp, and the claims

that knowledge of grammatical categories fostered literate skills as demonstrably false. William H. Wells, one of the earliest professors of the system of inductive grammar (his textbook appeared in 1846), had lost faith in grammatical study by 1865, when he wrote that a student "may have the whole grammar book by heart, and yet not be able to make a respectable speech. . . . The great object to be attained, is not the mastery of a text-book in grammar, but the acquisition of language" ("Teaching English Grammar," 148–49). In addition, some began to question whether English even had a grammar, so poorly did the language seem to fit into the accepted inflected structure of Latin grammar. In *Words and Their Uses* in 1870, Richard Grant White claimed that English was a grammarless language, and many believed the claim.

As a result, the traditional teaching of formal grammar at the precollege level was in deep trouble by the 1880s. The state of Connecticut dropped all grammar teaching during this period, claiming it was hateful to students and did not help them to speak or write better (Barbour). On the level of theory, more philologists were coming to agree with pioneer linguist George P. Marsh:

> So far as respects English or any other uninflected speech, a knowledge of grammar is rather a matter of convenience as a nomenclature, a medium of thought and discussion *about* language than a guide to the actual use of it, and it is as impossible to acquire the complete command of our own tongue by the study of grammatical precept, as to learn to walk or swim by attending a course of lectures on anatomy. (*Lectures,* 87–88)

Marsh believed that in English "grammar has little use except to systematize," and people were beginning to question why such an abstract system should be at the core of American school education.

Yet, although its early methods were being seriously questioned, grammar was far from defunct. Educators (a conservative group in the nineteenth century) were shoring up fragments against the ruin of their central subject, and between 1850 and 1880 a new pedagogy for grammar was born, one based not on abstract learning of formal grammar but rather on using grammar in sentences.

Part of the reason for this widening of the methods of teaching grammar was the importation from Europe of newer inductive forms of pedagogy. Something new and important appeared in grammar pedagogy: "creative" and compositional elements were gradually added to the memorization and dissection exercises already used. Most important to this movement toward incorporating writing and grammar were the many editions of

Samuel S.Greene's *Analysis* of 1847. Greene was the first important grammarian to include original sentence writing as part of each of his grammar lessons, usually ending a series of models and parsing exercises with instructions for student writing. For instance,

> Write fifteen sentences of your own, limiting the subjects of the first five by a compound adjective element, the predicates of the next five by a compound objective element, and the predicates of the last five by a compound adverbial element. (*Analysis*, 79)

Greene's work was very popular, but in spite of his popularity, the field of grammar took time to respond. Many books continued overwhelmingly formalistic and abstract, having little to do with communications skills as they really existed. Through the Civil War era, most grammarians contrived to accept Lindley Murray's definition of grammar as "the art of speaking and writing the English language with propriety," and school grammar was still an attempt to instill, through rigid taxonomic practice, this knowledge of correctness.

But the more creative method based on Greene's *Analysis* steadily gained adherents. This pedagogy—which came to be called "sentence building" or "language lessons," after William Swinton's popular textbook *Language Lessons*, which appeared in 1873 (Bean, "Taught in America," 311)—focused on writing and then examining the student's own sentences rather than on rote memorization and parsing. The new pedagogy was given its greatest boost in 1877, when Alonzo Reed and Brainerd Kellogg first published their influential *Higher Lessons in English*.

Reed and Kellogg admit that grammar "is very insecure. Children are not enthusiastic in praise of grammar, most parents recall without pleasure their own trials with it, and many men of culture and of wisdom openly advise its banishment from the school-room" (*Higher Lessons*, 3). The authors believe that grammar is necessary but warn that "it must bear on its branches more obvious and more *serviceable* fruit, or the tree will be hewn down and cast out of the way" (3). The answer was to "make the Science of the Language, of which all the essentials are thoroughly presented, tributary to the Art of Expression." The book was filled with practices, exercises, and drills, but these were not so different from Swinton's drills. What really set Reed and Kellogg apart was their invention of the sentence diagram, the familiar straight-line diagram that was still used in the 1990s to demonstrate sentence structure. One of their original examples appears in figure 2. Breathes there an American educated before 1970 who does not recognize (most often with a sinking feeling) the sentence diagram? Diagrams could be used to

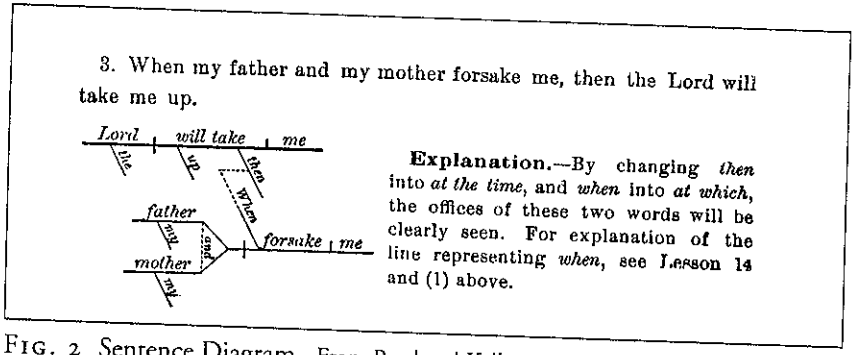


FIG. 2 Sentence Diagram. From Reed and Kellogg, *Higher Lessons in English*, rev. ed., 110.

test students, as blackboard assignments, as homework, as creative exercises. Their physical simplicity masked the complex judgments they required (some of which were arguable, thus always allowing the teacher to "win"), and they could be as short or as long as the teacher wished.

Diagrams quickly became the grammar pedagogy of choice in the middle and high schools. Reed and Kellogg's system provided a new defense for sentence-based grammar pedagogy; it can even be argued that the diagram-based analysis of sentences originating with *Higher Lessons* was *the* essential grammar pedagogy from 1880 through 1970. It was critiqued around the beginning of the century by several theorists, most notably Gertrude Buck ("Make-Believe Grammar"), for its mechanical and linear nature. Other critics of diagram-based texts called attention to the confusing variation of names and terms in different grammar texts.[7] Despite the criticism leveled at it, however, no system was put forward to supplant the Reed and Kellogg–based "sentence study" method. This became the background method for most of the discussions of grammar conducted on the college level prior to 1925 or so.

Grammar-school education, to which more than 90 percent of nineteenth-century Americans of both sexes had access, created an awareness of English grammar that was deep and widespread—if somewhat problematical. The rise of interest in vernacular grammar had led by the 1840s to a new and often uncomfortable awareness on Americans' parts of the concepts of "correctness" and "grammaticality." In large part, this new awareness resulted from new instructional methods in grammar classes. Lindley Murray, whose immensely popular *English Grammar* was the best-selling grammar text in America prior to 1825, utilized a correct/incorrect duality borrowed from the pedagogy used to enforce the learning of Latin grammar, and his

approach emphasized a binary, good-or-bad attitude toward each sentence studied. Samuel Kirkham, whose 1829 *English Grammar in Familiar Lectures* took up the market as Murray began to falter, made heavy use of false syntax exercises—lists of sentences larded with errors in grammar and usage that students were supposed to identify and correct. These exercises fostered an attitude of suspicion toward everything written, and as Edward Finegan suggests, Murray and Kirkham have to be held at least partly responsible for later negativistic and absolutist attitudes toward language (*Attitudes Toward English Usage*, 47–54).[8]

Meanwhile, class structures and the distinctions they create were solidifying. A gentry needs symbolic representations of its gentility, and the age of Victorian gentility was beginning. In the 1840s we begin to see a new movement in the United States, a movement whose desiderata were proper usage and grammatical correctness in speech and writing. This new interest seems to have sprung from two distinct proximate causes: the eastern reaction against the roughness and crudeness of frontier America, an attitude that wished to set standards of propriety in language as in all other aspects of life; and the desire for self-improvement and getting ahead, which was an important part of the American mythos during the nineteenth century. These two elements were found mixed into most of the early works on "good language." The first can be seen clearly during the late 1840s in an address given to the Newburyport Girls' High School by Andrew Peabody, chaplain at Harvard College. Peabody spoke to the girls on "Conversation," and the point of his remarks was that his audience should strive to establish a proper and correct linguistic ambience about them, should raise the tone wherever they were:

> Young ladies do more than any other class in the community towards establishing the general tone and standard of social intercourse . . . you are fast approaching an age when you will take prominent places in general society; will be the objects of peculiar regard; and will, in a great measure, determine whether the social converse in your respective circles shall be vulgar or refined. (10–11)

Peabody goes on to warn against faulty pronunciation, "ungrammatical vulgarisms," and other "untasteful practices" in conversation. His *Handbook of Conversation: Mistakes of Speaking and Writing Corrected* included this address as well as several other short pieces of linguistic prescription, and it remained in print from 1855 through 1882. Peabody's *Handbook* shows how early the cultural lines between "refined" and "vulgar" language were being drawn. His use of "vulgar" is especially noteworthy; it's not a term previously heard very often in America outside of lectures on rhetoric. It's an essentially elitist term foreign to the ethos of Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy, but through the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s we hear it used more and more.

In 1847, the year that Peabody first gave his Newburyport address, there appeared a book less popular but more important as a harbinger of things to come. This was Seth T. Hurd's self-improvement manual, *A Grammatical Corrector*. Between 1826 and 1834, Hurd had spent his winters as a "public lecturer" on English grammar, probably at the lyceums then coming to popularity (Bode). In his capacity as a traveling lecturer—a sort of early Chautauqua figure—he visited "almost every section of the United States." Hurd explained his method thus: "The common errors and peculiarities of speech, which were found to prevail in different communities, were carefully noted down and preserved, not only as a source of amusement (to myself), but for the purpose of correction and comment in the Lecture-room" (v). The epigraph on his title page describes the contents of the *Grammatical Corrector* better than anything else:

> Being a collection of nearly two thousand barbarisms, cant phrases, colloquialisms, quaint expressions, provincialisms, false pronunciation, perversions, misapplications of terms and other kindred errors of the English language peculiar to the different States of the Union. The whole explained, corrected, and conveniently arranged for the use of schools and private individuals.

Given his general attitude and modus operandi, it is no wonder that Hurd kept moving on. Painful though it might have been for them, however, Hurd's audiences in the 1830s were interested in having their "barbarisms" corrected, in being told that "done up brown" was "a very low phrase." Hurd's general audiences at such lyceum lectures obviously had wider agendas than mere politeness or gentility; theirs was an interest in self-improvement that was as much concerned with getting ahead in the developing class-structured society of the United States as it was with "raising the tone of the home." Hurd was more than an early Victorian John Simon, shaking his readers down while he attacked their language habits as uneducated, impolite, inelegant, and vulgar; in his constant references to "the gentry" and "one's betters" there are elements of Gatsbian self-improvement as well as a precursor to Dale Carnegie's commercial approach to influencing businessmen.

Usage, Correctness, and Social Position

These beginnings of linguistic status anxiety in the 1840s and 1850s grew stronger in the 1860s, when much of the American intellectual community was influenced by a small book written by an Englishman. *A Plea for the Queen's English,* by Henry Alford, who was Dean of Westminster and a noted British intellectual, appeared in 1864; it would see eleven British and American printings and remain in print until 1893. In it, "the Dean" (as he was called by his opponents and fellow controversialists) attacked much current usage, both literary and popular, striking out at poor pronunciation, wrong words, improper sentence construction, and other "objectionable" misuses of English. The Dean's book raised a number of hackles in England, but to Americans it was a particularly stinging rebuke, for Alford was bitterly anti-American in addition to being a linguistic purist:[9]

> the language of a people is no trifle. The national mind is reflected in the national speech. . . . Every important feature in a people's language is reflected in its character and history. Look, to take one familiar example, at the process of deterioration which our Queen's English has undergone at the hands of the Americans. Look at those phrases which so amuse us in their speech and books; at their reckless imagination, and contempt for congruity; and then compare the character and history of the nation—its blunted sense of moral obligation and duty to man; its disregard for conventional right where aggrandizement is to be obtained. . . . Such examples as this . . . may serve to show that language is no trifle. (*A Plea,* 5–6)

These was fightin' words in 1864, and America was not long in producing champions to field against the Dean. The great prescriptive-usage war of the Victorian era was on.

The Alford debates, which lasted through the 1860s and into the early 1870s, were not an edifying spectacle. There was little philosophical discussion and much snobbish huffing. Like the Dean, most of his antagonists contented themselves with nitpicking and mean-spirited criticism of this or that usage found in this or that source. Best known of the Dean's antagonists in these debates were George Washington Moon, an expatriate American living in England, and Edward S. Gould, a New York journeyman intellectual. Moon slashingly attacked Alford's own grammar and usage in *The Dean's English* of 1865 and *Bad English* of 1867. Gould's contribution was published in 1867 as *Good English: or Popular Errors in Language,* and it shows how conscious of language the American reading public was becoming:

> The present age is pre-eminently an age of progress; and, unfortunately, the progress is not limited to "things of good report." Error follows fast upon the footsteps of truth, and sometimes truth is left behind in the race.
>
> For example, the English language, within the last quarter of a century, through the agency of good writers, critics, and lexicographers, has in many respects been greatly improved; but, through the heedlessness of those who should be its conservators, and the recklessness of those who have been, and are, its corruptors, it has deteriorated in other respects in a greater proportion. (*Good English,* 1)

Dean Alford was wrong about where the deterioration lay, argued Gould and Moon, but neither argued that it did not exist. In fact, the deterioration of English at the hands of uneducated frontiersmen was what these easterners excoriated most violently.

A linguistic base for class distinctions was the hidden agenda of this debate. Richard Meade Bache put the case most clearly in the preface to his 1869 *Vulgarisms and Other Errors of Speech:*

> Many persons, although they have not enjoyed advantages early in life, have, through merit combined with the unrivalled opportunities which this country presents, risen to station in society. Few of them, it must be thought, even if unaware of the extent of their deficiency in knowledge of their language, are so obtuse as not to perceive their deficiency at all, and not to know that it often presents them in an unfavorable light in their association with the more favoured children of fortune. Few, it must be believed, would not from one motive or the other, from desire for knowledge, or from dread of ridicule, gladly avail themselves of opportunities for instruction. (Preface)

More than any of the other early prescriptive philologists, Bache realized that the changing nature of American society itself was behind the interest in correct speech and writing that sold so many of the nitpicking books of Alford, Moon, and Gould.

