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Textbooks and the Evolution of the Discipline

In "Textbooks and the Evolution of the Discipline," published in *College Composition and Communication* in 1986, Bob looks at what he—with typical wit and elegance—terms "the intricate quadrille that textbooks have danced with the teaching of writing in America" (100). After identifying the factors that fueled the development of composition textbooks in the nineteenth century—"a paucity of new rhetorical material [. . .] the weakness and ignorance of undertrained teachers [. . . . and] the increasing power of a newly technologized publishing industry" (105)—Bob traces the development of textbooks until the present day. He concludes by noting the extent to which the textbook industry and professional associations have offered competing visions of, and suggested practices for, the teaching of writing. As is often the case in Bob's writing, his narrative relies strongly on dualisms. Bob characterizes "[t]he history of research on writing and composition teaching from the 1940's through the present," for instance, as a "history of epistemological warfare, of progressive theoretical and empirical research struggling with entrenched traditional pedagogy" (112). But even as he does so, he persistently reminds readers that material conditions—particularly "the changing qualifications of the teachers in the composition classrooms" (113)—are at the heart of developments in the field.

The way out does not lie in tools but in sheer teaching.

–PORTER PERRIN, 1933

The last twenty-five years have seen an unprecedented surge in the scholarship surrounding writing and the teaching of writing. We are in the midst of an information boom, and for those of us

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whose professional views have been developed and shaped by reading scholarly journals it is difficult to imagine things any other way. But today's discipline of composition studies is really a very new one. Before 1930, the teaching of rhetoric and writing in American colleges went forward with no important influence from journals at all. During the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, composition theory and pedagogy were overwhelmingly shaped by one great force: textbooks. The course we have inherited today owes much to the forms and genres of textbooks that rhetoric spun off as it devolved after 1860 from a theoretical to a practical pedagogy. In this essay I want to examine the intricate quadrille that textbooks have danced with the teaching of writing in America. Such an examination will show that composition textbooks as they developed between 1820 and the present have always responded to the preferences of the teachers cast up by the culture, meeting their perceived needs and recreating these and other needs in later teachers shaped by the texts.

What, first of all, *is* a composition textbook? We cannot, I think, define it as any book used in any way in a rhetoric or composition course, because books of countless unrelated sorts have been dragged into writing classes over the years, as Albert Kitzhaber has shown.[1] Even books that are specifically rhetorical are not always texts, since not every rhetorical book was written to structure a pedagogy in writing. Rhetoric books before 1800 were treatises, not textbooks. American composition grew from rhetoric, and although composition theory is not rhetorical theory, many of the formal elements of composition texts are essentially those of the rhetorics that preceded them.

The tradition of books about rhetorical techniques from Aristotle through Campbell, Blair, and Whately was an *ex post facto* descriptive tradition;[2] that is, most manuals of rhetoric made it their business to describe what works in persuasive discourse and to analyze why it works. They did this by creating abstract categories, generalizations, taxonomies, rules. Indeed, rhetoric as it exists in books has always been primarily a theoretical and only secondarily a pedagogical discipline. Writing is a technology for extending and storing thought, and printed books are nonpareil at one thing: containing complex information that cannot be easily committed to memory. Thus, the reader of a rhetoric treatise or book of lectures has one central task: mastering the information. The book is the teacher, and no other teacher is really needed. Such books were reference sources rather than directly pedagogical materials for most courses.

This pattern of the rhetoric as reference book is followed up through the end of the eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth. Thus we see the popularity of the works of Campbell, Blair, Whately, Priestly, Witherspoon, and Lawson, all of which are either lectures or analytical treatises. During the early and mid-nineteenth century, however, the patterns of influence in rhetoric slowly began to change; fewer and fewer theoretical writers were turning to the synthesis of classical authors—John Quincy Adams was perhaps the last important lecturer in the neo-Ciceronian vein—and more and more were rely-

ing on Hugh Blair's belletristic approach. We need to examine this period, 1800–1850, very closely, because here begin the great changes in the rhetoric course that would eventuate in the founding of American college composition.

The Example of Hugh Blair's *Lectures*

Rhetoric entered the nineteenth century as a discipline based around the pedagogy of large lectures and accepting the idea of "mental discipline"—the enforced learning of large numbers of abstract concepts—as central to education. It covered a broad range of theoretical topics based on the tradition of oral discourse and belletristic analysis, contained no component of affective writing, and was ruled by a lecturer who depended on books for content and not for pedagogy. Rhetoric exited the nineteenth century as the new discipline of "composition," based around large lecture-sized discussion classes, accepting the idea of constant writing practice as central to education. Instead of the broad synthesis of the old rhetorical tradition, composition covered a narrow range of textbook topics based generally on the authors' intuitive theorizing about writing. The new discipline contained a large component of writing—the enforced composing of short assigned "themes"—and was run most commonly by a low-level teacher who depended utterly on his textbook for both course content and pedagogy. During that century, in other words, rhetoric was degraded, textbooks went from servants to masters, and teachers were correspondingly demoted until finally they were little more than grading assistants to the textbook author they chose as *seigneur*. Let us look more closely at how this happened.

American college culture and teaching differed from British in certain crucial ways, perhaps the chief difference being the much heavier American reliance on books and "book learning." The trained ushers and masters supplied in good numbers by the English school system were much rarer in America. Great Britain traded many goods to her colonies, but scholars were never a notable export, and thus Americans, always culturally subordinate, got used to knowledge arriving on these shores in the form of English books, not Englishmen.[3] The instruction in rhetoric that a London or Edinburgh student could have by sauntering down to the College weekly could be had in Philadelphia only between leather covers, and thus American college teachers came to rely much more on books, especially student-owned books, than did their European counterparts.

