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A NEW STRATEGY FOR TEACHING FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

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LEARNING TO LIVE A RHETORICAL LIFE:
A NEW STRATEGY FOR TEACHING FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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Dedicated to all those who taught me the value of living a rhetorical life:

To my family, friends and neighbors, priests, advisors, counselors, and therapists.

And to my students and academic colleagues

Triton College ♦ Northeastern Illinois University ♦ Joliet Junior College ♦
Olivet Nazarene University ♦ Webster University ♦ Proviso West High School ♦
Academy of Scholastic Achievement ♦ Whitney Young High School ♦
Corliss High School ♦ Queen of Peace High School ♦ Norman North High School ♦
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University of Chicago, and Northeastern Illinois University ♦
University of Oklahoma ♦ University of Central Oklahoma ♦ College English Association ♦
Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar and the ATEG Journal ♦
Colorado Language Arts Society ♦ Conference on College Composition and Communication ♦
Modern Language Association — Rocky Mountain, South Atlantic, and South-Central Chapters ♦
National Council and Illinois Association of Teachers of English ♦ Popular Culture Association ♦
Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) ♦ The Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) ♦
National and Oklahoma Association for Developmental Education (NADE and OKADE)

And to my teachers and classmates

Belle View School ♦ St. Stephen's School ♦ Trinity College (Hartford CT) ♦
Brown University ♦ US Navy Officer Candidate School ♦ US Navy Supply Corps School ♦
University of Chicago Graduate School of Business ♦ Concordia University ♦
University of Illinois at Chicago ♦ Northeastern Illinois University ♦ University of Oklahoma

And to my employers, employees, suppliers, customers, clients, and business associates

Congressman Carlton R. Sickles ♦ US Information Agency ♦ Marsteller Advertising ♦
First National Bank of Chicago ♦ Henrici's Restaurants ♦ Baker & Brichta Advertising ♦
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GWL Marketing Services Management Corp. ♦ Action Press, Inc. ♦ The Presentation Store, Ltd.
And to the crew of the USS Wilhoite DER 397, VFW Comrades, and Vietnam War Veterans

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In which I introduce my collaborators who live eternally on library shelves, internet websites, DVDs, CDs, academic journals, and JSTOR. Together they form my cadre of “constructivist confederates.” So to all who have helped me in this project whose works I have referenced and unabashedly employed for my own benefit, thank you for joining me in this adventure “as companions, as fellow researchers.” It’s been a blast!

Abstract: Finding a Pedagogical Path to a Rhetorical Life

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both...
Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken"

The received history of first-year composition (FYC) pedagogy seems to present itself in almost Darwinian evolutionary terms, first emerging from the swamp of Susan Miller's current-traditional basement (121), then developing into a more advanced disciplinary state with the advent of the "writing process," and finally, after many presumably beneficial "turns" (for example, the "social turn"), reaching what today might be seen as an almost teleological moment, the establishment of an independent academic discipline based on an accepted pedagogical model. The species has more than survived, it has also most certainly thrived.

However, this evolutionary journey may not be as highly advanced, well-developed, and firmly established as it first might seem. Like the narrator of Frost's "The Road Not Taken," many composition scholars tell of their academic and pedagogical journey "with a sigh," tacitly acknowledging that there have been "roads not taken," resulting in a much different, even more advanced level of evolutionary development that I call the "rhetorical life," a life that current FYC theory and pedagogy seem incapable of imagining, let alone creating in the classroom.

Nonetheless, I will try to create it here by proposing other pedagogical strategies that, I will argue, are ultimately more productive and, in the end, more effective than any of the other current instructional models including but not limited to the most recent argument model that has come to be called, among other terms, "civic engagement." In fact, it will be an "academic model," not the argument model, of composition that can best respond to a vast array of rhetorical situations that students and graduates will encounter, from the seemingly prosaic demands of business management to the intense challenges of political debate to the intellectual rigors of academic research.

Foreword: Ethos – An Example of a Lived Rhetorical Life

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day.
Dylan Thomas

“Once more unto the breach, dear friends.”
King Henry V, 3.1

In his examination of the rhetorical purposes of the novel, Lennard Davis makes the claim that this literary form is “a cultural phenomenon with certain overt aims and a hidden agenda” (5), a view supported by John Lanchester, British journalist, novelist, and contributing editor of the *London Review of Books*, who observes in a recent *New Yorker* article that “(W)hen you are writing fiction, there is a story behind the apparent story.” I’d like to propose an extension of these claims, namely that not only novels but most texts, perhaps all texts, even doctoral dissertations, have unstated themes, assumptions, and premises that underlie their very existence and form the entire edifice upon which they are based. Or again to repeat Lanchester, there is always “a story behind the story.” And so it is with this dissertation.

The unstated theme, assumption, and premise of my underlying narrative is suggested by Edward Said in his article “Thoughts on Late Style” when he proposes a form of rhetorical invention that he claims is the basic structure of rhetorical life. To briefly summarize, he first declares that there is an “accepted notion” (that I will call a commonplace), in his case, the claim that “age confers a spirit of reconciliation and serenity on late works.”¹ He then introduces what I will subsequently call “a closer look,” a move that, inspired by one or more anomalies, invents a position contrary to the commonplace, specifically: “But what of artistic lateness not as harmony and resolution, but as intransigence, difficulty, and contradictions? What if age and ill health don’t produce serenity at all?” In short, what if we old guys, instead of “shifting.../ Into

¹ At the age of 77, I think it’s safe to say that this dissertation constitutes one of my “late works.”

the lean and slipper'd pantaloons, / With spectacles on nose and pouch on side" (*As You Like It*, 2.7), actually become more and more cantankerous?