The Alford controversy had powerful consequences in an increasingly self-conscious America. As a result of it, William Mathews wrote in 1876, "hundred of persons who before felt a profound indifference to this subject . . . have suddenly found themselves . . . deeply interested in questions of grammar, and now, with their appetites whetted, will continue the study . . ." (*Words,* 5). The 1870s and 1880s saw a spate of nonacademic little "manuals of correctness" covering both conversation and writing.[10] The general ethos of these manuals can be summed up by the quote from Swift that

Alfred Ayres (Thomas E. Osmun) chose as the epigraph to *The Verbalist: A Manual* (1881): "As a man is known by his company, so a man's company may be known by his manner of expressing himself."

Though we tend today to think of the Gilded Age as a time when wealth, status, and vulgarity combined in an unprecedented way, it was also a time when the concept of proper society exerted a powerful conservative influence. Wealth might make vulgarity tolerated, but it could never make arrivistes truly acceptable; thus the children of horny-handed captains of industry were carefully tutored by hired intellectuals and were shipped to Harvard, Yale, and Princeton to be finished off. Propriety—most obviously reflected in a person's way of speaking—was the desire of even the crassest "new money"; and true propriety could not be purchased, it had to be learned.

Colleges had always assumed part of that burden of socialization, and during the 1870s they began to react directly to these changing cultural attitudes. This was a period when American college education was undergoing a number of other profound shifts in emphasis. Universities were developing; women were going to college; the A&M schools were opening; and the older college ideal of classical study and mental discipline was fast retreating as colleges, striving to attract students and meet changing cultural needs, instituted sweeping curricular changes. Their potential clientele, they were discovering, no longer consisted of aspiring lawyers, ministers, and gentlemen; the growth of vocational specialties and of the concept of college as training in social acceptability meant that the purposes behind enrollment were much broader. Students wanted something new after the Civil War, and the colleges and universities underwent radical changes as they scrambled to give it them.

Changes in the College Rhetoric Course

It was impossible that the college course in rhetoric and writing should be unaffected by these shifts, and the focus of writing instruction in America underwent a radical change. The years 1865–1910, which I am calling the periods of Postwar and Consolidation composition-rhetoric, were years of wrenching necessity and desperate invention that only slowly eventuated in Modern composition-rhetoric. Like the rest of the traditional college curriculum, rhetorical instruction was forced to move away from the abstract educational ideal of "mental discipline" and toward more immediate instructional goals.[11] The immediate goals in this case came to involve simple mechanical correctness instead of more effective written communication. In this sense, at least, Postwar and Consolidation composition-rhetoric

were genuinely antithetical to traditional rhetoric. Let's look at how this occurred.

To fully appreciate this antithesis, we must be aware that the idea of teaching grammatical or mechanical correctness on the college level does not go farther back than 1870. From the classical period up through 1860 or so, the teaching of rhetoric concentrated on theoretical concerns and contained no mechanical material at all. Usage and style were major areas of rhetorical consideration, but traditional prescriptive advice in these areas assumed a student able to handle grammatical construction and to produce an acceptable manuscript with facility. The Greek or Roman rhetorician would have been scandalized by the suggestion that he profess the structure of the language on any level. That job, dirty but necessary, was the responsibility of the *grammaticus,* the lower-grade teacher who made certain that pupils could speak with correctness. Only when this knowledge of pure and correct language was assured would the rhetorician take over and teach the pupil to discourse with eloquence. This essential split between grammar and rhetoric existed unchanged and unquestioned throughout the eighteenth century. The brilliant George Campbell, hardly a purveyor of unexamined tradition, in 1776 put it thus:

> Now, the grammatical art hath its completion in syntax; the oratorical, as far as the body of expression is concerned, in style. Syntax regards only the composition of many words into one sentence; style, at the same time that it attends to this, regards further the composition of many sentences into one discourse. Nor is this the only difference; the grammarian . . . requires only purity. . . . The orator requires also beauty and strength. The highest aim of the former is the lowest aim of the latter; where grammar ends eloquence begins. Thus the grammarian's department bears much the same relation to the orator's which the art of the mason bears to that of the architect. (35)

Campbell is not sneering here at grammar (he discusses grammatical purity at some length when covering good usage), but he does wish to differentiate it clearly from the rhetorical theory that absorbed his interest.

Campbell's attitude toward grammar was not, however, shared by Hugh Blair, whose 1783 *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* became the most influential of the eighteenth-century rhetorics. Instruction in formal English grammar had begun in both England and America around 1750, and Blair saw, as Campbell did not, that an English rhetoric would have to come to terms with English grammar. "Grammar," wrote Blair in one of his two chapters covering it,

> is apt to be slighted by superficial thinkers as belonging to those rudiments of knowledge, which were inculcated upon us in our earliest youth. But what was then inculcated before we could comprehend its principles, would abundantly repay our study in maturer years; and to the ignorance of it, must be attributed many of those fundamental defects which appear in writing. (*Lectures*, 78)

Blair gave grammar a place in two of his forty-six lectures, covering all the parts of speech and something of the origins of English. This discussion, thought Blair, was necessary, for without a knowledge of grammar as a formal system good writing was impossible. Good style demanded grammatical purity and propriety, and "If any imagine they can catch it merely by the ear, or acquire it by a slight perusal of some of our good authors, they will find themselves much disappointed" (101). This idea became an article of faith for several generations of teachers of vernacular composition, who came to see a complete knowledge of English grammar as a panacea for all ills in writing.

The gradual absorption of grammar by rhetoric began slowly, however. There were early academy textbooks like Russell's *A Grammar of Composition* (1823), but most of the texts of the pre-1850 period were nearly all of two kinds: either they were based upon Blair's *Lectures* and contained much rhetorical theory and only a passing mention of grammar, or they were based upon Murray's *English Grammar* and were overwhelmingly grammatical with perhaps a few pages on "Purity, Propriety, Precision, and Perspicuity" in writing. Rhetoricians before 1850 were generally able to assume preexisting understanding of the "rules" and terms of grammar on the part of their readers. At the very least, students of rhetoric were supposed to have mastered the necessities of "Correctness," which, as Samuel Newman said in his *Practical System* of 1827, "is to be learned from the rules and principles of syntax" (136).

Rhetoric, however, was still mostly thought a higher mystery, one concerned with more than the grammarian's correctness. The rhetoric of the period before 1850 was primarily Blairian: taxonomic, abstract and theoretical, concerned with style, taste, and systems of rules and principles rather than with creative methods. Before 1860 or so, there was very little actual practice in composition in rhetoric courses; such courses consisted of lectures on or textbook study of a system. For such a rhetorical tradition, chockfull of its own theoretical content, there was little need for the rules and definitions of grammar, a separate system. For traditional rhetoricians, grammatical instruction was as unthinkable as teaching gymnastic tumbling.

But rhetoric in America was changing, and with its change came the development of the teaching rhetoric of written composition that has come down to us as Modern composition-rhetoric. The period 1860–1910 was a time when systematic theoretical rhetoric was largely replaced by an intensely practical course in correct writing, and a large part of this change came about as a result of the mixture of the "practical" sentence-based grammar of Greene and Reed and Kellogg with the newly practical subject of English composition. During the 1850s and 1860s, it was becoming apparent to those teachers who did demand writing from students that the older theoretical rhetoric of Blair had little effect on students' ability to write. At first the idea that grammar instruction could solve the problem did not seem obvious, and only one early text, George P. Quackenbos's *Advanced Course of Composition and Rhetoric* (1854), tried mixing the new sentence-building grammar with rhetorical lessons.

During the 1860s, however, several phenomena converged to create a new situation for grammar.First, formal grammar came under attack for being sterile and impractical. Second, the teaching of rhetoric became more concerned with writing, and with a written product came the ideal of correctness as well as that of eloquence. Third, U.S. culture as a whole became more aware of correct speaking and writing as indices of status and professional worth. After the Civil War, with the Union saved and the beginnings of the drastic social stratification of the Gilded Age, proper language came to have new importance. Surely, thought teachers of the new field of English, the novel "creative" grammar pedagogies could work together with rhetoric to meet these needs.

A few theorists saw that rhetoric and grammar would be melded in the developing discipline of composition and they strove to create an intellectually defensible synthesis of the two. Some, like the grammarian William Wells, saw a new discipline in which practice in writing would be the central pedagogical technique, "where analysis and parsing will find their appropriate place as collateral aids in connection with the daily living exercises in the use of the English tongue" ("Methods of Teaching," 149). Rhetorician Henry Day, always a theoretical pioneer, published his *Grammatical Synthesis: The Art of English Composition* in 1867. This book, which meant to unite Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic in one study because all were "grounded in the basis of Thought," never attained great popularity; like most of Day's work it was too original—and too turgidly written—for its own good. *Grammatical Synthesis* showed, however, that by the late 1860s some teachers, and at least some colleges, were beginning to mix grammar with composition.

In a sense, the history of composition-rhetoric in America is a history

of how this heretofore "elementary" instruction took over a commanding place in most teachers' ideas of rhetoric. Between 1865 and 1895, such base-level elements of mechanical correctness as grammar, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization, which would never have been found in pre-1850 textbooks, came to usurp much of the time devoted in class to rhetorical instruction and most of the marking of student writing. What became more to be taught and enforced was correctness, but as Albert Kitzhaber points out, "the sort of correctness desired was superficial and mechanical" (*Rhetoric in American Colleges,* 312). (The very use of the word "correct" changed between 1870 and 1910 from a meaning of "socially acceptable" to one of "formally acceptable.")

We have already examined some of the general causes of this interest in correctness, but for its direct introduction into the rhetoric course we can also identify a proximate cause: In 1874, Harvard University introduced its entrance examination featuring, for the first time, a writing requirement. The reasons for the introduction of this writing requirement were several: a growing awareness of the importance of linguistic class distinctions in the United States; poor showings in written assignments by Harvard undergraduates; a desire to demonstrate that Harvard had the highest standards and deserved its leadership position in American education; a declaration that henceforward writing would be an important element in the college rhetoric course; perhaps a challenge to the academies that supplied the Cambridge institution with raw material.[12]

The examination was introduced and given for the first time during the summer of 1874, and when the English faculty at Harvard received this first test of their candidates' writing ability, they were deeply shocked. The scrawled pages revealed that the graduates of the best academies and preparatory schools in America were writing essays filled with formal and mechanical errors of all sorts. Punctuation, capitalization, spelling, syntax—at every level, error abounded. More than half the students taking these early examinations failed to pass. As Adams S. Hill, who took over the administration of the exam in 1876, put it: "the examination makes a poor showing for the schools that furnish the materials whereof the university which professes to set up the highest standard in America, has to make educated men" ("Answer," 11).

Harvard and other colleges strove mightily to pin the blame for poor freshman writing on the preparatory and secondary schools (where, indeed, much of it did lie), but at the same time, colleges found themselves forced to deal somehow with the results of the poor training they were decrying. The errors students made on their exams were beginning to get a good deal

of publicity and were even becoming something of a national scandal.[13] This could not be borne, and the 1870s and early 1880s saw a great deal of pedagogical innovation as teachers engaged in the first great wave of college-level remedial English. This is the great explosion of experimental pedagogy during what I am calling the Postwar period. Hill's short-term answer to the problem at Harvard was the new course English A, which moved the required sophomore writing course down to freshman year and simplified it. Other schools quickly copied Harvard's move, and Freshman Composition was born.

After the mid-1870s much anxiety was apparent in the public prints bemoaning the "illiteracy of American boys" and suggesting various solutions to the problem. The most popular remedy prescribed for the cure of "illiteracy" was the collection of form-based mechanical lessons that came to be known as "grammar." College students could not write (the reasoning went) because their early grammar lessons had not "taken." Thus the lessons needed to be repeated until the knowledge of parts of speech and rules would transform into the ability to write. From our modern vantage point we now see this as an essentially incorrect idea and identify students' poor writing in 1874 as a result of their lack of composition practice in the academies and schools. Yet grammar, as a result of the conflation of grammar and composition in so many of the elementary texts following Murray, was so much associated in the popular mind with "correct" writing that its power as a panacea for writing ills was still strong in the 1870s and 1880s. In spite of some teachers' reservations about it, grammar still seemed a valid nostrum to many parents—like castor oil, noxious but useful. It was universally hated by children, but its wide primary school use gave it great historical cachet.

Grammar was also attractive, perhaps, because it had been increasingly obvious to writing teachers since the 1860s that the old abstract rhetoric of Blair, Whately, and Day would not solve the formal and mechanical problems given such wide notoriety by the Harvard exams and the literacy crisis they provoked. What good, teachers asked, did knowledge of tropes or amplification do a student who could not spell or punctuate? How did the Style versus Invention debate affect a freshman who could not write a grammatical sentence? Beginning in the 1870s, college-level teaching tools of a simpler sort began to appear. New texts were published that contained simple right/wrong sentence exercises as well as theoretical advice, and college texts such as Jameson's *Rhetorical Method* and Coppens's *Practical Introduction* began for the first time to include sections on simple formal elements of writing such as capitalization and punctuation. Uncased from its elementary school framework and its general association with abstract mental dis-

cipline, grammar was introduced to college students in the 1870s in the hope that somehow a theoretical knowledge of the structure of English would act as a prophylaxis against errors in writing.

Thus was born the soulful trust in the powers of grammar that still rules the methods of some instructors today. After 1885 or so, a large part of the nature of the freshman and sophomore writing course was defined by error avoidance rather than by any sort of genuine communicative success. As Kitzhaber points out, this meant in practice that composition had to be taught as series of explicable rules, and that the writing desired from students was writing that violated none of these rules (*Rhetoric in American Colleges,* 319). The theory that composition-rhetoric developed above the sentence level during the Postwar and Consolidation periods—most important, the modes, paragraph structure, static abstractions, the levels of composition, and the methods of development—was all an attempt to rule-govern the written product. The heart of the rules orientation, however, always remained in grammatical and mechanical application of rules at the sentence level, and that was where many courses concentrated their efforts.

After the mid-1880s, this rule-and-form orientation constituted a sort of hidden agenda in many college writing courses. Unlike the rhetorical theory of the period, which was all developed in textbooks, we find relatively little textbook evidence of the mechanical correctness pedagogy used in most of the composition courses of the 1880s and 1890s. The correctness emphasis was there, we know from student papers that have survived, but texts hardly mention it, concerning themselves with paragraphs, modes, abstractions, and so on. That college composition was fast becoming error-obsessed was like a shameful secret during this period, mentioned only obliquely. Of the four great rhetorical voices of the fin-de-siècle period, only one—John Genung—ever wrote a college-level textbook dealing in any depth with rule-governed formal correctness. What sketchy treatments there were are found in texts by lesser authors. Albert Kitzhaber infers that this lack of textbook treatment of lower-level mechanical questions is a result of the "paragraph boom" of the 1890s and of the low opinion of grammar study developing in the elementary education level (*Rhetoric in American Colleges,* 306). He is undoubtedly correct, but there is, I believe, a further reason: college teachers were ashamed to be found professing grammar, punctuation, and lower-level skills (as many were in 1971 during the second great remedial period, and as many still are).