By 1800, of course, America was producing a small number of genuine scholars of its own, but old habits die hard, and Britain continued to dominate American language instruction long after she had ceased to dominate America politically. The teaching of English grammar in America was shaped by Lindley Murray's *English Grammar* of 1795, and American rhetoric was for more than fifty years completely in thrall to Hugh Blair's *Lectures*. The case of Blair is important and paradigmatic enough to warrant special attention, because not only did Blairian rhetoric predominate theoretically, it also introduced a new pedagogy that redirected American rhetorical instruction.

Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres was published in London in 1783, and during the next 80 years it saw 18 British (English and Scottish) editions, the last in 1863, and eight abridgments, the last in 1822.[4] Clearly Blair's rhetoric was popular in England and Scotland, but just as clearly his book was not central to British education. Turning to American imprints we find a much different story, a tale of rhetoric triumphant, turned into a veritable centerpiece of education both in secondary schools and in colleges. Following its first Philadelphia printing in 1784, Blair saw *at least* 66 full-length editions in the United States before 1874. Even more important for this argument, 74 abridged versions of the *Lectures* were also published between 1803 and 1911 in America. Examining these editions and abridgments, we can begin to see the development of a new rhetoric pedagogy around Blair's theories, one that would seriously change students' relations with rhetoric books by introducing simplistic questions that made the text rather than the teacher the centerpiece of the course.

We don't see this happen immediately; the first twenty-five years of Blair in America are not particularly noteworthy. A number of editions were published, but all merely copied the corrections and additions of the most recent London or Edinburgh editions. Abridged versions of the *Lectures* began to appear in 1803, probably for the use of the many academies that were springing up throughout the East, but these shortened versions added nothing pedagogically new. In 1818, however, the first abridgment appeared that added *questions* to the end of each abridged lecture, specifically announcing that it was "for the use of schools and academies." The year 1820 saw a Hartford edition of Blair "reduced to Question and Answer by John Marsh."

Clearly a trend was shaping here, and in 1829 it culminated with an edition of the *Lectures* "to which are added copious questions and an analysis of each lecture by Abraham Mills, Teacher of Rhetoric." This was to become the "cheap stereotype edition" published by Carvill in New York and the Kay Brothers and T. Elwood Zell in Philadelphia—the inexpensive edition that flooded onto the market by the thousands of copies after new mechanical processes made hand-setting of type unnecessary.[5] The Mills editions, which became the college standard, contained questions that were absolutely catechetical, demanding nothing more than rote memorization of the exact lines of Blair. Following the chapter on style, for instance, Mills asks, "Of what kinds of style did our author treat in the last lecture? With relation to what, was style considered?" etc.[6] Mills, an educational drone, was rendered wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice by this farrago.

What do these editions of Blair with questions added signify? Simply, that the way rhetoric was taught was undergoing significant change. First in academies and then in colleges, teachers were coming to depend less and less on straight lecturing and more and more on the use of recitation and perhaps even discussion. With these interactive forms of pedagogy came a need for new support systems for the use of teachers. As it always would, the young textbook industry scrambled to meet the perceived needs of teachers. I will argue that these editions of Blair with questions are the first specifically pedagogical rhetoric books—the first textbooks.

Reasons behind the New Pedagogy

The reasons for the switch from lecture-based to question-answer classes in rhetoric are complex, and they begin on the secondary rather than the college level.[7] During the early nineteenth century, we see in many disciplines a new importance given to question-answer methods. Textbooks in geography, history, mathematics are suddenly all full of questions; rhetoric merely went with the trend. Almost certainly this flood of questions was due to the sudden popularity of the monitorial classroom system proposed by Joseph Lancaster in his influential 1803 book *Improvements in Education*.[8] Lancastrian teaching, which had its heyday between 1810 and 1835, took sole responsibility for classroom activity off the teacher and put much of it on classroom "monitors," students who drilled other students on the lessons. These monitors were usually older students, but they were untrained in pedagogy and often had little more knowledge of the subject than the students they were drilling. They needed textbooks of a new and very directive sort, and in every subject such textbooks rapidly appeared. Usually the new texts contained catechetical questions that untrained monitors could easily use, and thus in rhetoric we see the growth of question-and-answer abridgments of Blair.

Teachers were not undivided in their opinions of this change in classroom methods. Even some of those authors who included questions in their texts feared the mechanism inherent in slavish use of them. The Rev. J. L. Blake warned in his abridgment of 1822 that:

> It is also suggested to teachers that their pupils would find great advantage in fixing their minds more upon ideas and less upon the words than is usual—to answer as much as possible in their own language, instead of committing to memory and repeating *verbatim* from the book. . . . This remark applies in all its force to the method of teaching by "Question and Answer," as it is termed—one of the most erroneous principles of education ever adopted unless it be for small children not become capable of much reflection.[9]

Questions were considered a great advance by others, however; two years later, Nathaniel Greene prefaced his abridgment of Blair by noting that "the mode of communicating the ideas of Blair, by practicing in Question and Answer, has been found of great utility. This Edition carries that system into very complete operation."[10]

That a textbook-based question-and-answer system might take hold of rhetoric at the secondary level is easy to understand, arguable though its utility might have been. On the college level, however, where tutorials and lectures had always emphasized thought rather than rote memorization, the growth of such a system is harder to explain. Many schoolbooks before 1870, of course, were written to be used on either the secondary or the college level,[11] but we cannot ignore the use of recitation methods in college-level books. The great numbers of question-ridden editions of Blair caused Samuel

Newman, author of the first American college-level text, to plead in 1827 for more thought-oriented pedagogy in American colleges: "Above all things, let not the mockery of set questions and set answers be practiced, in teaching what pertains to the philosophy of rhetoric."[12] Newman's book, *A Practical System of Rhetoric*, followed this precept, being mostly composed of treatise material, but his plea went largely unheeded as question-laden books proliferated.