Thus, in spite of growing evidence of the poor writing of college freshmen and especially the evidence presented to the sound of trumpets by the Harvard Reports of the 1890s, the most notable college teachers of rhetoric

refused in their rhetoric texts to deal with the problem, or to admit that they were dealing with it every day. Instead, they cried out for deliverance by some sort of secondary school *deus ex pedagogia.* E. L. Godkin, one of the Harvard Report authors, was the most outraged spokesman for this Old Guard attitude; throughout the 1890s he urged that college teachers be "delivered, in large part at least, from the necessity of teaching the rudiments of the language" ("Illiteracy of American Boys," 7). Barrett Wendell dealt not at all with mechanics in *English Composition,* nor did A. S. Hill in his earlier college texts (though he had no aversion to including mechanics in his lower-level texts and in his college-level "adjunct materials"). John Genung, in spite of having authored the rules-oriented *Outlines of Rhetoric* in 1893, drew the line at teaching sentence mechanics, sneering in 1900 that basic-level punctuation elements "belong to grammar; they are no more a part of rhetoric than is spelling" (128n). And Fred N. Scott, the most perspicacious of Kitzhaber's Big Four rhetoricians, rejected mechanical emphases for predictably higher reasons: "These matters, after all," he wrote, "are subsidiary. . . . They are means to an end. To treat them as an end in and for themselves is to turn education in this subject upside down" ("What the West Wants," 19). As a result of these attitudes, we see very little mechanical material in the most popular rhetoric texts of the late nineteenth century.

After 1880, however, the lower-level elements of composition were making their ways ineluctably into the college writing course. Grammar was added to rhetorical instruction on the assumption that its primary school application had not "stuck." Charles Bardeen's *A System of Rhetoric* of 1884, for instance, included 139 pages of straight grammar—numbered with Roman numerals and called an "Introduction"—but it also utilized a more old-fashioned organizational system than most popular texts and did not sell well. Beginning in the late 1880s, other text authors made the jump from "rhetoric" to "composition." The words "composition" and "by practice" in a book title were often the code terms for books that included lower-level formal sections and sections on grammar. The first was William Williams's *Composition and Rhetoric by Practice* (1888), which devoted its first sixty pages to grammar and to sentence practice, and remained popular into the 1920s. Williams was immediately copied by Edward Shaw, whose *English Composition by Practice* (1892) was even less concerned with traditional non-grammatical rhetoric than Williams's book.

Make no mistake, however—the introduction of grammar into rhetoric was a battle in a cultural war. We find little evidence of the advance of grammar in most "rhetoric" texts of the day—those that identified themselves with the older tradition. Alexander Bain, A. S. Hill, Barrett Wendell,

Fred Newton Scott, all wrote popular rhetoric texts that had no important grammatical components at all. Of all the major rhetoricians of the last two decades of the century, only John Genung in his *Practical Elements of Rhetoric* (1886) and *Outlines of Rhetoric* (1893) touched on grammar in any important way. Genung's willingness to deal with grammatical elements (he called them "Fundamental Processes") in his books was part of the reason for his tremendous success: between 1887 and 1894 or so, *Practical Elements* was the most popular composition textbook in America. Genung realized that rhetoric was going to have to make peace with grammar one way or another and figured that it might as well be done with dignity. "But even in employing grammatical processes as working-tools," Genung wrote, "rhetoric imparts to them a new quality distinctively rhetorical, the quality by which they become methods in an art, means to an end" (*Practical Elements,* 109). His more basic text *Outlines of Rhetoric* of 1893 was even more open in its acceptance of grammatical theory and syntactic exercises. *Outlines* is a collection of 125 illustrated rules not unlike an expanded version of Abbott's *How to Write Clearly.* Of these, 31 were overtly grammatical rules. *Outlines* was the first text by a major rhetorical author to be so practice-oriented and prescriptively organized.

The Consolidation period of the 1890s, then, was a time of warfare between the old-fashioned rhetoricians and teachers who believed that grammar and rhetoric should remain separate and the newer teachers and authors who had no such qualms. The old guard, many of them educated in Blair's systematic tradition, looked down on the new field of composition as it burgeoned. They decried the illiteracy of students but insisted that secondary schools take the responsibility for education in grammar and formal correctness. There was a powerful feeling on the part of traditionally trained rhetoricians that dealing with grammar would open the floodgates to all sorts of demeaning material, and thus they proselytized the academies for deliverance. It was increasingly clear, however, that they would not soon be so delivered, and younger numbers of the authorial community increasingly produced textbooks that took advantage of the trend toward grammar.

Although more traditional grammar was being included in college rhetorics after 1895, those who wrote about English pedagogy at the time seemed curiously reticent about admitting that the "practicalization" of the course in rhetoric, so much lauded, really meant the supplanting of abstract lectures by low-level formal exercises of a kind previously associated with lower grades. The very word "grammar" seldom appeared in many books except as part of a short discussion about its relation to rhetoric. It was

hardly mentioned that basic grammatical correctness was becoming the prime goal for composition students. One must look at some of the student papers of the period and the comments teachers made upon them to realize how essentially formal and mechanical the criteria for good writing were becoming at most colleges. At the same time that article-writers in *Educational Review* were discussing "philological training" and "the science of language," writing teachers were scrawling red "P"s and "S"s on papers and making their students buy A. S. Hill's pamphlet on grammatical correctness or one of the newer texts that carefully straddled the line between high school and college composition.

It is ironic that just as the teaching of "error-based" grammar was accelerating in college rhetoric, the first major questioning of the use of grammar in teaching writing was occurring in secondary education. The Committee of Ten on the Teaching of Secondary English in 1892 proposed that grammar instruction be limited to the final year of high school, because technical grammar did not serve writing in any demonstrable way. "Although grammatical analysis (as an instrument of interpretation and of criticism) may properly accompany reading and the study of composition, it should not be regarded as a separate subject in the curriculum," wrote the Committee (*Report of the Committee on Secondary School Studies,* 88). Later they made the point explicit: "A student may be taught to speak and write good English without receiving any special instruction in formal grammar" (89). The early educational researcher Joseph Meyer Rice conducted a study in 1904 that led him to divorce writing skill from knowledge of technical grammar:

> I do wish to impress the fact that grammar—i.e., from the standpoint of composition—is merely one of any number of forces that aid in the development of the power of expression, and cannot be looked upon as a substitute for, or a gauge of, the ability to write. . . . The only test of the power of expression is a test of the power of expression. (*Scientific Management,* 246)

The reservations of such progressives as Rice and the Committee of Ten had little effect outside the still small circle of professional education specialists. Formal errors were still perceived as the essential problem to be solved, and teaching "grammatical correctness" in college accelerated after 1900.

Such work was detail-oriented and onerous, and it soon became obvious that new tools would be needed to make college grammar more effective. Edwin Woolley's *Handbook of Composition* reduced the system of English grammar to a series of prescriptive error-based rules in 1907. The *Hand-*

book was not a grammar treatise of the old sort, interested in grammar as a system of mental discipline; as Woolley said in his Preface, "The aim of the book is not scientific, but practical. The purpose is to make clear the rules in regard to which many people make mistakes. No material has been put into the book for the sake of formal completeness" (iv). A far cry from the aims of traditional grammarians from Lowth onward, but Woolley defined here the sort of "grammar" that would henceforward be most people's definition: a set of rules about words and sentences that define mistakes in English as perceived by an English teacher.

The development and use of handbooks after Woolley is another story (see chapter 2), and for the purposes of this discussion, suffice to say that after 1910, grammar was found in the increasingly popular—eventually almost ubiquitous—handbooks (insofar as grammar was part of Modern composition-rhetoric). As the handbook moved closer to centrality in the teaching practices, and especially in the paper-grading and marking practices of teachers, the field of grammar became more important. For secondary school students, "grammar" meant the sentence-building book or the language book; for college students, "grammar" meant the handbook and all of its nearly-impossible-to-recall rule structures.

Rhetoric of the old theoretical and exploratory sort declined in both theory and practice during the period 1910–1930, as the newer pedagogical approaches of Modern composition-rhetoric developed and solidified. Frank Scott wrote in 1918 that "for ten years or so there has been a steady diminution of the amount of rhetorical theory offered in [college textbooks]; that which has been retained has been made more and more elementary" ("Composition," 515). Meanwhile, the sort of grammar being taught in college courses reflected the most old-fashioned, rigid, and puristic prejudices of the nineteenth century filtered through the "common errors" perspective of the early twentieth.

The orientation toward formal correctness that runs through these two periods of composition-rhetoric is primarily associated with grammar, but it also came to include punctuation, which had not been included as part of rhetoric before, and finally even spelling, put into place as a college-level subject. Some detail about the addition of punctuation and spelling to Consolidation composition-rhetoric might be in order here.

Punctuation, which we now tend to think of as one of the lowest-level skills in the range of mechanical writing skills, was not thought so in the nineteenth century. From the earliest records we have of teacher-corrected student papers, the red "p." is the most common teacher mark. This is not

so surprising in itself, but the degree to which many of the rhetorical authors of the nineteenth century were willing to deal with punctuation in their works is. Teachers appeared reconciled to punctuation in ways they were not to grammar and spelling, probably due to the early influence of Lindley Murray's *English Grammar* of 1795. This book included more than twenty pages on punctuation under the rhetorical section. Though Murray confessed that his treatment of punctuation as a system of pauses and stops was "a very imperfect doctrine" (267), it was still influential. By conflating the marking system of written discourse with grammar and with the pause effects of spoken discourse, Murray began a tradition that many other writers, especially on the secondary and academy level, would follow.

Punctuation seems to have been viewed by many authors as a necessary adjunct to written rhetoric, and we do not see as much of the shrinking from it as might be expected. Since punctuation had been one of the prime battlegrounds of the Alford usage wars, it may be that proper punctuation carried a cachet of learning and class approval. In any case, it was widely covered in textbooks. Both Richard Green Parker and George Quackenbos mentioned punctuation in their pre–Civil War textbooks, as would be expected from authors whose first texts were academy-level, but soon clearly college-level books were including punctuation as well. Simon Kerl's *Elements of Composition and Rhetoric* of 1869 devoted two entire chapters to what Kerl called a "supplemental art, used to show the construction and meaning of sentences more distinctly to the eye" (77). Kerl criticized the teaching of "the obsolescent niceties of punctuation," probably of the sort represented by the secondary school descendants of Murray.

John Wilson's *Treatise on English Punctuation,* which was first published as an aid to printers and compositors in 1826, went through three large editions (and innumerable printings) in the nineteenth century, each one making it simpler and more suited for classroom instruction. Filled with rules, examples, and exercises, the third edition of 1871 was a common college classroom tool and may have been used as a sort of early handbook by some teachers. That a whole book devoted to nothing but punctuation did so well indicates how atomistic Postwar composition-rhetoric was becoming by the 1870s, flying in many directions at once. When examining the use of punctuation in Postwar texts, we find a variety of authors including sections on it. It seems to have been almost a philosophical rather than a pedagogical decision to include or not to include it. David J. Hill, a serious rhetorical thinker whom no one can accuse of being a textbook hack, devoted in his *Elements of Rhetoric and Composition* of 1878 a whole chapter

to punctuation (and another to capitalization). Charles Bardeen's radical *A System of Rhetoric* of 1884 contained one whole chapter on punctuation. There is no evidence that the decision to include punctuation needed a defense, as was the case with spelling and grammar.

The challenge to teaching punctuation as part of composition-rhetoric came only during the Consolidation period after 1880, from the Big Four rhetoricians of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, A. S. Hill, Genung, Wendell, and Scott. These teachers were powerful figures, serious intellectuals without being hidebound academics, and they wished to some degree to reclaim the ancient autonomy of rhetoric, freeing it from the simpler materials that had grown up around it as Postwar composition. So we see a challenge to the inclusion of punctuation in their texts—at least their early texts.

A. S. Hill was concerned with rhetoric as style, and he did not deal at all with punctuation in his *Principles* of 1878 or his *Foundations* of 1892. The market was changing, though, and after 1900 there was a demand for simpler methods. By the time of his *Beginnings* of 1902 (written as a secondary school text, but also used as a college text), Hill had given in and included punctuation. "Punctuation, which is sometimes spoken of as if it were an abstruse science or a fine art, is in point of fact a very simple affair," Hill assured his readers before leading them through it (*Beginnings,* 23). John Genung was also led to see the value of punctuation. In his *Practical Elements* of 1886, he did not include any material on punctuation. By the time of the 1893 *Outlines,* however, Genung had (probably by his editors) been convinced of its importance:

> Punctuation is by no means, as many think, an affair of arbitrary printer's marks, or something put in from the outside as a kind of afterthought; it belongs just as truly to the structure and meaning of sentences as does the choice of words or phraseology. That is why the matter is put here as an important element in the treatment of the sentence. Every mark of punctuation, if rightly used, has its definite office to fulfill, and depends on some determinate principle of connection and relation. (*Outlines,* 186)

Fred Newton Scott and Joseph Denney, in their *Paragraph-Writing* of 1893, devoted twelve pages of appendixes to capitalization and punctuation rules (most of them to discussion of variations on or exceptions to the rules).[14] Barrett Wendell was the only one of Kitzhaber's Big Four who never dealt with punctuation at all in his *English Composition,* which was originally delivered as a series of lectures.

When handbooks became very popular after 1920, punctuation was sometimes relegated to the small books of rules whereas rhetoric texts covered larger issues. It has never left rhetoric texts for long, though, probably because the very nature of punctuation allowed it to be treated simultaneously as an afterthought, as a necessary meaning-maker, and as an honorable cultural code. It has never stopped being common practice for rhetoric textbooks to include at least an appendix on punctuation, and many of them still include whole chapters. Punctuation is technical and recondite enough almost to escape the opprobrium usually placed on lower-level skills that have not been learned early.

Spelling, on the other hand, was the last and for most teachers probably the most painful subject they were forced to add to the standard materials of college rhetoric as it became college composition. Almost no nineteenth-century textbooks take up the issue of misspellings, in spite of the evidence that spelling was the second-most-marked error pattern in college papers (punctuation was the first). College teachers simply assumed that training in proper spelling had been taken up at the elementary level, as it had been since the American Revolution. Noah Webster's *American Spelling Book* first appeared in 1783, and soon became the most popular speller America had known, selling over five million copies by 1818. By the 1880s William H. Appleton—the publisher of what was popularly known as Webster's "Blue-Backed Speller"—boasted that the book "has the largest sale of any book in the world except the Bible. We sell a million copies a year" (*Spelling Book,* i). Using Webster's book, spelling contests, and constant rote-memorization exercises, elementary school teachers worked hard to inculcate the rules of spelling.

Spelling was thus seen during the nineteenth century as an elementary subject, one that had nothing to do with the august subject of rhetoric. A. S. Hill's *Principles* of 1878 dealt with spelling only insofar as a question arose about whether to spell foreign names in traditional or newfangled ways—*Lacedaemon* or *Lakedaimon.* This was the only sort of spelling question that seemed at all rhetorical to traditional rhetoricians. Standard word-spelling questions should have been settled long before students got to college, harrumphed the professors. And yet Hill, reporting in 1879 on the results of that year's entrance examinations (which failed 157 of 316 candidates), noted that spelling was one of the most pervasive problems examiners found.

> Many, a larger number than usual, spelled as if starting a spelling reform, each for himself. . . . Of these mistakes some are evidently much graver

> than others, but some of the worst were found in several books, and not a few are apparently due to an unconscious effort to represent to the eye a vicious pronunciation." ("Answer," 10)

Using correction cards and different systems of notation for errors, college teachers relentlessly marked up student papers, leaving a trail of "Sp." marks along the way, but correction of misspellings and dire warnings about checking dictionaries were just about the only pedagogical techniques of which we can find evidence.

Some high school textbooks began to address spelling during the 1880s, but on the college level there was no real mention of the problem in textbooks until 1898, when Alphonso Newcomer's *Elements of Rhetoric* appeared. Newcomer is the first college-level book to deal with misspellings at all, and he only provided three simple rules and a list of 57 commonly misspelled words. Here was the advent of the list of "spelling demons," words that teachers claimed gave students the most trouble. Several other books copied Newcomer's list, but the first significantly influential list of spelling demons clearly meant for the college market appeared in Woolley's *Handbook of Composition* of 1907. Woolley's text provided 13 spelling rules for his readers ("Words ending in silent *e* usually drop the *e* before a suffix beginning with a vowel," etc.) and a list of 134 words whose misspelling "should be avoided with particular care." The success of the *Handbook* was such that two years later, Woolley published *The Mechanics of Writing,* an expanded version with exercises. This book contained 48 spelling rules, and 24 whole pages of spelling demons.

Woolley's books, with their rules and demons, represented the Modern approach to teaching spelling. The other, more old-fashioned approach—"look it up in the dictionary"—was more common, mainly because it allowed textbook authors a very cursory treatment of spelling issues. In the world according to this pedagogy, students who misspelled had simply to cultivate their own doubts until they knew which of their words were misspelled. Such correction was really very simple, as Martin Sampson and Ernest Holland noted from their empyrean height in 1907, and should be done during revision. "Now correct the misspelled words. When you are in doubt, look up the word in the dictionary, or ask some one who really knows" (*Written and Oral Composition,* 19). Superadded to this technique was, usually, an injunction to write doubtful words out over and over again. Hidden in this older pedagogy was the assumption that students really did know how to spell, that they should possess the rules and conventions of spelling

just as they did those of good deportment. As Martha Hale Shackford and Margaret Judson (of Wellesley and Vassar) put it in 1917:

> In social life, in business, in any relationship with other people we must try to follow the accepted rules of life. There are fixed and exact rules about spelling. Anyone who breaks these rules is likely to be considered very dull, for anybody can learn to spell correctly if only he will work hard enough. . . . Every student should own a small dictionary in which he can look up the spelling of words which he cannot spell. It is a very good plan to write out ten times the spelling of any word that is troublesome. (*Composition—Rhetoric—Literature,* 23–24)

This assumption that students actually know which words they are spelling incorrectly was to undergird spelling pedagogy even far into the Modern period.

Spelling continued to be perceived as a serious problem at all educational levels, but there was very little agreement as to how the problem might be solved. In "The Futility of the Spelling Grind," published in 1897, J. M. Rice analyzed the spelling problems of thirty-three thousand fourth through eighth graders and concluded that there was no panacea for spelling problems and that "there is no direct relation between methods and results. In other words, the results varied as much under the same as they did under different methods of instruction" (413). Given this essential pessimism about the possibilities of teaching spelling and the genuine conflicts that college teachers had about whether they should be trying to deal with spelling at all, it is not surprising that spelling pedagogy hardly developed beyond a few simple methods (look it up, learn the spelling rules, and so on).[15]

Grammar, punctuation, and spelling were added to the rhetoric course much to the regret of some old-line rhetoric teachers, for whom such materials were shamefully elementary. To admit that their students were unprepared to construct complex sentences or to punctuate them was to admit that American education was not succeeding, and this teachers hated to do. And to admit that, without some training in these areas, college students could not be expected to attain college-level writing, and that English faculties seemed the only possible teachers to take the problem in hand, was something professors hated.

And so, the later 1880s and the 1890s were times of extreme changes in the way that writing was taught—changes half-obscured, but no less real for that. The college rhetoric course was being deformed by novel stresses and was consolidating around its most practical pedagogies to try to solve the

problems that were arising. We need now to look more closely at some of these problems and at the solutions they engendered.

Overwork

To understand the rise of mechanical-correctness standards in Consolidation composition-rhetoric, we must look at the most pervasive reality faced by rhetoric teachers at nearly all colleges after 1880: gross overwork. We may still have a way to go today before teachers are given realistic teaching loads in composition, but the composition instructors of the nineteenth century faced situations far grimmer. Most teachers were responsible for teaching between 140 and 200 students. At Yale's Sheffield Scientific School, one professor and one instructor were responsible for 250 students (as well as for three non-freshman courses totaling 306 students). At the University of Iowa, the average class size for freshman and sophomore courses was 80, and again, over 250 students were the responsibility of one professor and one instructor. At Chicago, which prided itself on its small classes, the courses in "required theme-writing" averaged over 65 students per class.[16] These very large lecture-sized sections were the result of some of the rapid changes taking place in American universities.

As Lawrence Veysey noted, after 1870 three basic types of instruction came to prominence: the laboratory, the lecture, and the seminar (*Emergence of the American University,* 153). The laboratory was conceived as a specialized scientific instructional form, and the labor-intensive seminar (or seminary, as it was referred to) was usually reserved for upper-class and graduate students. This left the lecture-sized section as the main choice for most freshman and sophomore courses. The large lecture is a perfectly defensible technique for courses with testable subject-content that might be fashioned into fruitful lecture material. In composition courses, though, its use, though widespread, always presented problems. Leaving aside the question of the worth of abstract lecture material to the struggling writer, the large class sizes of lecture-organized sections meant two things: first, that the teacher could give little individual attention to students, even if a large course was split into smaller classes; and second, that the number of papers each teacher was expected to read and grade was staggering.

The reasons for such conditions are not difficult to infer. Then, as now, teachers of composition were ill-organized and suffered from a code of "professionalism" that frowned upon complaining publically about conditions. Many were low in status, unsure about how their courses should be run, unwilling to demand changes in conditions. College administrators, for their part, probably did not realize that the introductory English course was qualitatively different from the introductory History course; thus both were organized as large lectures. The result was the destructive overloading of writing teachers. As George R. Carpenter et al. put it in 1903, "It is not uncommon for teachers of English . . . who are conducting twenty hours of recitation a week . . . to sit up until twelve o'clock night after night in order to correct the compositions of their pupils" (*Teaching of English,* 329). We shall never know the degree to which this glut of theme-correcting destroyed rhetoric as a scholarly discipline by driving sensitive scholars into other fields (particularly literature), but it must have been considerable. Faced with this gross overwork and with growing social and professional pressure to enforce the basics, teachers evolved strategies to protect themselves from insanity and to get on with their work. We are still seeing versions today of the several various strategies evolved by the writing teachers of the late nineteenth century to cope with those conditions.

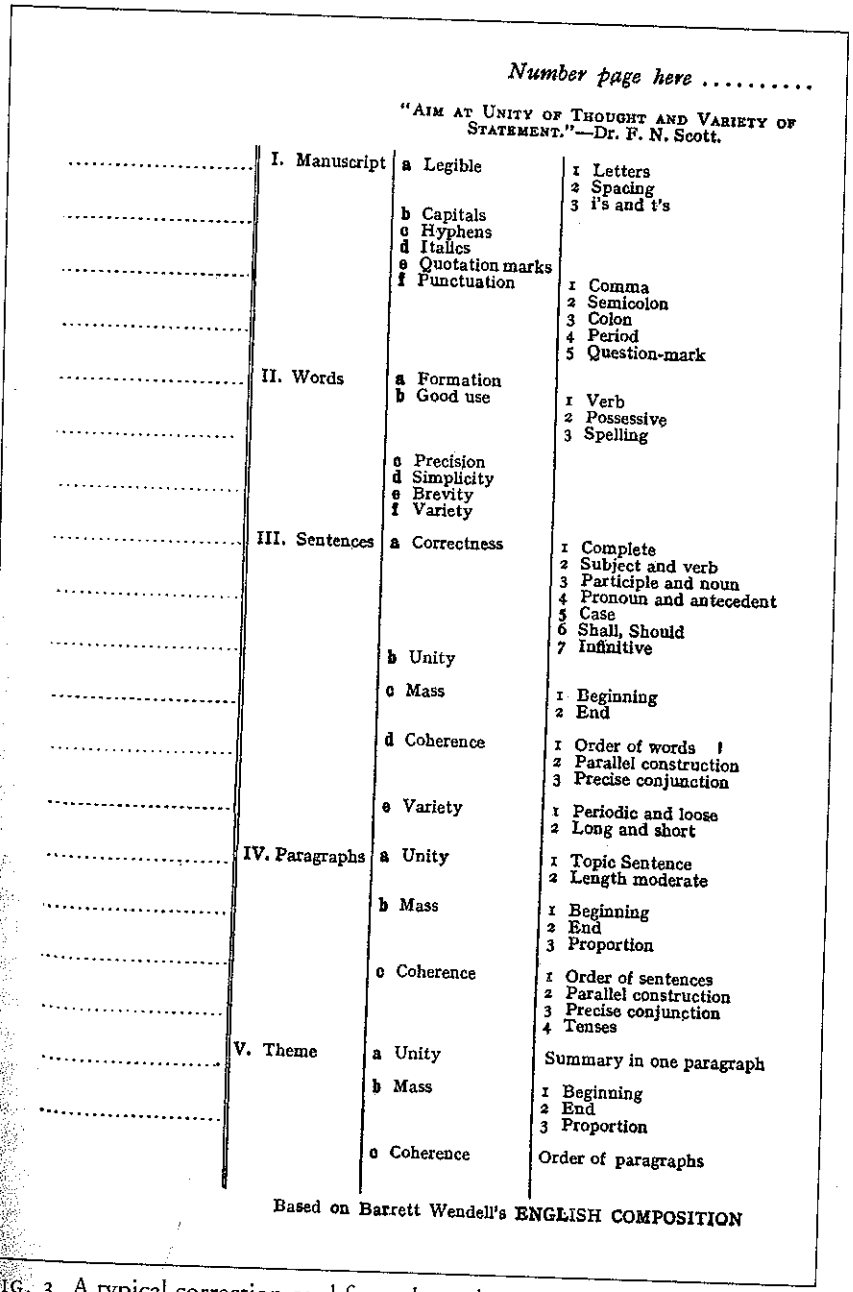
First of all, teachers moved to scrap the abstract topics that had been popular between 1800 and 1870, substituting simpler assignments that could be quickly scanned for obvious flaws. One change was toward more personal assignment topics. Kitzhaber shows how the trend moved away from assignments requiring special knowledge, complex conceptualizations, or detailed explanations, and toward essays based on personal experience and observation (*Rhetoric in American Colleges,* 169–77). In terms of the modal division of discourse then popular, this was a switch from an emphasis on argument and exposition (which was more complex in the nineteenth century than it became in the twentieth) to an emphasis on narration and description. Topics such as "Curiosity" or "The Evanescence of Pleasure" were replaced by "Our Newsboy" and "An Early Morning's Fishing," and eventually the notorious "How I Spent My Summer Vacation."

Kitzhaber's contention that this personalization and simplification of theme topics was the result of dissatisfaction with the older abstract topics is certainly true, but he does not go into much depth on the reasons for this dissatisfaction. That such topics as "Selfishness" produced bad writing from college freshmen is easy to understand (and we shall take up the reasons in chapter 7). More important for this discussion, however, personal-experience writing is the easiest reading a teacher sees. Abstract topics produce writing that is cognitively more demanding and therefore slower to read and grade. Criteria for judging narratives and simple descriptions are easy to set; paper content often suggests itself; and the essay's organization is usually simple chronology or spatial reference. Personal-experience papers can be read far more quickly and with fewer difficult judgment calls to make than

in the older sort of abstract-analysis papers. The newer topics took over at least in part because grading them was easier work for teachers snowed under by too many themes.

With questions of content and organization radically simplified, the reading and grading of students' papers entered a whole new era. At some point between 1870 and 1900, the act of a teacher reading and commenting on the general communicative success of a piece of student writing—form and content—was succeeded by a simplified concept: the teacher as spotter and corrector of formal errors. Student essays ceased to be "literary efforts" and became instead exhibits of rule-worship, to be examined "with a lawyer's eye," as Mina Shaughnessy tellingly puts it in *Errors and Expectations.* Skill in writing, which had traditionally meant the ability to manipulate a complex hierarchy of content-based, organizational, and stylistic goals, came to mean but one thing: error avoidance.

So the new emphasis upon mechanical correctness grew out of the "illiteracy" furor we have discussed, but (more important) out of the understandable need of teachers to somehow deal with their huge stacks of student themes. As every writing teacher knows, truly reading a paper—any paper—is mentally demanding and time-consuming. It requires complete attention to all levels of style, form, meaning, full presence of mind. Full editorial reading is tiring and cannot be done efficiently for long stretches of time. On the other hand, merely scanning a paper for formal and syntactic correctness is a more mechanical act; with practice it can be done with almost as little concentration as riding a bicycle. Far more students' papers can be passed through such a mechanism in a given period of time than can be passed through a full reading. The writing teachers of the 1880s and 1890s, faced with a reading task that was essentially impossible, were forced to cut their losses as best they could. Substituting rapid scanning-for-errors in place of full readings, they came to see this simple correcting procedure as what they were expected to do. Those who have examined numbers of nineteenth-century student essays have all seen that the great majority of them have only been subjected to such rapid "correction." Yes, teachers "read" the 170 themes a day or the 216 themes a week—after a fashion. They "corrected" and graded them, and they rationalized this sort of reading by claiming that they were giving the students what they really needed most. The work was demanding; it took time; it was onerous—but it was not impossible, as genuine reading would have been. Faced with killing work levels, teachers had to give something up, and what went, unfortunately, was rhetoric. Real teacher responses to student papers went the same way as complex and challenging assignments.