This degradation of college rhetoric from a lecture-tutorial system to a catechetical recitation-based discipline is largely due to the development of American colleges between 1820 and 1850, the period during which what Frederick Rudolph calls "the college movement" was at its most powerful. Almost incredible numbers of small colleges were founded throughout America during these years, especially in the frontier states. As Rudolph states,

> College-founding in the nineteenth century was undertaken in the same spirit as canal-building, cotton-ginning, farming, and gold-mining. In none of these activities did completely rational procedures prevail. All were touched by the American faith in tomorrow, in the unquestionable capacity of Americans to achieve a better world.[13]

According to Donald G. Tewksbury, as many as 700 colleges were founded before the Civil War, of which fewer than 200 were still extant in 1932.[14]

Throughout the 1820's, 30's, and 40's, then, this great wave of small colleges, usually religiously-affiliated, spread throughout the land. Many of them did later fail (Ohio had 37 colleges in 1880, only 17 in 1930), but during the boom period prior to 1850 the educational resources of the country were seriously strained. Only nine American colleges predated the Revolution; only 25 existed in 1800. When the college movement began around 1815, there was a sudden serious shortage of trained college-level teachers and no corresponding mechanism for producing them.

This shortage created a pedagogical problem. The traditional college tutorial methods of Socratic questioning require from teachers considerable knowledge of the field and considerable ability to deploy that knowledge flexibly. These qualities became harder and harder for the many new colleges to find in their teachers. There were simply not enough men trained by the established colleges—only a few hundred a year, and most of these went to bar or pulpit. Harvard, of course, could always find a reputable scholar for the Boylston Chair, and Yale had scores of scholars on which to draw. But for the overseers of Wabash Presbyterian College in the frontier town of Rockland, a trained rhetoric teacher was a rarity.

The problem: a shortage of trained, effective college rhetoric teachers. The solution: many of the newer and less established colleges were forced to turn to less skilled and less highly trained teachers. The pedagogy: highly inflexible recitation techniques like those many of the new teachers were used to using on the secondary level. The tools: question-answer textbooks like

Greene's abridgment of Blair and the mass-produced stereotyped editions of Blair that featured the mindless catechetical questions of Abraham Mills.

Thus were rhetoric textbooks born: out of a paucity of new rhetorical material, out of the weakness and ignorance of undertrained teachers, and out of the increasing power of a newly technologized publishing industry that was quickly gaining the ability to control the content of textbooks by the exertion of market pressure. For more than a century afterwards, these three conditions would continue to be key elements affecting composition textbooks.

The New Composition Texts: Drills and Exercises

To this point I have been speaking generally of rhetoric, the ancient discipline of persuasive discourse, but now we need to follow rhetoric as it was transmuted from a discipline of oral to one of written discourse—as it became composition. Composition texts, unlike rhetoric texts, could not make do merely with the questions and answers of a discipline that still paid lip service to "mental discipline." Composition was ineluctably practical; students were expected to *write*. Teachers could, of course, have asked students merely to do a great deal of writing and have examined and discussed it with them, but that would seem to scant the rhetorical theory that composition carried over from the older discipline; in addition, such a pedagogy would have been unimaginably arduous given the huge lecture-sized writing classes of the nineteenth century.[15] Class time could not be all lectures or recitation—it had to be made to include writing, *but not the sort of writing the teacher needed to look at*. The obvious answer was "composition practice," in the form of sentences, paragraphs, short exercises, and drills.

Teachers could, of course, create their own assignments, exercises, topics, check-drills, but to do so was a demanding task. Furthermore, few teachers had very clear ideas about what such exercises and assignments should look like. Should they be more complex versions of grammar-school composition exercises, based primarily on Murray's *English Grammar* and Walker's *Teacher's Assistant in English Composition*, or should college exercises be something essentially different? These were questions that were answered only gradually between 1820 and 1860.

The answers required a reshaping of the pedagogy of "mental discipline" implicit in lecture-treatise and recitation methods. Up to this point, it had been taken for granted that the teacher's job was to produce and disseminate raw information in certain standard forms—the treatise, the lecture series, the rhetorical lesson—and that students' jobs were to capture this information in notes, learn it, and be able to feed it back in synthesized form. This instructional strategy of requiring absorption and regurgitation had lain behind the entire pedagogy of abstract rhetorical theory (as opposed to the older practice-oriented pedagogy of rhetoric as a form of verbal action) that had been growing up since the sixteenth century. It was a pedagogy based around learning abstract concepts, but even when confronted with a

concrete, skills-oriented subject like composition, *it would not let go.* Thus writing, a practice-based skill, became tangled with the insistence on abstract "mental discipline" of the early nineteenth century, and the conception grew that one learns to write by consciously learning ideas about writing and then practicing the application of those ideas. The story of the growth of composition textbooks is the story of the abstract and theoretical rhetoric that was the legacy of the treatise forcing itself into realms of skill development not easily conformable to it.