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"Aim at Unity of Thought and Variety of Statement."—Dr. F. N. Scott.

I. Manuscript	a Legible		1 Letters 2 Spacing 3 i's and t's
	b Capitals c Hyphens d Italics e Quotation marks f Punctuation		1 Comma 2 Semicolon 3 Colon 4 Period 5 Question-mark
II. Words	a Formation b Good use		1 Verb 2 Possessive 3 Spelling
	c Precision d Simplicity e Brevity f Variety		
III. Sentences	a Correctness		1 Complete 2 Subject and verb 3 Participle and noun 4 Pronoun and antecedent 5 Case 6 Shall, Should 7 Infinitive
	b Unity		
	c Mass		1 Beginning 2 End
	d Coherence		1 Order of words 2 Parallel construction 3 Precise conjunction
	e Variety		1 Periodic and loose 2 Long and short
IV. Paragraphs	a Unity		1 Topic Sentence 2 Length moderate
	b Mass		1 Beginning 2 End 3 Proportion
	c Coherence		1 Order of sentences 2 Parallel construction 3 Precise conjunction 4 Tenses
V. Theme	a Unity		Summary in one paragraph
	b Mass		1 Beginning 2 End 3 Proportion
	c Coherence		Order of paragraphs

Based on Barrett Wendell's ENGLISH COMPOSITION

FIG. 3 A typical correction card from the early twentieth century. From Williams, *Report on the teaching of English,* 54.

With primary teacher attention and nearly all paper correction being devoted to the formal aspects of student writing, it was inevitable that the nature of the college composition course should change. During the 1880s and 1890s we can see the changes slowly taking place, not so much in textbooks as in adjunct technologies. The mechanical grading and evaluation that teachers were being forced into invited mechanical support systems, usually in the form of rating systems, error counts, and systems of rules to which students could be referred. These systems of mechanical rules were found in two primary sources: as "composition cards" containing abbreviated rules and correction marks, and later, in specialized textbooks. Let us examine both of these developments.

"Correction Cards," or "Theme Cards," printed on heavy stock and given out to students, were first used in high schools in the 1870s, but their use quickly spread to the college level. The most common sort contained short directions on manuscript preparation and a key to the system of correction marks used by the instructor. Many of these systems of marks were based on the one recommended in E. W. Huffcut's *English in the Preparatory Schools* (1887), but they varied a good deal from school to school. Some sort of card system of this sort was the rule at most colleges by 1890. A. S. Hill assembled one for sale at Harvard, and many other colleges followed suit. The rules of "grammar" might not be good enough for a place in rhetoric textbooks, but no teacher could do without some means of referring to them. These cards were highly ephemeral and few have survived; the one reprinted here is a high school card from 1908 (see fig. 3).[17]

Use of these cards, while better than nothing, presented several problems. First of all, their correction systems were varied and could be confusing to students. More seriously, they could not provide enough space for satisfactory explanations of the key correction marks. Teachers clearly felt a need for some sort of bridge between the rhetoric texts—which, even if they covered punctuation usually rejected syntax, grammar, and prescriptive error-based materials as "baby work"—and composition cards. Such bridges were slow in appearing. A few rhetorics appeared that contained a page or two of composition card material, but they were the exception rather than the rule.

Remedial Technology

The obvious answer to the problem was a new sort of textbook, one that would explain and exemplify the sorts of rules that teachers were increasingly asking their students to learn and practice, and through the last quarter of the nineteenth century several attempts to find the form for such a book were made, none of them completely successful. The first and most obvious answer to the problem of teaching students "grammar" (which by 1885 was a sort of catch-all term used by English teachers to mean formal correctness of all kinds) was merely to update the grammar rules taught by elementary schools. This was done by Alonzo Reed and Brainerd Kellogg in their 1877 high school text, *Higher Lessons in English,* and at the college level by Joseph Gilmore in his 1875 text, *Outlines of the Art of Expression,* which used a sort of Baltimore Catechism question-and-answer method to inculcate grammatical rules. Gilmore used an expansive definition of grammar: "Grammar," he said, "may be defined as the art of correctly expressing our thoughts. It lays the foundation for rhetoric, which superinduces, upon mere correctness of expression, Clearness, Energy, and Elegance" (*Outlines,* 5). He went on to deal in such questions as "Define a simple sentence and an act of thought," and "Give the exceptions to the general rules for forming the plurals of English nouns." He set out, quite clearly, to make grammar a college-level subject. Gilmore, a professor at the University of Rochester, stated in his Preface: "This little book has grown, in the author's class-room, out of an attempt to supplement the defective early training of his pupils. Those pupils had, when they entered college, some practical acquaintance with English composition. . . . *English* Grammar, many of them had never studied at all—few if any, of them, as the author conceives it should be studied" (3). His 112-page book mixed formal grammar and prescriptive advice with some low-level stylistic rhetoric. *Outlines* was neither a grammar book nor a true rhetoric, but its combination of sentence-level advice and grammatical rules made it popular in colleges until nearly the turn of the century.

Much more popular and important for grammar's entry into composition was Edwin A. Abbott's *How To Write Clearly* of 1874. This book, which went through twenty-five printings between 1874 and 1914, is worth examining in more detail here. "Almost every English boy can be taught to write clearly," said Abbott, "so far at least as clearness depends upon the arrangement of words. . . . Clear writing can be reduced to rules" (5). Abbott, a Shakespeare scholar, had originally written his book to help his students translate Greek and Latin into acceptable English. Abbott was appalled by the results, stating that "the flat, vague, long-winded Greek-English and Latin-English imposture that is often tolerated in our examinations . . . diminishes instead of increasing the power that our pupils should possess over their native language" (7). Abbott's answer (unlike Gilmore's) was to try to discern the main grammatical principles most commonly violated and to create a new sort of prescriptive rule that would warn against this specific

violation. *How To Write Clearly* contains fifty-six rules, most of them dealing with sentence construction and style, many of them similar to certain of today's handbook prescriptions. Unlike Gilmore's questions and answers, Abbott expressed his rules in positive commandments followed by exemplifications: "32. In a long conditional sentence put the 'if-clause' antecedent, or protasis, first," and "41. Antithesis adds force, and often clearness." Abbott's rules were often grammar based but were by no means always grammatical rules. For instance, whereas Gilmore covers adverbs according to their traditional definitions and classes, Abbott assumes this knowledge and proffers three specific prescriptions: "Adverbs should be placed next to the words they are intended to affect"; "'Only' requires careful use"; and "When 'not only' precedes 'but also,' see that each is followed by the same part of speech."

Rather than concentrating on abstract concepts, Abbott means to tell his readers how specifically to avoid common errors, and he does it in the language of grammar. Abbott's book covered few questions of usage, no spelling or punctuation, and very little basic syntax or grammar, but it was widely used. Harvard required its purchase through the 1880s, and it also seems to have been used at different times by Oberlin and the Universities of Pennsylvania, Virginia, Michigan, and Colorado.[18] As early as 1880, teachers were casting about for convenient systems of enforceable reference rules. Textbooks at this time became predictable and derivative, unwilling to experiment with new treatments. Materials on mechanical correctness bloomed, and toward the end of the Consolidation period there appeared a new sort of textbook, the logical culmination of the move toward rule-governed composition that had been going on since 1875: the modern handbook of composition.

The first true handbook was Edwin C. Woolley's *Handbook of Composition: A Compendium of Rules* of 1907. Woolley provided in a primitive form nearly all the elements that make up today's handbooks: it dealt with punctuation, spelling, legibility, sentence structure. The *Handbook* saw no element of writing as beneath its scope; it had no rhetorical pretensions. Woolley himself argued the case for such a teacher-aid book most succinctly in his *Mechanics of Writing* (1909):

> The chief benefit derived from theme-writing lies probably in the instructor's indication of errors in the themes and his showing how these errors are to be corrected. . . . But . . . how shall the instructor, as he indicates these eight hundred errors (in the fifty themes he must hand back the next day), furnish the information called for by each one? Obviously he must use some kind of shorthand. Suppose, then, that he writes opposite the incorrect "whom" above quoted the expression "Gr." or "b.E." or "case." Do these expressions furnish the student with the information he needs regarding that "whom"? It seems to me that they do not. . . .
>
> Yet shorthand must be used in correcting themes. Is there no system of shorthand which conveys to the student the information he should have regarding each error marked in this themes? There is such a system; it consists of references to a book. . . . The *Handbook* was designed, and the present book has been designed, to be used in this way. (vi–vii)

This was Woolley's credo, and teachers reacted to this new sort of text with overwhelming approbation. In a representative review in 1909, H. E. Coblentz spoke for most of the college teachers of the day: "This little book deserves the utmost praise. . . . Every teacher of English will find this the handiest book of its kind" (Review, 581). At last the cat was out of the bag, and teachers of writing no longer tried to hide the primarily mechanical nature of their readings.

With the *Handbook,* Woolley began the handbook era, initiating a new sort of writing text that would quickly come to be at the heart of most college writing courses. From the time of the first Woolley *Handbook,* composition pedagogy was transformed. Needs had shaped the texts, now the texts shaped the writing courses; this was especially true of handbooks, which were always the favorite texts of untrained writing teachers and thus exerted a great, although often hidden, influence. In chapter 2 we saw how Woolley's home-reference handbook grew first into a book of rules and exercises and then into a full-scale textbook meant for use both at home and in class: the rhetoric handbook. Woolley and Scott's *College Handbook of Composition* in 1928 marked the beginning of this phase of textbook development, a phase that meant the algorithmic rule–governed approach and the mechanical organization of the handbook extended themselves into all aspects of rhetoric.

The twenty years following the Woolley *Handbook* might be called the Great Handbook Boom. Between 1907 and 1927, at least fifteen different handbooks were published. A survey taken in 1927 showed that, of twenty-seven representative colleges in the Midwest, 85 percent used handbooks in their writing courses—and more important, 41 percent used no texts but handbooks (Henry, "Freshman English"). As important as the numbers of handbooks, however, were the changes the handbook form was causing in the rhetoric texts of the period and the broadening of the purposes of the handbooks themselves. Beginning around 1910, we see the rapid crumbling of rhetoric text authors' unwillingness to include mechanical correctness

materials in their books. Clippinger's *Illustrated Lessons,* Foerster and Steadman's *Sentences and Thinking,* Young and Young's *Freshman English,* all reflected a novel handbook-oriented emphasis on lower-level elements of mechanical correctness: punctuation, spelling, grammar. Clippinger in 1912 actually included a separate handbook section in his rhetoric—probably the first such conjunction. Quite literally, after 1925, handbooks and handbook rhetorics were in control of composition classes.

The predictable result of this "handbookization" of rhetoric was that Modern composition-rhetoric became ever more formalized and mechanical, ever more removed from the actual process of communication. Handbook rhetoric was always the most reductive form of composition-rhetoric, and by the 1920s there was little rhetorical theory not influenced by handbook approaches. Fewer rhetoric texts were found that did not incorporate a handbook or rules-type section, and after 1925 it seemed a tacit assumption that the average composition course was an essentially remedial endeavor. As John French said in *Writing* in 1924: "This book attempts to supply in one volume material adequate for such a course in English Composition as includes the review of elementary principles and the anticipation of mature studies in English and other subjects. Consequently it gives much space to rules for correctness" (v). For the freshman of 1924, mature writing was something only anticipated.

If the period 1875–1910 nurtured the elements leading to an obsession with mechanical correctness, and the period after 1910 turned composition from a subject (distantly) concerned with communication into a mere hunt for errors, the period following 1925 was what might be called the remedial-technology era. It was a time when composition teachers, at their nadir in terms of experience and interest, were lured ever farther into mechanism by ever more sophisticated "classroom aids" put out by textbook firms. Handbooks became the central reference point for teachers who had never studied any rhetorical theory (and no teacher English-trained could have been taught rhetoric between 1915 and 1950). Even those whose training in critical reading made them sensitive readers of student writing were too overworked to bring useful criticism to bear on the papers they graded, and these teachers did what they could: they enforced correctness and made it the heart of their demands.

Handbooks arrived and proliferated because they were useful tools in the task of enforcing correctness. Their main purpose, in theory at least, was as support systems for instruction that was still supposed to be rhetorical: student essays read by the teacher. Following closely behind handbooks, however, were their dark siblings, drill books and workbooks that introduced completely a-rhetorical practice in error recognition and sentence construction into the college writing course. Beginning in the mid-1920s with C. H. Ward's *M.O.S. Book* and becoming a thriving industry by 1935, the "remedial racket" (as Porter Perrin called it) introduced high school–level exercises in grammar, punctuation, and usage into college classrooms. Such books as Ward's, Howard Grose's *Exercises in Everyday Writing,* Dana Jensen's *Corrective English Exercises,* and Easley Jones's *Practical English Drillbook* were selling well by the mid-1930s, and college composition was close to its most mechanistic point. Perrin's voice was one of the few raised in protest against the workbook approach:

> These exercises obviously violate the lone principle that present teachers of composition have salvaged from the 2,500 years of the discipline of rhetoric, that one learns to speak and write by speaking and writing. . . . Why do we adopt them? Well, they're easy to handle: like every popular "advance" in pedagogical method, they are ultimately easier for the teacher. . . . We find a comforting certainty in grading exercises in the most elementary conventions of the language that is a great relief in a field where so little is certain, where the real work is eliciting variables in a growth. We may realize that these absolutely certain elements are few and are the least, or at any rate the lowest, factors in style. But we cannot help breathing more freely as we pass from the sand of better-or-worse to the pavement of supposed right-or-wrong. ("Racket," 384, 387–88)

Perrin could certainly understand the weakness that made teachers turn to drill books, but he could not condone it.

So the tools of formally based teaching—simplified mechanical rhetorics, rhetoric handbooks, handbooks, and drill books—were all essentially in control of the majority of American writing classrooms by 1930. During this period the last vestiges of the old abstract theory tradition left over from the Consolidation period died out, and with them died any sense of professional history. By 1920 most of the great nineteenth-century rhetorical theorists had been forgotten; and their doctrines, passed down in diluted textbook form, were assumed to have always existed. In the hands of overworked part-timers and graduate students, Freshman English entered its Dark Ages of unenlightened toil, a benighted processing of students through the obstacle course of mechanical correctness.

It is ironic that, just as freshman composition was becoming associated in the popular mind with grammar, a notable gap began to open in the late nineteenth century between the grammar that English teachers taught and the growing insights of the scientific philologists and linguists active in

English studies. Philology, the study of the chronological and spatial development of languages, was one of the most important of the scholarly subject areas that evolved in the German universities of the nineteenth century, and after the Civil War American scholars returned from work at German universities with degrees in philology in ever larger numbers. Scholarly language study on the German model led to the dismissal of some long-held American linguistic prejudices.