The change from abstract treatises to abstract textbooks was accomplished by adding exercises, drills, questions, and assignments to the rhetorical lessons that were the heart of each treatise-chapter. These exercises, like the chapters themselves, were atomistic, breaking down writing into many discrete subskills and observance of conventions of writing into hundreds of unrelated small elements. Newman's *Practical System* of 1827 used some assignments, but they were a minor part of the back of the book. It is to one of Newman's competitors in the freewheeling textbook market of the early nineteenth century that we must turn for the first full-scale "activities" textbook.

Richard Green Parker was a professional textbook author. He had popular texts in geography and history, but his primary works were in the field of rhetoric, or, as it would increasingly be known after 1840, composition. Parker's *Progressive Exercises in English Composition* was published in 1832 and sold very well in the burgeoning education marketplace of the time. Heartened by its success, Parker investigated the subject at the college level and realized quickly that there was no book applying to the higher study of writing the popular exercise-based pedagogy that had made *Progressive Exercises* such a hit on the elementary level. He lost no time in lashing together a college version of this method, and in 1844 it appeared as *Aids to English Composition,* subtitled "Specimens and examples of school and college exercises." This was a *locus classicus* of the textbook meant for use by exceedingly uninformed teachers—"those," as Parker admits openly in his Preface, "who have neither the leisure nor the inclination to seek in the wide fields of literature for other and deeper sources of information."[16]

Aids was a college text unlike any before it, proceeding inductively and atomistically through series of short lessons based on the lessons in elementary texts. The book begins with simple grammatical and logical materials—Events, Objects, Names, Words, Phrases, Clauses—and works up to questions of style, revision, and various literary genres. Each short chapter includes a "lesson" which is explained in abstract terms, an example of the lesson as illustration, and exercises that ask the student to practice the lesson using given materials. This was by no means a novel pedagogy, even in writing,[17] but never before had this simple pedagogy been offered on the college level.

And it prospered. *Aids* was very popular, remaining in print for more than 30 years and seeing at least 21 printings. Other similar books appeared, like James R. Boyd's *Elements of Rhetoric and Literary Criticism* (1844) and

George Quackenbos' *Advanced Course of Rhetoric and English Composition* (1855), which also used a lesson-illustration-exercises approach. The college boom of the period had created a sort of pedagogical vacuum, and professional textbook authors like Parker and Quackenbos filled it with their new and simpler texts.

I don't wish to suggest that these exercise-oriented texts ever completely dominated the scene. "Rhetoric," as opposed to "composition," was still taught from treatises and books of lectures (although increasingly the older theoretical rhetorics were being supplanted by newer elocutionary texts). Some college teachers, especially in the East, *were* well enough educated and confident enough to do without a textbook's pedagogical support, and such professors continued to use Campbell, or Blair *sans* questions, or Richard Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric*, or Henry Day's *Art of Rhetoric*. Prior to the Civil War, textbooks and treatises shared the rhetoric/composition market.

The Theoretical Interregnum in Postwar Rhetoric

After the Civil War, composition texts underwent another great mutation. The 1860s, of course, mark a great change in rhetorical history—in educational history, for that matter—in the United States. As I have discussed elsewhere, the Morrill Act of 1862, which provided for the establishment of land-grant agricultural and mechanical colleges, was instrumental in creating a new sort of populist education in America. At the same time, the postwar culture, with its growing emphasis on applied technologies and its increasing social stratification, was demanding even of the older colleges a new sort of education. From being essentially based in orality, rhetoric—increasingly called "composition"—was becoming a writing-based discipline, and between 1860 and 1900 composition gave birth to that set of practical and theoretical doctrines that we now usually refer to as "current-traditional rhetoric."[18]

This period of rhetorical history is commonly conceived, following Albert Kitzhaber, as a long continuous breakdown of the old abstract rhetorical theories as newer exercise-based and mechanically-oriented pedagogies gained popularity. Indeed, that perspective is a defensible one. But looking at the textbooks and only the textbooks of the period, we might form a different idea. Post-1860 texts, in stark contrast to Boyd's, Quackenbos', and especially Parker's exercise-oriented texts of the 1840's and 1850's, look much more like treatises and much less like drillbooks. Though a number of postwar texts did contain exercises, the exercises were few in number and often located near the simpler grammar-based sentence material usually found at the beginning of many books. Through the sixties, seventies, and eighties we see a surprising swing away from basic mechanical texts and back toward more abstract and theoretical books.

What are the reasons for this seeming turnabout? Most importantly, the size, nature, and number of colleges in America. In comparison to the 1820–1850 period of almost frenzied college establishment, the years 1860–1890

were a time of consolidation, when college space was created by the growth of universities rather than by the foundation of new colleges.[19] Rather than seeking to find teachers and professors as best they could, the better-supported schools that had survived the shakeout of the fifties and sixties could concentrate on quality of education and on the establishment of curricula. Institutions were aided in this search for professionalized and competent faculty by the growing influence of the German model of higher education: after 1860, more and more faculty members possessed and were expected to possess advanced degrees in the subjects they professed.

The day of the amateur professor was coming to an end, and with the growing experience and expertise of the American professoriat came a corresponding rejection of simplistic or elementary methods. Thus we can understand the seemingly curious fall of the first wave of exercise-based composition texts. As Alexander Bain noted in the Preface to his influential *English Composition and Rhetoric* of 1866, dicta and not practice or exercises were the proper substance of a book:

> All the principles and rules of composition that seem to me capable of affording aid or direction in the art I have attempted to bring together. . . . The fulfillment of this design has ended in a work more closely allied to Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric, Blair's Lectures, or Whately's Rhetoric, than to the majority of recent works on English Composition.[20]

Bain did include a few exercises in his book, but in the main it consists of abstract lessons and observations.

There follows Bain a curious sort of interregnum between two overtly exercise-based and mechanics-oriented periods in textbook style. Between 1870 and 1895, the exercises of the earlier part of the century were relegated to secondary school texts, while college texts became treatises. Certainly the three most important texts of the period are classic rhetoric treatises in the mold of Whately and Newman rather than Parkerian exercise-books. A. S. Hill's *Principles of Rhetoric* of 1878, John Genung's *Practical Elements* of 1886, and Barrett Wendell's *English Composition* of 1891 all eschewed basic practice materials and concentrated on deductive lessons based on their authors' observations. These books dealt little with grammatical and mechanical considerations, seeming to consider rhetoric an essentially conscious application of carefully-learned abstract principles.

These three textbooks are crucially important to the development of composition in America for several reasons. First was their sheer popularity. Hill was in print from 1878 through 1923, Genung from 1886 through 1914, Wendell from 1891 through 1918. These books went through printing after printing, and these were not the small printings of 2000 copies which had characterized the imprints of earlier in the century, but great steam-driven mass productions of 10,000 and 20,000 copies. The large houses which still control much text publishing today were being formed and were establishing extensive sales and distribution networks; after 1870 their most popular texts

defined the content of disciplines in a way that had been rare before the advent of cheap stereotyping. Hill, Genung, and Wendell were among their most popular authors, and, along with Bain, these three created the rhetorical theory that would shape American composition through the 1960s.

Second, these authors were the first genuine rhetoricians to deal completely with the theoretical problems posed by the shift from oral to written discourse. Rhetoricians since Blair had attempted it, but most of their theories had bogged down in belletristic analysis, poorly adapted oral rhetoric, or cumbersome taxonomic systems. Bain had begun to adapt, but his books were arid and hard to read. In Hill, Genung, and Wendell we have the first attempts at a modern written rhetoric, the first rhetoric of the century to really go beyond the orally-based theories of earlier rhetoric. Much of this composition theory had to be sheerly *invented* out of the whole cloth of personal observation, supposition, and selective plagiarism, and thus were born the modes of discourse, Unity, Coherence, and Emphasis, the patterns of exposition, Clearness, Force, and Energy, the organic paragraph, and other classic elements of current-traditional rhetoric. Whatever we may think of this theory, it remained the heart of composition textbooks for over sixty years.[21]

Finally, these books are important because they carry on the central *formal* characteristic of oral rhetorical theory: they are atomistic in perspective, dividing and subdividing the subject into many, many discrete classes, levels, figures, skills, behaviors, and rules. In spite of the fact that much of the theoretical *content* of these three books was recent, the *form* of these treatises was very traditional. Rhetoric was perceived as a collection of observations about the properties of successful written products, and the composition student was expected to bring the conscious insights of the book's author to bear on his own writing. Genung, in his Preface to the *Practical Elements*, admits that such an approach does not supply answers to all needs, but claims that a textbook cannot do more:

> Some elements of rhetoric, though very real and valuable, are not practical, because the ability to employ them cannot be imparted by teaching. They have to exist in the writer himself. . . . Literature is, of course, infinitely more than mechanism, but in proportion as it becomes more a text-book of rhetoric has less business with it. It is as mechanism that it must be taught; the rest must be left to the student himself.[22]

And Barrett Wendell's "Note for Teachers" at the beginning of *English Composition* makes it clear that for him, too, composition is a mechanical skill to be built up piece by piece, from the smallest pieces to the largest.[23]

The Age of Iron

By Wendell's day, however, the theoretical interregnum was almost over. The great changes that occurred after the 1890s were not so much theoretical as formal: treatises gave way to textbooks filled with exercises and assignments

as well as lessons. Between 1890 and 1930, the textbook as we see it today was developed by placing the invented theory of the nineteenth century into a lessons/exercises format perfected on the secondary level, and then feeding the resulting product into an increasingly centralized mass textbook market.

In other essays I have traced the rise of criteria of mechanical correctness, the growth of grammar and skills drills, the inception of handbooks and workbooks, and other elements of the history of teaching composition that reflect the influence of textbooks,[24] and for now I will merely summarize. The "literacy crisis" of the 1880's and '90's created a felt need for new sorts of composition teaching, and the cry then as in the 1970s was "Back to the Basics!" In the late eighties textbooks began to appear with the term "by practice" somewhere in their titles. Taking advantage of the general move toward giving students strenuous doses of writing practice, these books incorporated mechanical and formal exercises that had been unheard of in colleges for several decades. Such books prospered in the crisis atmosphere gripping the nation, and soon other authors were penning texts that proposed to use "written exercises, both critical and constructive, designed to cultivate in progressive and systematic order the students' sense of the leading requisites of composition," as John Genung put it in *his* exercise book, *Outlines of Rhetoric,* in 1893.[25]

By 1900 the trend had caught on most seriously, and with a few exceptions the textbooks that were being produced were, in formal respects, modern: filled with lessons, illustrations, and practice exercises. During the early part of this century, almost every text covered obligatory elements like the levels of composition—word, sentence, paragraph, whole composition—and modes of discourse—narration, description, exposition, argument—as well as a number of minor fields that shifted with the book's emphasis—grammar, spelling, punctuation, figures of speech, outlining, proofreading, letter-writing, etc.