Largely as a result of philological studies, support for a universal grammar and a rigid purism in usage declined rapidly among genuine philosophers of language after 1900. Such important early linguistic scholars as Thomas Lounsbury, Brander Matthews, and George P. Krapp began to suggest that a new way of viewing grammar—one based on a descriptive and flexible objectivity rather than on the prescriptive purism of the older grammar—might be the linguistics of the future. Sadly, however, little was carried over to writing courses from descriptive language studies such as those of Krapp, Otto Jesperson, Henry Sweet, or George Curme.

Before 1900 there was little organized critique of this purblind dependence on an increasingly discredited system, even though, as early as the 1880s, a few philologists had criticized teachers' total acceptance of traditional rigid grammar. See, for instance, Edward A. Allen in 1887:

> But our grammarians, refusing to study their language in its marvelous process of development for the last thousand years, have been content either to create rules for the use of it . . . or to borrow the rules of those languages which have a differently developed system of grammar. . . . No student should be deluded into the belief that he can become a grammarian by the study of the grammar alone. ("English Grammar Viewed from All Sides," 466–69)

With the work of Lounsbury, Matthews, and Krapp a new scientific and descriptive spirit appeared in philology. Arguing against a fixed standard of grammatical propriety, Lounsbury in *The Standard of Usage in English* grittily proclaimed that "in order to have a language become fixed, it is first necessary that those who speak it should become dead" (71). George Krapp, in his *Modern English* of 1909, made an important differentiation between standard English, as taught by the rigid prescriptive grammarians of the schools, and good English, which treads the boundary between convention and invention. "Language is valuable only as it effects the purposes one wishes to attain," wrote Krapp (330), unconsciously echoing George Campbell's definition of rhetoric in 1776 as "that art or talent by which the discourse is

adapted to its end." Philologists wanted nothing to do with handbook prescriptivism.

By World War I, a whole generation of philologically trained teachers had made themselves conversant with both the history of the English language and its similarities to and differences from other language systems. This generation of scholars—no more than a few hundred in number, in comparison to the thousands of literary specialists and composition teachers—founded the Linguistic Society of America in 1924. Linguistics thus officially cut itself free from English, classics, anthropology, and psychology, complaining that "the standing of our science in the academic community leaves much to be desired" ("The Call for the Organization Meeting," 6). To put it plainly, linguists felt themselves surrounded by yahoos. In an almost anguished apologia for the LSA, published in the first volume of *Language*, Leonard Bloomfield charged:

> Our schools are conducted by persons who, from professors of education down to teachers in the classroom, know nothing of the results of linguistic science, not even the relation of writing to speech or of standard language to dialect. In short, they do not know what language is, and yet must teach it. ("Why a Linguistic Society?" 5)

Bloomfield's charge was all too sadly true. As we have noted, S. E. Lang, Gertrude Buck, and others had launched various disorganized attacks upon prescriptive grammar before 1910, but no organized—or truly knowledgeable—group of critics had been forthcoming at that time.

Teachers' Responses to Student Writing

After 1910, poor working conditions for teachers created the background and constrained the possibilities for Modern composition-rhetoric. Rhetoric as it had existed in the era of smaller classes became practically defunct in pedagogical terms, as the one-on-one editorial conferences used (with struggle) even as late as the time of Genung and Wendell were rendered impossible by the greater numbers of students. Evidence of widespread acceptance of teachers' acting as rhetorical audiences for their students simply does not exist in any depth during this time. From 1900 through 1930, the most widely accepted idea was that the teacher's job was to correct, perhaps edit, and then grade student papers. Now and then someone attacked this approach, but it seems to have held wide sway through the first half of this century. As Walter Barnes put it in 1913, writing students live

> in an absolute monarchy, in which they are the subjects, the teacher the king (more often, the queen), and the red-ink pen the royal scepter. . . . Theme correcting is an unintelligent process. . . . In our efforts to train our children, we turn martinets and discipline the recruits into a company of stupid, stolid soldierkins—prompt to obey orders, it may be, but utterly devoid of initiative. ("The Reign of Red Ink," 158–59)

The teacher who "pounces on the verbal mistake, who ferrets out the buried grammatical blunder, who scents from afar a colloquialism or a bit of slang" seemed to Barnes a weak writing teacher, but by far the most common kind.

The idea that the teacher's most important job was to rate rather than to respond rhetorically to themes was almost universal from the late 1880s onward, perhaps as a result of the cried-up "illiteracy crisis" of the 1880s and 1890s. It is not surprising that teachers wished for some more rigorous basis for the grades they gave, however, and thus were born, during the first decade of this century, the various "rating scales" that formed our first systematic attempt to deal with the issue of rhetorical effectiveness in student writing.

This is not the place for a complete history of the rise of rating scales, the various purposes they covered, or the arguments they engendered. Between 1900 and 1925 a number of scales were proposed for rating composition, and it is probably fair to say that all of them evolved from the rise of scientific method and statistics and from writing teachers' uncomfortable awareness of exactly how subjective their grading of papers was (James, "National Survey"). Teachers wished for a defensible rating instrument, and beginning with the Hillegas Scale in 1912, educational theorists proposed to give them one. Many developments and variations of Hillegas's scale followed: the Thorndike Extension, the Trabue Scale, the Hudelson Scale, the Harvard-Newton Scale, the Breed-Frostic Scale, the Willing Scale, and others (Hudelson, "Composition Scales," 164–67).

I do not want to suggest that these composition scales were entirely devoted to formal and mechanical ratings; their interest lies primarily in their attempts to evolve an early holistic-style set of standards by which the more qualitative elements of composition could be reliably judged.[19] Efforts to create the perfect rating scale, however, eventually ground to a halt, largely because rating rhetorical elements was simply too complex and multilayered a task for any scale. As two scale-using researchers—Marion Brown and M. E. Hagerty—admitted in 1917, after having seen through a complex study using a variant of the Harvard-Newton Scale, "This study raises more

questions than it answers. In fact, it cannot be said to have settled any question satisfactorily" ("Measurement of Improvement," 527).

The fact that rating scales usually served as instruments for administrative judgment rather than for student improvement also led to their gradual abandonment by many teachers. Fred Newton Scott had, with his customary sagacity, identified this problem early on, noting in 1913 that "whenever a piece of scientific machinery is allowed to take the place of teaching—which is in essence but an attempt to reveal to the pupil the unifying principle of his life—the result will be to artificialize the course of instruction" ("Our Problems," 4). Scott drew a strong distinction between a system that grades a composition for administrative purposes and that which evaluates it as a stage in the pupil's progress. Hillegas's Scale clearly served the former purpose, and Scott ended his discussion of it with this Parthian shot:

> I leave this problem with you, then, with the seemingly paradoxical conclusion that we ought in every way to encourage Professor Thorndike and Dr. Hillegas in their attempts to provide us with a scale for the measurement of English compositions, but that when the scale is ready, we had better refrain from using it. If this sounds like the famous recipe for a salad which closes with the words "throw the entire mixture out of the window," you will not, I am sure, if you have followed me thus far, be under any misapprehension as to my meaning. ("Our Problems," 5)

The liberal wing (including most of Scott's PhD students) followed this line, and the controversy over rating scales lasted for better than a dozen years.

Part of the problem was that teachers were not sure what rating scales could or should actually be looking for; and thus was born another early tradition of research in English: research into error patterns. Such research is as old as composition teaching, of course, but before the growth of the social science model in education it was carried on informally. Teachers had "the list" of serious and common errors in their heads, and these lists were probably substantially similar (although "serious" and "common" were not necessarily overlapping categories).[20]

Beginning around 1910, however, teachers and educational researchers began trying to taxonomize errors and chart their frequency. The great heyday of the research into error frequency occurred during the two decades between 1915 and 1935, when no fewer than thirty studies were conducted.[21] Unfortunately, most of these studies were flawed in some way: too small or too regional a data sample, different definitions of errors, faulty methodolo-

gies (Harap, "Most Common Grammatical Errors," 440). Most early error research is hard to understand today because the researchers used terms widely understood at the time but now incomprehensible or at best strange. We see similarities through this period, however, in the sorts of errors that teachers noted as most serious. Roy Ivan Johnson, writing in 1917, reported on 198 papers written by 66 freshmen, and his list of the top ten error patterns in his study is as follows:

1. Spelling
2. Capitalization
3. Punctuation (mostly comma errors)
4. Careless omission or repetition
5. Apostrophe errors
6. Pronoun agreement
7. Verb tense errors and agreement
8. Ungrammatical sentence structure (fragments and run-ons)
9. Mistakes in the use of adjectives and adverbs
10. Mistakes in the use of prepositions and conjunctions.
("Persistency of Error," table 2, p. 560)

In 1930, Paul Witty and Roberta Green analyzed 170 papers written by freshmen in a timed situation. They seem not to have included errors outside of grammatical categories, and so they disagree with Johnson. Here is their top ten list:

1. Faulty connectives
2. Vague pronoun reference
3 Use of "would" for simple past tense forms
4. Confusion of forms from similarity of sound or meaning
5. Misplaced modifiers
6. Pronoun agreement
7. Fragments
8. Unclassified errors
9. Dangling modifiers
10. Wrong tense

Many teachers used these lists in their own grading methods.

Bereft of a theoretical discipline and a professional tradition, teachers during this period had few places, outside their textbooks, to turn to for information about their subject. Only *English Journal* published articles for college writing teachers—and many of its essays were on rating scales and

error counting. There were, however, a number of forward-looking articles (of a type that might surprise first-time readers of old volumes of the *English Journal)* such as Allan Gilbert's "What Shall We Do with Freshman Themes?" in which Gilbert proposes a socially constructed and process-oriented regimen of peer review and group conferencing.

Writing in 1922, Allen Gilbert's is a startlingly modern voice that often sounds like David Bartholomae or Ann Berthoff:

> The course in freshman rhetoric—without plenty of reading—is an attempt to make bricks of straw only. . . . The teacher of Freshman English must deserve his right to stand on the same level as any other teacher of Freshmen, and must deal with big things, ideas and books that hit the intelligence of the students. This does more to improve slovenly sentences, than does constant worrying of details. The mint, anise, and cummin *[sic]* must be tithed, but the teacher of Freshmen who gives himself to trivial things and neglects the weightier matters of good literature does not make his course a power for literacy. (400)

Gilbert goes on to recommend literature as a springboard for students' own choices of what to write, then suggests that students read their papers before the class, because to do so "gives the writer an audience," after which comes group criticism, then personal conferences with the teacher, then group conferences.

Sadly, Gilbert's was a rather lonely voice in his time. But for every Gilbert or Leonard or Scott or Gertrude Buck there were ten Hilda Jane Holleys, for whom "Interest and Originality" was but one of ten areas rated (and third from the bottom, rated way below "Grammar" and "Vocabulary") and Louise Griswolds, proposing to reread each graded theme and change the grade to F if every formal error has not been corrected. The woods were full of chart-makers, rating-scalers, green-ink-not-red-ink nutcases, and exhausted handbook loyalists, but mostly they were filled with simple followers of departmental orders about the centrality of formal error in evaluation. It is not difficult to see why I. A. Richards called rhetoric "the dreariest part of the waste the unfortunate travel through" during their first year of college. Rhetoric had truly been transmogrified into the dread discipline of Freshman English, and rhetorical theory had become Modern composition-rhetoric, a rhetoric wherein correctness is in the saddle, and riding communication.

The Loyal Opposition

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) had been formed in 1911, but only slowly did it come to be a prime mover behind attacks on correctness-only standards, grammatical purism, and prescriptivism. Most early NCTE members, it appears, were satisfied with Woolley's prescriptive handbook approach, but a few of the most active and influential members were aware of the trends in linguistics and began in the late 1910s to fire off salvoes against prescriptive grammar and usage. Fred N. Scott, as reliably ahead of his time on this issue as on others, attacked inflexible prescriptive standards in the 1917 *English Journal*. In the following year, he was seconded by G. P. Krapp, who was still exploring the question of acceptability of usages, and the youthful Sterling A. Leonard, whose "'Old Purist Junk'" still remains a classic of witty denigration. It begins, "The purist is surely one of the strangest of God's creatures," and includes the plaint, modern-sounding even today:

> In our weary preoccupation with a hundred mere insignificant conventions of wording and idiom we have left almost untouched more fruitful topics. . . . Our nice conscientiousness has been sadly misled by dictatorial and wise-sounding but often densely ignorant pronouncements, into a teaching, not alone of fiddle-faddle niceties, but of positive untruth about present usage. I suggest that for a very considerable part of the actual difficulties and regrettable ill successes of our English teaching—I know at least that it is true of my own—the blind leading of purists is responsible. (296)

With his posthumously published *Current English Usage* (1932), Leonard was one of the most important figures in establishing the empirical reality of what would come to be called "the doctrine of usage"—the idea that if a word or expression is widely used by educated people it cannot be declared "incorrect" by purists.[22] As early as 1917 he had already spoken out strongly in favor of the liberal and reformist ideas he had learned as Scott's student at Michigan, but with *Current English Usage* the idea that actual use in contemporary writing rather than some ideal of linguistic purity should be the standard of acceptability became widely approved.

The 1910s also brought forth the first series of attempts to empirically measure the worth of grammar to literacy skills. Most of these early experiments involved elementary and secondary schools and affected college grammar only indirectly. Yet the fact that they were done at all indicates a new professionalism in education, an unwillingness to accept the received wisdom that grammar was indispensable. Studies such as those of Hoyt in 1906, Briggs in 1913, and Charters in 1915 cast increasing doubt on the idea that grammar instruction carried over into composition.[23] William Asker in 1923 correlated the grammatical knowledge of high school seniors with their freshman composition grades in college and found that "knowledge of formal grammar influences ability to judge the grammatical correctness of a sentence and ability in English composition only to a negligible degree" ("Does Knowledge?" 109–11).

By the 1920s, the anti-prescriptivists had begun to assemble an impressive array of theorists and studies unified by the belief that traditional grammar was not useful. Krapp, Leonard, and Scott insisted that the insights of Bloomfield, Sapir, Jesperson, and other scientific linguists could be ignored only at peril. Around the mid-1920s Charles C. Fries added his voice to this chorus of criticism. Throughout his long and active career in the LSA, the MLA, and NCTE, Fries constantly strove for the role of bridge figure, to make English teachers aware of linguistic insights. In his first important book, *The Teaching of the English Language* (1927), he wrote:

> Even after more than a hundred years of linguistic study based upon the historical method, the fundamental principles upon which the modern scientific view of language rests and the results of scholarly investigations in the English language have not reached the schools. On the whole the schools still perpetuate with very little change the eighteenth century point of view. . . . This book is an effort to interpret the modern scientific view of language in a practical way for teachers. (Preface)

Fries discusses at length the folly of rule worship, where the concept of acceptable grammar originated, the doctrine of the standard of usage, and other elements of informed language teaching. For the next forty years, which included presidencies of the LSA and NCTE, Fries would continue to press the fight against destructive prescription in grammar.