Over the next forty years, very little was added that was novel, although some changes took place in texts. Most obviously, textbooks became very specialized; instead of the one central book of 1900 the field gradually evolved complex squadrons of rhetorics, exposition texts, handbooks, drillbooks, readers, sentence books, and all varieties of combinations and permutations. This movement began in the 1890's, with the first composition readers, Holt's "Specimens" series, which covered the four modes with a different anthology for each. Edwin Woolley produced the first handbook of composition in 1907, the perfect symbol of the mechanism of the period: composition crystallized into 500 mechanical rules. In 1912 the first "Patterns of Exposition" text appeared. In the late twenties, "exercise pads" appeared, large loose-bound books of exercises with perforated pages that would later be called workbooks; soon such books were staples of college teaching.[26] And always there were the rhetorics, with their endlessly derivative treatments. As time went on a few new electives were added—the business letter, the research paper, the literary essay—but most rhetorics remained depressingly similar.

This static situation, which lasted until after 1940, was the result of further development of phenomena we have already discussed: an unrealistic and atomized theory based on observation of finished products and on solipsistic intuition, and a centralized and highly competitive textbook marketplace that squeezed out approaches that didn't immediately sell. The most important cause of the morbidity that has caused some historians to label 1900–1930 the "Dark Ages" of composition was, however, the appallingly ignorant and reactionary nature of the audience for textbooks after 1900: the writing teachers. Interesting theory was not forthcoming because it did not sell as well as it had in the 1890's. And why not?

Composition was moribund during this time for the same reason that had caused the popularity of simplistic textbooks a century before: the qualifications of the teachers in the classrooms. In 1830 the young usher-professor, having had little rhetorical training and no pedagogical training, had *needed* a copy of Blair-cum-Mills in order to run his rhetoric class at Missouri Methodist College. The system in 1830 was not producing enough trained teachers, and such textbooks had helped take up the time. In 1930 the young literary graduate student needed *his* copy of Rankin, Thorpe, and Solve's *College Composition* and his *Century Collegiate Handbook* to run his class at Penn State, having had no rhetorical training and little pedagogical training. The system, considering composition intellectually valueless, had not taught him anything about teaching writing, and for the teacher of 1930 as for the teacher of 1830, textbooks taught the only way he knew. "Little wonder," as James McCrimmon put it, "that in such a sea of confusion he clings to his handbook as a shipwrecked sailor clings to his raft, and by an interesting human weakness, soon comes to believe that these rules, which yesterday were unknown to him, are the sole criteria of good writing."[27]

Textbooks thus came to have a unique place in the profession of composition. In most developed intellectual disciplines, the function of texts has always been essentially conservative: textbooks, which change with glacial slowness, provide stability amid the shifting winds of theoretical argument. They serve as sources for the proven truths needed for students' basic training while advanced scholarship extends the theoretical envelope, usually in journal articles. This is a model of information testing and dissemination accepted by disciplines from history to biology. The great difference between composition and other college-level disciplines is that for all intents and purposes, composition studies *had* no scholarly professionals between 1900 and 1930. English departments during that period saw composition as degrading hackwork, apprenticeship to higher literary studies, and did not encourage theoretical speculation. There was only one journal in the field, and as late as 1930 the *English Journal* had only 1,000 subscribers.

As a result, the usual disciplinary balance between journals and textbooks was destroyed; the conservative influence of textbooks became pervasive. There was nothing to move textbooks forward in correspondence with new discoveries in the field. There *were* no new discoveries. There was hardly any field. What debate was carried on in *English Journal* was usually rather

low-level and was read by few; a popular textbook, on the other hand, was the commonest artifact in a teacher's world. A textbook was placed in her hands as a graduate student, and most teachers assumed that the wisdom of the text was the wisdom of the world. They read their texts, they studied their handbooks, they taught their tools. Composition was the only college-level course consistently carried on by people whose only real training came from the rules and tenets found in the textbooks they asked their students to buy.

Knowledge, Power, and Markets

Slowly, however, glacially, changes began to take place in the structure of the discipline—changes that would strongly affect textbooks. The National Council of Teachers of English, founded in 1911, had made little headway during its first two decades, remaining a shrunken in-group of mostly midwestern teachers until 1930 or so. Around that time, however, the expansion of *English Journal* into a high school and a college version began to attract more university teachers, and the growing influence of John Dewey in colleges of education led to greater membership in the Deweyite NCTE. In 1938 the college membership of the NCTE had become so numerous that *EJ* underwent mitosis and a separate journal, *College English*, was spun off. Eleven years later the Conference on College Composition and Communication was formed, and its members, feeling that they needed their own journal, founded *College Composition and Communication*. Suddenly, within only about twenty years, there was a *literature* on the problems of college writing, a growing body of knowledge being developed by a growing group of practitioners. For the first time, writing teachers could turn to something other than their textbooks for information about how best to do their work.

As a result, the last four decades' worth of textbooks have been a remarkably experimental group when contrasted to pre-1940 texts. The effects of the new journals and of the burgeoning educational culture of post–World War II America led to a real questioning of the older sorts of textbooks, and we have seen General Semantics texts, Communications texts, structural linguistics texts, and different sorts of thesis texts[28] come and go in a seemingly endless parade of novelties. We have seen many educational fads, but after the "abstraction ladders" had fallen down, the "four communications skills" had melted back into expository writing, the "structural linguistics" heirophants had been Chomskyized, the day-glo covers had faded beneath the harsh light of back-to-basics, the textbook of 1980 was mostly material that would be familiar to a teacher of 1950.[29] Not even the rhetorical revolution of the 1960's had a powerful effect on textbooks, at least not until recently.

The history of research on writing and composition teaching from the 1940's through the present is a history of epistemological warfare, of progressive theoretical and empirical research struggling with entrenched traditional pedagogy. We who read the journals have tended to characterize the struggle as a war between good and evil, discovery and reaction.[30] In the most pragmatic sense, however, things are considerably simpler: it is a struggle for

epistemological primacy between journals and textbooks, and textbooks are changing because they have begun, for the first time, to lose the battle.

It is a curious war, this, with both sides dependent to some degree on each other, and with a constant movement of troops—that is, teachers and "composition theorists"—back and forth from one camp to another. Textbook publishers and journal authors, who often promulgate vastly different visions of what composition teaching should be, are yet symbiotic.[31] Fascinating as this coëvolutionary socioculture is, however, it is tangential to our central inquiry here. What we need to note here is that once again textbooks are changing, and this time it is a genuine shift, slow but powerful, and not the scattered ad hoc experimentalism that passed for textbook change from 1965 to 1980. A shift has occurred, and fairly recently: for the first time in this century, more textbook adoption decisions are being made by rhetorically-trained persons than by rhetorically ignorant persons. And that means that finally the dream of Fred Newton Scott in 1909 and of Porter Perrin in 1933 and of Albert Kitzhaber in 1960 has a chance of realization, and the intellectual discipline of composition can finally start to take control of its tools once again.

This shift is not due to any new liberality on the parts of text publishers. It is occurring for the same reasons that have motivated the other great textbook shifts we have examined in this essay: the changing qualifications of the teachers in the composition classrooms. We are seeing today, I believe, a sort of repeat of the post–Civil War situation. The average teacher of composition today is much more likely to be knowledgeable about the field than she was even ten years ago. The average composition program is much more likely to be directed by a trained specialist than ten years ago. Practicums, colloquia, wider journal coverage, more professional respect, and a drastically changing job market have all come together to change the preparation and thus the needs of the average writing teacher, and when the average teacher changes, textbook publishers react. Fewer and fewer young, trained writing teachers are willing to surrender their teacherly autonomy to the master-teacher behind the textbook, to exercises and canned discussions and mechanical paper marking. Text publishers are realizing that stasis is no longer safe, not even for current-traditional warhorses like McCrimmon's *Writing with a Purpose.*

The battle for better teaching continues always, of course, and it remains to be seen whether the evolutionary change in teachers and writing programs that I have been describing will prevail. But textbooks *are* beginning to appear that concentrate on having students learn the processes of writing rather than abstract concepts *about* writing, that liberate the teacher to listen to her students rather than enslaving them to an author's theories. More and more involved, trained teachers are gravitating to these texts. The shift is relatively new, and the movement toward better textbooks has far to go; the forces of tradition and dependency are very strong. But if we will keep training teachers to stand by themselves, we can continue to re-invent textbooks in the image of their best nature—as our tools, not crutches we depend upon for all support. Texts can be powerful servants, but only our own pride in

and knowledge of our subject will keep them from turning on us and becoming, as they have in the past, oppressive masters.

NOTES

1. Albert R. Kitzhaber, *Themes, Theories, and Therapy: The Teching of Writing in College* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), pp. 8–26.

2. It could, I think, be argued that Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* is an exception, an essentially pedagogical rather than an analytical work; even Quintilian, however, is filled with descriptive and analytical detail.

3. The letters of the Founding Fathers, especially those of Franklin and Jefferson, are filled with references to sending and receiving books from Europe and to the excitement of such imported learning.

4. According to the *Catalogue of the British Museum.*

5. The stereotyping process, which was invented by the French printer Didot in the 1790's, allowed printers to cast solid page-sized plates from *papier-mache* molds rather than setting individual pieces of type. These plates could then be used again and again, allowing reprints of books to be made far more cheaply. The Mills edition of Blair, cast in 1829, remained available through 1873, brought out by a number of different publishers. (Carvill and Zell apparently sold stereotype plates to whoever could afford them.) During those 44 years the pagination, questions, and "analysis" remained completely unchanged.

6. Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres, To Which Are Added, Copious Questions: And an Analysis of Each Lecture By Abraham Mills, Teacher of Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1873), p. 215n. This was the last year that the 1829 Mills "University, College, and School Edition" was published in Philadelphia.

7. The introduction of Blairian rhetoric in secondary schools was itself a novel development. Prior to 1800 students might have read a few orations prior to college, but systematic rhetorical study had not been often taught in lower grades. Blair's rhetorical approach, however, which allowed the combination of rhetoric with the ever-increasing study of vernacular literature, was incredibly popular, and its popularity encompassed younger students than had ever been taught rhetoric before. In one sense, then, textbooks did not ascend to rhetoric; rhetoric descended to educational levels where question-answer apparatus had existed for years.

8. Joseph Lancaster, *Improvements in Education* (London: Darton and Harvey, 1803).

9. Rev. J. L. Blake, *Abridgment of Lectures on Rhetoric by Hugh Blair* (Concord: Hill and Moore, 1822), p. iii.

10. Nathaniel Greene, *Abridgment of Lectures on Rhetoric by Hugh Blair* (Boston: True and Greene, 1824), p. iii.

11. As William G. Carr says, "The history of the textbook since 1860 is primarily a history of increased differentiation and grading. The early books were written 'for schools, academies, colleges, and teachers' institutes.' It was apparently assumed that children of all ages were equal in ability, had the same interests, and could be benefited by identical subject matter and methods of instruction" (William G. Carr, "The Evolution of the Junior High School Textbook in English," *English Journal,* 16 [February 1927], 120).