By the mid-1920s the defenders of formal grammar, though ascendant in the classroom, were on the defensive in scholarly journals. Leon Mones in 1923 was one of the few who made any attempt to defend the teaching of formal grammar against the flood of attacks. Grammar was under such attack, complained Mones, that "an argument in its favor must ring like either grumpy reaction or hysteric reform. Well, grumpy some of us are, and hysteric too. We have seen the 'No Formal Grammar' army march on to victory and leave chaos behind it" ("A Word on Formal Grammar," 234). Mones's nostalgia for an ordered past was not the usual position found in journals after 1920, however. The greater number of post-1920 journal ar-

ticles on grammar either attack the idea of prescriptive usage, or report on minor teaching techniques involving grammar without taking sides, or make technical descriptive points within traditional grammar, or report the findings of ill-designed studies about whether grammar helps students read and write.

Fewer than one teacher in a hundred read the *English Journal,* however. Handbooks and their sinister new siblings—drill books and workbooks—held almost unchallenged sway in the classrooms. During this period, the public attitude toward grammar instruction was mixed; most people had hated their school grammar, but large numbers felt it had done them good and many thought traditional grammar needed to continue.[24] The public had little idea of the formidable intellectual forces within academe, building a case against prescriptive grammar instruction until Leonard's *Current English Usage* in 1932 and Marckwardt and Walcott's follow-up book *Facts about Current English Usage* in 1938. These books were widely perceived as a surrender on the part of English teachers to an "anything goes" ethic in usage, and various funerals for "grammar" were held in popular magazines.[25] When the NCTE in 1935 published its *Experience Curriculum in English,* a document that more or less summed up the pedagogical opinions of the Deweyite wing which comprised the group's vocal minority, few were surprised to see a general condemnation of grammar teaching:

> Because scientific investigators have failed to show the effectiveness of grammar in the elimination of usage errors, it is not here organized for that purpose. There is no scientific evidence of the value of grammar which warrants its appearance as a prominent or even distinct feature of the course of study. (Hatfield et al., 228)

Despite the seriousness of the *Experience Curriculum,* however, many members of the public continued to distrust English teachers' withdrawal from teaching grammar and correctness.

The absolute insistence on mechanical correctness as the prime grading criterion for student writing was, however, coming under serious question by some teachers after 1920. The excitement over error counts and rating scales so obvious during the 1910s was being supplemented by a new level of discussion, as teachers turned to discussing the most effective ways of "criticizing a theme" beside the question of grading it. Various kinds of advice were advanced: raise the standards as the course advances; don't be too severe; always include a bit of praise; don't point out every error.[26] All good advice, but the attitude of these authors toward the job of the teacher was almost universally in support of critical/judgmental rather than editorial/interventionist relations with students. "Correction" of papers was always uppermost, even to liberal teachers and writers. James Bowman, whose "The Marking of English Themes" of 1920 provides one of the most sensible discussions of teacher marking, devotes only one short paragraph to the whole issue of teacher comments: "The comments are of far greater importance than the mark which is given the theme. These should be stern and yet kindly. While they should overlook no error, they should, in addition, be constructive and optimistic. It is necessary, above all, for the teacher to enter intimately and sympathetically into the problems of the student" (252–53). These ideas were well intentioned, but immensely general. Against that one paragraph, the rest of the article discusses correction of errors and assignment of grades.

By the 1930s, however, serious interest in English pedagogy was developing, and we see the beginnings of the curious schizophrenia that has afflicted college composition since: the split between the scholars and theoreticians of the discipline and the great mass of classroom teachers. The continuing descent into mechanistic teaching that occurred in the 1930s was a result of the beliefs and activities of the latter group, but we must note that this took place against a background of serious and capable research and even protest from the former. During this decade, language scholars began to bring together some of the research that had been ongoing since the 1910s. Studies of errors in writing, of remedial techniques, of the efficacy of grammar drill, all were scrutinized, and all of them pointed to the conclusion that the popular sorts of classroom grammar drills were essentially futile as attempts to improve student writing. The NCTE truly found its voice during the 1930s and began to declaim a Deweyite gospel of education for social goals, "tying up literature and composition with the business of living," as Stella Center put it ("Liberalism of the NCTE," 164). These pragmatic goals meant that the organization usually worked against sterile drills and mechanistic pedagogies. In sum, a motley crowd of linguists, educationists, and rhetoricians began to coalesce during the 1930s and to struggle against the overwhelmingly mechanical classroom methods of the time.

It looked at first to be a futile battle. The forces of overwork and professionally countenanced ignorance that institutionally undergirded much of Modern composition-rhetoric were very great. Handbooks, workbooks, drill books appeared in larger numbers each year, continuing the feedback loop of mechanical criteria as the only valid criteria of good writing. Periodic outbreaks of hysteria about writing quality or the breakdown of "good old traditional methods" occurred. But the seeds of dissent had been planted, and through the 1940s and 1950s an anti-mechanical reaction to the standard composition course began to grow strong in the profession of English.

Rhetoric, which had been dormant within composition since the 1890s, began to make a reappearance after 1944, when the first communications courses were taught at the University of Iowa. Communications courses quickly spread to other schools, bringing together scholars from English and speech departments for the first time since the tragic split between the disciplines that occurred in 1914, teaching all four of the "communications skills"—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Rhetoric, which had been in the keeping of speech departments during the twentieth century, was a vital part of these courses, and many English teachers learned for the first time what might be some of the alternatives to mechanical correctness.

This reintroduction of more capacious concepts of rhetoric into composition was to prove vivifying. The idea of successful communication (and not mere grammatical correctness) as the central aim of writing was novel and exciting to English scholars, who once again began to investigate the great traditions of rhetoric; the newly formed Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) became the professional vehicle for this movement away from composition-as-grammar. It was inevitable that large parts of this emergency scholarship would involve intense self-criticism by English teachers, and indeed, beginning around the late 1940s, we do hear voices raised in plaintive criticism of the methods of brother teachers both past and present. Porter Perrin, who had been a soldier in the rhetorical trenches for over twenty years, spoke in 1951 of the years 1900–1935 as "a conspicuously narrow era of instruction" that showed "a general surrender of the broad aims that have made the study (of rhetoric) great to a concentration on minutiae of usage (actually a triumph of grammar over rhetoric)" ("Professional Attitude," 488).

By this time, however, Perrin's voice was not the only one raised in criticism of the mechanical-correctness emphasis in writing instruction. Others were coming to the realization that student disgust for the writing course was no irrational response, and the concept of teachers best serving students by "correcting" their papers, like many other accepted traditions in writing pedagogy, began to come under sustained fire from a new generation of writing teachers.[27] Jeffrey Fleece in 1951 made what seemed to many a novel suggestion: that teachers actually consider themselves the students' real audiences and respond to their essays accordingly. Since "purpose" was the watchword of the communications movement, said Fleece, why not admit that the teacher was the only final and actual audience for students, and make use of that audience relationship? On papers with a real purpose, said Fleece, "the teacher should react to the content in some way, to guarantee the student's continued confidence in his interest" ("Teacher as Audience," 273).

Fleece's view hardly seems radical today, but at the time it was received as a startling suggestion about the relations that students and teachers in writing might have. Even students were unused to having what they said in papers taken seriously. In an essay called "Conversing in the Margins" in 1954, Harold Collins reports:

> When I return the themes, hands go up over pained faces, and injured innocence makes itself heard.
>
> "Aren't you supposed to stick to the grammar and punctuation and that sort of thing and not bother about what we say, the—er—content of our themes?"
>
> "I had only one error in spelling and three in punctuation. What do you mark on?" (He means, "Why didn't I get an A or a B?")
>
> "Do we have to agree with you? That doesn't seem. . . ."
>
> I must justify my extensive commentary, explain why I have seen fit to stray from such textbook concerns as diction, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and organization. With some warmth, I protest that I am not a theme-reading machine, a new marvel of electronics grading for grammar. Though it may be hard to credit, I am a real human being, and so I am naturally interested in what my students say in their themes. (465)

Before 1940, the concept that most students could have anything to "say" in their writing that would really interest the teacher was hardly imagined, except by a few rare teachers.[28] Ruth Davies in 1950 wrote that "many teachers of freshman English waste much of their energy trying to enforce rules and standards universally ignored. . . . While we are engrossed with the scrawny skin and brittle bones of composition, the flesh and blood and heart of the matter are almost forgotten" ("Defense of Freshman," 442). Jacques Barzun struck out at the hypocrisy of educational systems that claim to be "progressive" and eschew narrow insistence on formal correctness—but continue to enforce it:

> I know very well that correctness was supposedly given up long ago. The modern teacher does not mention it. But if the teacher marks spelling and grammatical errors and speaks of little else, what is a child to think? . . . Meanwhile the things that are teachable, the ways of translating the flashes of thought into consecutive sentences, are neglected. ("English as She Is Not Taught," 28–29)

And Barriss Mills, in his seminal "Writing as Process" of 1953, strongly condemned the "police-force concept of usage" that still prevailed in most classrooms. "Nothing is more blighting," wrote Mills, "to natural and functional written communication than an excessive zeal for purity of usage in mechanics" (21).

By the middle 1950s, educators were expected more to address their students' essays as "real" audiences and to write long personal comments. "It requires extra time and care on the teacher's part," admitted Delmer Rodabaugh. "Perhaps it is not strictly his job to go to so much trouble, but trouble turns to pleasure when he begins to get results" ("Assigning and Commenting on Themes," 37). Rodabaugh admitted that what he proposed was not new but was a "deliberate and persistent attempt to extend what we all do." This new effort, based on the idea that students should get full-scale rhetorical comments both in margins and at the end of the papers, was very much in place by the end of the 1950s, and new teachers after that time who gave no rhetorical advice along with their formal corrections did their work with a certain guilt.

The criticism of the traditional mechanical priorities that appeared during the late 1940s and early 1950s can only be called a spontaneous reaction to a notably deficient pedagogical paradigm, a revolt against the traditional methods of teaching and thinking about composition that took its impetus from the rediscovery of rhetorical issues as they applied to writing. From its beginning, this revolt gathered strength during the next decade and suddenly burst into full flower during the early 1960s. Suddenly theorists and teachers everywhere were actively—sometimes heatedly—discussing the purposes and methods of teaching composition. The reign of mechanical correctness, which had largely depended on continued teacher ignorance, was being threatened. The assault on Modern composition-rhetoric had begun.

English and Linguistics: Cross-Purposes

There was, however, still a problematical relationship between composition-rhetoric and grammar during this era, one that reached a sort of crisis during the late 1950s and early 1960s. After 1935 a number of factors had come together to make the relations between linguistics and composition both complex and polemical. Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield had each published their magnum opus (both entitled *Language*) in 1921 and 1933, and in the 1930s their students moved ever more rapidly toward a genuinely scientific linguistics. In practice, this meant that after 1935 linguistics and composition began moving apart in terms of their ultimate goals. Linguistics was becoming interested exclusively in comparative and structural description that had nothing at all to do with teaching or with specifying good or bad usage, "vulgarity," and "awkwardness." Such labels, dear to English teachers, were becoming genuinely embarrassing to linguists.

Except for a few teachers like Charles Fries, who had deep roots in both English and linguistics, there were not many who could carry the message of this essential disjunction over to English. Linguistics was headed firmly down its own path. Since Bloomfield's *Language* in 1933, linguistics had hardly concerned its investigations with writing, assuming that writing was secondary to oral speech, but few English teachers were even aware of that. Most had never had specific training in linguistics, although the NCTE since 1928 had been calling for such training for English teachers.[29] English teachers indeed knew something was happening in linguistics, and they had heard it was scientific and impressive; when, they tended to ask, would this new grammar give them something they could use in classrooms to replace the oft-critiqued old grammar? Such applications were not forthcoming, primarily because figures like Fries were so thin on the ground. Linguists after 1940 hardly bothered to criticize the sort of grammar taught in English. They merely rolled their eyes and sighed. The linguistic frontiers they sought were far away from the handbook and the classroom. As many large universities formed departments of linguistics, linguists literally moved away from English and away from the turmoil that continued in English over the use of grammar to teach writing.

After 1940 we must carefully distinguish the controversies within the field of linguistics from those in English (whose ostensible subject was linguistics). Linguists increasingly disputed analytical techniques, categories, philosophical and psychological perspectives, and purposive paradigms. English teachers disputed two questions: what should "grammar" be, and how can it help students read and write better? While this is not the place for a history of linguistics in America (those interested can turn to a number of books on that subject), it must be noted that the knowledge and attitudes of most English teachers were increasingly outdated.[30] Fries was a voice crying in the wilderness; his *American English Grammar* of 1940, financed by the NCTE, was meant to impart the contemporary grammatical knowledge to teachers and thus reduce the "futile and even harmful practices which have resulted from ignorance" (vii). The book seems not to have had much impact, however, despite its practical intentions and readability. It is unfortunate but true that the textbook market in English remained completely divorced from the burgeoning science of language. Of the dozens of hand-

books published between 1930 and 1960, there were only a handful that even attempted to utilize the insights of linguistics, and only one that had any influence—Porter Perrin's *An Index to English* (1939), which, like all of Perrin's work, was rigorous in its scholarship and not satisfied to mouth the contemporary pieties. The other handbooks remained derivative, and grammar in English departments remained mostly a myth based on nineteenth-century prescriptivism.

In the 1950s, however, grammatical entropy in English began to disappear as new voices were heard—and old ones listened to. The change began slowly. In 1952, the indefatigable Charles Fries published *The Structure of American English,* a textbook that attempted to apply the insights of linguists since Bloomfield to constructing English sentences. Fries's basically descriptive, non-normative approach gradually came to be called "structural grammar" and would be one of the key issues in the grammatical arguments raging a few years later.[31] In 1952, however, *The Structure of English* caused barely a ripple. Many teachers examined it but few taught it. Most English teachers continued to slumber through a long summer of lethargic acceptance of linguistic ignorance, leading W. Nelson Francis to cry in 1953:

> In no reputable academic discipline is the gap between the pioneers of research and the pedagogical rank and file more shockingly great. . . . our situation is as anomalous as if our scientific colleagues were to teach geocentric astronomy, pre-Darwinian biology, and chemistry based on the four elements. ("Our Responsibility," 329)

Francis's despair was shared by many linguistically trained teachers.