12. Samuel P. Newman, *A Practical System of Rhetoric* (New York: Mark H. Newman, 1843), p. 14.

13. Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), pp. 48–49.

14. Donald G. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities before the Civil War* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1932), pp. 15, 28. My reading of Tewksbury's somewhat confusing statistics is more conservative than that of Rudolph, who extrapolates over 700 colleges founded *and defunct* before 1865. (Rudolph, p. 47n.)

15. For more on this problem, see my essay "Mechanical Correctness as a Focus in Composition Instruction," *College Composition and Communication*, 36 (February, 1985), 61–72.

16. Richard Green Parker, *Aids to English Composition* (Boston: R. S. Davis, 1844), p. i.

17. Such a method had previously been used in books like Daniel Jaudon's *Union Grammar*, John Rippingham's *Rules for English Composition*, George Quackenbos' *First Lessons in English Composition*, and Parker's own *Progressive Exercises*.

18. C. H. Knoblauch, in his talk, "Neither Current, Nor Traditional, nor a Paradigm" (Modern Language Association Conference, Washington, DC, December 1984), delivered a usefully astringent corrective to the casual adaptation of Daniel Fogarty's term "current-traditional rhetoric," to mean the congeries of intuitions and assumptions from the nineteenth century that have informed most twentieth-century composition teaching. The term seems, however, to have developed a sinister life of its own, and I heave a sigh as I realize that inventing a new term would be harder and more confusing than continuing to (mis)use the old one.

19. It is true that the Morrill Act established some new colleges, but its importance lies primarily in the ways in which it changed the nature of established schools and gave them certain kinds of financial support. According to Arthur Comey, there were 38.1 college students per 100,000 Americans in 1850 and 41.3 per 100,000 in 1880. During this period the U.S. population itself more than doubled. Since we know that relatively few new private colleges were founded during this period, the natural assumption is that most of these new students were the result of the founding of the A&M colleges after 1862 and the subsequent enlargement of many older colleges into prototypical universities. (Arthur M. Comey, "Growth of Colleges of the United States," *Educational Review*, 3 [February, 1892], 124–127.)

20. Alexander Bain, *English Composition and Rhetoric: A Manual* (New York: American Book Co., 1866), p. 4. Bain was not American, but his implied sneer at Parkerian books reflected contemporary American professorial attitudes.

21. We now tend to think of these theories and constructs as relics of a barbarous era, epistemologically questionable and pedagogically useless, but we must remember that the rhetors behind this theory were attempting to chart an almost completely unknown territory. That their maps were not accurate is hardly to be wondered at; we sigh today not because of the maps' inaccuracy, but because so many have for so long unquestioningly followed their directions into the desert.

22. John F. Genung, *The Practical Elements of Rhetoric* (Boston: Ginn, 1886), pp. xi–xii.

23. Wendell had his students read his book, chapter by chapter, beginning with the "Words" chapter and working up to the "Force" and "Elegance" chapters. They would after these readings analyze their fortnightly essays looking for elements specifically relating to the chapters read. "Repeated use of this scheme," says Wendell, "certainly fixes the book in their minds to a rather surprising degree." Doubtless true. See Wendell, *English Composition* (New York: Scribners, 1903), pp. [1–4]. This Note is dated May 1894, and does not appear in editions predating that year.

24. See "Mechanical Correctness"; "Grammar in American College Composition," in Donald M. McQuade, ed., *The Territory of Language: Linguistics, Stylistics, and the Teaching of Composition*, rev. ed. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, forthcoming); and "Handbooks: History of a Genre" in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 13 (Spring, 1983), 87–98.

25. John F. Genung, *Outlines of Rhetoric, Embodied in Rules, Illustrative Examples, and a Progressive Course of Prose Composition* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1893), p. iii.

26. See Porter Perrin's diatribe against the use of drillbooks in his classic article "The Remedial Racket," *English Journal*, 22 (May, 1933), 384–388.

27. James M. McCrimmon, "The Importance of the Right Handbook," *College English*, 3 (October, 1941), 71.

28. Thesis texts are the quintessential modern composition texts; I call them thesis texts because each one purveys a central idea about writing or learning to write. This central idea controls the presentation of the pedagogy. For a fuller discussion of thesis texts, see "The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse," pp. 451–452.

29. For an illustration of this *plus ca change* phenomenon as illustrated by a popular text, see my article "Current-Traditional Rhetoric: Thirty Years of *Writing with a Purpose*," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 11 (Fall, 1981), 208–221.

30. Two of the most thoughtful of these critiques are Donald C. Stewart, "Composition Textbooks and the Assault on Tradition," CCC, 29 (May, 1978), 171–175, and Mike Rose, "Sophisticated, Ineffective Books: The Dismantling of Process in Composition Texts," *CCC*, 32 (February, 1981), 65–74.

31. See, for instance, David Tedlock's rather rueful "Confessions of a Textbook Writer," *College English*, 42 (October, 1980), 167–170, and Arnold and Charlene Tibbetts' darkly negative "Can Composition Textbooks Use Composition Research?" *CE*, 44 (December, 1982), 855–56.