The combination of ignorance and willful refusal to abandon traditional grammar and the "standards" that many people thought it represented continued throughout most of the early 1950s. Many teachers shared the common public attitude that "standards" had been sliding in English for many years, and especially since Sterling Leonard and Charles Fries and their band of radical hotheads had begun cutting the ground out from under traditional grammar. By the mid-1950s, however, this position was held mostly by the pedagogical rank and file and was little defended except in sotto voce staffroom complaints. The English journals were filling with linguistic articles, and most of the publishing members of the professional were increasingly coming to see a pro-traditional grammar attitude as a hallmark of ignorance and solipsism. The split between scholars and practitioners in composition was beginning.

The Great Structuralism Debate

With the mid-1950s we enter a fascinating era, one that really deserves a book all its own. In short space here I cannot do full justice to the complexity of the positions held or the arguments advanced on grammar; such huge theoretical shifts rocked both linguistics and composition between 1956 and 1965 that the picture is often less than clear. Before 1956 or so, there was relatively little English department interest in grammar as an intellectual concept or a pedagogical challenge, and after 1965 we emerge into the recognizable modern landscape well described by W. Ross Winterowd in his bibliographical essay on linguistics in Tate's *Teaching Composition: Twelve Bibliographical Essays.* Between those two dates, however, a veritable ferment of interest in linguistics came to English, leaving the discipline shaken and changed forever.

As happens so often in composition, the knowledge that journal authors had been trying to promote for years was eventually delivered by textbooks. The new era probably began with Fries's *Structure* (1952) as much as with anything else. Though not a popular textbook, it motivated several other authors to write textbooks using "structural grammar" as their essential model. Paul Roberts's *Patterns of English,* Donald Lloyd and Harry Warfel's *American English in Its Cultural Setting,* and Harold Whitehall's *Structural Essentials of English,* all appeared in 1956. Suddenly, school boards and freshman-comp directors were ordering these books. Like it or not, English teachers were faced with having to choose between books that tacitly supported the old dispensation and those that trumpeted the new.

Not, I hasten to add, that the "structural" textbooks took over the field of writing. In fact, they did rather poorly, considering how much had been said in the journals since 1940 about the "new grammar." Some teachers tried the structural approach, hopeful, perhaps, that this "new" grammar could rekindle the flame of belief that seemed to be guttering for the old grammar. But Lloyd and Warfel, Roberts, and Fries never became the textbook touchstones they sought to be. Their problems were well diagnosed by Charlton Laird in 1957:

> If we are to attempt teaching English in the near future by extensive use of structural linguistics, we are presented with at least the following staggering facts: (1) structural linguistics is a difficult concept and an exacting practice, when compared, for instance, with an engaging amusement like general semantics; (2) the linguists themselves do not as yet agree entirely, either in the analysis of English or in a method of teaching it; (3) no large-scale test

> of the approach using unselected teachers has yet been attempted, and (4) there is no immediate prospect of producing a considerable body of teachers versed in structural linguistics. ("The Parts, or Vestigial Remnants, of Speech," 337)

Laird went on to question the entire structuralist enterprise, but he was aware even as he criticized descriptivism that the old grammar was no more defensible.

Laird's essay provoked several spirited responses, and by 1959, the question of structural linguistics and its relation to English was getting ready to explode. In late 1958 the venerable Wilbur Hatfield—one of the founders of the NCTE and the Grand Old Man of English—had come out in favor of teaching structural grammar in composition ("Will Structural Grammar Help?" 570–72), and the fuse was lit in 1959 by Harry Warfel's argument in the February *College English*. In his typical aggressive fashion, Warfel began:

> The science of structural linguistics has put new tools into our hands. Just as nucleonics has penetrated into the minute operations of the atom, so structural linguistics has unlocked the secrets of language. The established conclusions and the emerging theories seem likely to force other disciplines to reshape current procedures wherever they are dependent upon or impinge upon language. . . . The teaching of composition must undergo a revolutionary change. ("Structural Linguistics and Composition," 205)

From this polemical beginning, Warfel went on to lecture his audience on the "vast array of facts" amassed by structural linguists from which come "principles, rules, and laws that have relevance to general composition." Warfel argued that the function-based grammar then accepted by most linguists was a better basis for composition learning than anything else. He inveighed against the "outmoded gadgetry" of traditional handbooks, workbooks, and grammars, but he also condemned the (sometimes extreme) "thought" and "general education" methods of the period. "The study of semantics has been a will-o-the-wisp. . . . most books of reading selections have been productive of little good. The preoccupation with ideas as opposed to the student's mastery of the language system has been self-defeating" (212). This hectoring tone continued throughout the article, indicating the frustration many linguistically trained teachers felt with the inertia of their prescriptivist colleagues.

Warfel's structuralist boosterism seems vaguely sad and ironic to us today—"Look upon my works, ye mighty, and despair"—but in 1959 it was little less than a call to arms. Replies to his blast appeared quickly, and soon the journals were filled with essays for and against structural linguistics in English. The denigration of linguistics in the popular prints was also gaining new life, with Jacques Barzun leading the charge against the "new grammarians," and from 1960 through 1963, linguistics and its impact on composition were fighting issues. *College English* devoted the better parts of four issues to the linguistic controversy between 1960 and 1965, and the battles raged in other journals as well. Structuralists explained patiently again and again why their discipline better explained the facts of language than the traditional grammar (Levin, "Comparing Traditional and Structural Grammar"), while at the same time numerous English teachers wrote essays complaining about the nonjudgmental aspects of descriptive linguistics and their resulting problems in trying to use it to grade and teach. Polemicists had a field day: W. Nelson Francis criticized Barzun and Mario Pei ("Language and Linguistics," 13–14), John Sherwood criticized Charles Fries ("Professor Fries," 276), A. M. Tibbetts criticized W. Nelson Francis ("Case," 281), platoons criticized Harry Warfel. The entire discipline seemed to feel a great question impended. As Alain Renoir put it: "The necessity to make a considered choice between traditional grammar and structural linguistics is one which teachers of freshman composition can no longer avoid" ("Traditional Grammar," 484).

In the midst of this controversy a number of reasonable nonpolemical points of view also appeared. Among those who took this rational middle ground were Renoir, who admitted that the structuralists' "extreme accuracy in linguistic description is certainly desirable but by no means necessary to the teaching of composition. The main job of the teacher of composition is *not* to describe language, but rather to teach his students how to *compose*" (485). And Charles Fries himself, in several magisterial statements in 1960 and 1961, defended linguistics but tried to disassociate himself from its thoughtless popularizers. "Linguistic science, like all science, is concerned with knowing and understanding, not with doing," wrote Fries. If applications were to be made, he was certain that they could not be the result of forcing English teachers to take one or two linguistics courses to master techniques. Nor did Fries believe in the simple-minded adaptations that some of the "linguistic science-fiction" writers like Warfel had proposed. Fries was utterly certain that such adaptations were futile, and his statement is worth noting today:

> In my view, it is not the tools and the techniques of linguistic science that should be brought into the classroom; but in some way, the substance of the knowledge and understanding won by linguistic science must be

> thoroughly assimilated and then used to shed new light upon the problems that arise wherever language is concerned. ("Advances in Linguistics," 37)

Fries must have been aware even as he made this statement that such an outcome was unlikely.

The structuralist controversy seemed to many teachers and English-based linguists to be a battle for the very soul of composition teaching itself. Some asked, Would the discipline stagnate, a purveyor of outworn and discredited conventions? or would it take the high road of science and accept the future? Others asked, Would English surrender to the "anything goes" radical wing? or would it proudly continue its traditional role as safeguarder of standards? Only a few early saw the futility of the battle, the foredoomed fate of both structuralists and traditionalists. While the usual suspects (Warfel, Fries, Francis, Barzun, Allen, Roberts, and many others) worried the question of structuralism from 1959 through 1963, one of Zellig Harris's young students, Noam Chomsky, readied the transformational-generative linguistic revolution that would, at least in America, relegate the entire structuralist enterprise to the history books. As early as 1961 James Sledd, in a thoughtful article called "A Plea for Pluralism," saw it coming. As usual, Sledd minced no words:

> For American teachers of English, the year's principal developments in language-study have been two. First, Chomsky, Halle, Lees, and their disciples have sustained their attacks on structural linguistics with increasing vigor and success. Second, with increasing success and vigor the evangels of the Anglists have sustained their effort to convert the high schools and colleges to structural linguistics. Yesterday's Left has thus become today's Right, a new Left has emerged which is in some ways closer to yesterday's Right than to today's, and today's Right, internally divided and calling itself the Center, works at ignoring the new Left as it evangelizes the old Right. The result may well be that men who have argued creditably against traditional dogmas will now saddle the country's schools with the opposite dogmas of American structuralism at the precise moment when many of those dogmas are being discredited. (16)

That is what happened for a little while, but not for long.

After 1965, linguistics in America was clearly in the hands of Chomsky and the MIT axis, and the structuralist debate was effectively over. The old Right, the handbook traditionalists, remained in English, but even the tenuous bridges between linguistics and handbook grammar built by the structuralists were impossible to maintain after the ascent of transformational-generative grammar. If Friesian function categories and juncture theory were hard for English teachers to follow, phrase-structure rules and obligatory transformations were completely impossible for most of them. After 1965, linguistics as an ongoing exploration had less and less to do with teaching English. As genuine linguistics became less accessible, "grammar" in English became that strange amalgam of buzzwords, legends, handbook nostrums, half-understood transformational concepts, and decayed eighteenth-century prescription that most of us know today. Again, James Sledd has an apposite comment on structural linguistics:

> That version of modernity is now quite rejected and forgotten, having been succeeded by several other abiding truths; but despite the confusion of the shifting doctrines, a clear result has certainly been attained—namely, a state of utter confusion among schoolteachers and blank ignorance among their pupils. We have taught the teachers to despise our one established grammatical tradition; we have given them nothing stable to put in its place; and consequently the average student in our colleges and universities today knows nothing of any grammatical system whatsoever and is totally at a loss when in any of his classes strange vocables like *noun* and *verb* are uttered. ("What Are We Going to Do About It Now That We're Number One?" 184)

Traditional grammar did not flourish openly, especially after the famous and seemingly final verdict of *Research in Written Composition* in 1963 that "the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing" (37–38), but it continued its curious half-life in its accustomed lair: handbooks and workbooks.

In 1963, the concerted leap forward in rhetorical theory that we now think of as the "rhetorical revolution" was just beginning, and some nonmainstream linguistic theories such as tagmemics were instrumental parts of it. A few enthusiasts believed that transformational-generative (TG) theory could be made the keystone of the new rhetoric, but results were inconclusive, and the full story of TG applications takes us beyond 1965, where Contemporary composition-rhetoric begins and where I arbitrarily mean to end this discussion of grammar and correctness. I will not rehearse here the disputes of the last three decades over such issues as formal marking, theme correction, the nature of revision, the teaching of grammar. These debates can all be viewed as the mechanical-correctness tradition defending itself against attacks made in the name of rhetorical priority. On the one hand are the theorists, the rhetoricians, the proponents of writing as discovery or

communication; on the other are the traditionalists, the frontline teachers, the proponents of writing as vocational skill. Both sides make valid points, and if the rhetoricians have often gotten the best of the abstract arguments, the traditionalists can still point to savage overwork as an occupational reality for many writing teachers—a reality that makes real rhetorical instruction difficult or impossible. A teacher with a hundred papers to grade in a weekend, say the traditionalists, cannot possibly respond effectively to each one as communication—and they are right. There is no doubt that the composition-as-mechanical-correctness tradition has suffered serious setbacks during the last thirty years, but it is not a tradition that can be overcome so long as administrative priorities overwork undertrained teachers. There are still too many "four and four" teaching assignments, and such cynical exploitation of the victims of the depressed academic marketplace only creates grist for the mills of mechanism. Of the making of handbooks there is no end—and too many teachers are still given no training beyond their Harbrace charts. Overwork and ignorance have ever been the parents of destructive overemphasis on mechanical correctness, and these are not conditions we can get rid of easily.

We can, however, rejoice in the gains we have made. At last the reductive traditions of the first half of the century are being questioned and challenged. Teachers are better trained every year. Newer textbooks are providing even traditionally oriented teachers with more defensible course content than the "shall-will" rules. Administrators have gradually been made to understand that forty students are too many for one class, and most now accept thirty as too many. We may eventually be able to convince them that twenty-five are too many as well, and that four writing courses per term is too heavy a load for any teacher. We have made strides, and more will be made.

The enforcement of standards of mechanical correctness is not a tradition that can—or should—die out of composition instruction. Mechanical errors, as Mina Shaughnessy says, are "unprofitable intrusions upon the consciousness of the reader" that "demand energy without giving any return in meaning" (12), and helping students overcome their own unintentional sabotage of the process of communicating their thought is certainly an important part of our work. But it is not all our work. Striking a balance between formal and rhetorical considerations is the problem we now face, and it is a delicate one. We cannot escape the fact that in a written text any question of mechanics is also a rhetorical question, and as a discipline we are still trying to understand the meaning of that conjunction. We may spend the rest of our professional lives investigating how the balance between rhetoric and mechanics can best be struck.

4 Licensure, Disciplinary Identity, and Workload in Composition-Rhetoric

One of the most striking changes we find when examining the development of rhetoric in American colleges over the last two hundred years lies not in the theory or even the pedagogy of rhetoric, but in its status. As theory and discipline, it has been degraded within both cultural and economic contexts. The discipline of rhetoric at the college level entered the nineteenth century as one of the most esteemed fields in higher education. The professor of rhetoric in 1800—in touch with an intellectual and practical tradition more than two millennia old, yet revised and revitalized by recent theoretical advances—was a respected figure on his campus. His courses were subscribed, his opinions regarded, his guidance sought out by both students and administrators. A chair of rhetoric was a chair of power and honor, as it had been for twenty-five hundred years.

When, however, we look at the teacher of rhetoric a mere century later, what a sad change we find. Instead of being an honored and respected intellectual figure in community and campus, the rhetoric teacher of 1900 is increasingly marginalized, overworked, and ill-paid. Instead of being a senior professor, the rhetoric teacher is typically an instructor, or a graduate student. Instead of teaching a discipline rooted in millennia of tradition, he—or, increasingly, she—is teaching a congeries of theory and pedagogy less than forty years old. Instead of being sought by students, rhetoric courses by the early twentieth century are despised and sneered at, and their instructors have fallen from the empyrean of named chairs to the status of