Said supports his claim about curmudgeonly old men by referencing Ibsen "whose final works... reopen questions that are supposed to have been resolved..." ("Late Style"). In many ways, I will be following Said's "late style" formula, reopening questions about the nature and purpose of first-year composition pedagogy that "supposedly have been resolved," and, as I do this relatively late in life, it can be considered a time, according to Said, that can be marked by "intransigence, difficulty, and contradictions," perhaps unconsciously mirroring Dylan Thomas's suggestion that "Old age should burn and rave at close of day."

In other words, a tendency towards a "little madness" might well appear in the fall of life as well as in the spring.² After all, the aged, having experienced decades of cultural and institutional constraints (or less negatively, "guidelines," or more negatively, Foucault's "panopticon"), can exhibit a certain rejection of authority as well as respect for it. A definitive explanation for the appearance of such apparently contradictory professional behavior may be impossible, but if I had to venture a guess it would be that after spending my entire adult life (and even much of my childhood) swimming in rhetorical waters, often without ever realizing it,³ I feel that now, like a frequent visitor to Burke's rhetorical parlor, I have more than "caught the tenor of the argument," and it's finally time to "put in my oar" (*Philosophy* 110-111).⁴ But rather than just joining the conversation, I want to try to make a significant impact on it by proposing new strategies for teaching first year composition based on the kind of life that I have

² An allusion to Emily Dickenson's "A Little Madness in the Spring."

³ Much like in David Foster Wallace's book *This is Water*, fish spend their lives swimming unwittingly in water.

⁴ Although Burke's "Parlor" (or the "unending conversation" to which this citation refers) is one of the most iconic references in composition scholarship, it has a serious conceptual flaw, specifically the assumption that the person who decides to "put in their oar" has an interesting contribution to make.

been living (or trying to live or, perhaps more accurately, wishing that I had been living) — what I call a “rhetorical life” in much the same way that Richard Lanham proposes the existence of “rhetorical man,” someone who is “trained not to discover reality but to manipulate it” (4).

Indeed, it seems that I have always been “contesting commonplaces.”⁵ Being contentious is apparently what I do. If there is a commonplace, my nature seems to be to want to contest it, and that is what this dissertation will attempt to do – contest the current state of FYC theory and pedagogy and then propose more productive approaches to the vital task of teaching first year college students how to write. My overriding claim will be that the purpose of FYC should be to introduce students to this “rhetorical life,” a life of both academic contemplation and the action of the “arena,”⁶ a life that can be lived successfully both inside and outside the academy primarily by challenging commonplaces,⁷ whether posing as intellectual issues within and among the academic disciplines or as business concerns encountered in a wide variety of commercial enterprises or as social and cultural imbroglios, appearing as “the flurries and flareups of the Human Barnyard” (*Rhetoric of Motives*, 23). Regardless of the source, the ability both to identify and to challenge commonplaces is absolutely essential to the advancement of knowledge, whether academic, business, social and cultural, institutional, scientific, or governmental, and it is this ability that must be the goal of FYC instruction.

In other words, this work is a distillation of more than fifty years of almost continual employment in what might be called the “rhetoric business”— first in the production of rhetoric starting as a congressional intern in 1964 responding to constituent letters for a US congressman

⁵ In fact, “Contesting Commonplaces” has been the title of my own course in composition ever since I began teaching AP Language/Composition in 2007, a title that I carried over to my FYC classes

⁶ A reference to Theodore Roosevelt’s speech and Richard Nixon’s book.

⁷ The ability to create productive commonplaces will be explored as a means of rhetorical invention and the creation of knowledge and successful ideas.

followed by a short-lived career in student politics,⁸ a stint as the editor and publisher of *Mutatis Mutandis* (the University of Chicago Graduate Business School student magazine), and then a twenty-five year career in advertising, interspersed with the part-time profession of rhetoric as an adjunct professor of advertising, business, and marketing at various colleges and universities before evolving into a high school English teacher, eventually combining the study, creation, and profession of rhetoric as a Master's and Ph.D. student and graduate teaching assistant, a career that included the editorship of a professional journal⁹ along with multiple presentations at professional conferences including the Illinois Association of Teachers of English (IATE), College English Association (CEA), Conference on College Composition and Communications (twice, including a full-day post-conference workshop), Modern Language Association (Rocky Mountain, South Atlantic, and South Central Regional Chapters), the National and the Oklahoma Association for Developmental Education, National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Popular Culture/American Culture Association, and Teaching English in the Two-Year College (TYCA) — in short, I have been living the life of a professional rhetorician for several decades. Hopefully,¹⁰ then, this more than half a century of living a “rhetorical life” allows me the latitude to emulate Said's description of Ibsen as someone who can “stir up anxiety, tamper irrevocably

⁸ I had the mistaken idea that “independent” students at Brown University (that is, students not members of a fraternity) would respond to a movement designed to increase their presence in student government — the “Brown Independent Union.” What should have been obvious is that students at Brown join fraternities in order to participate in student government, and they remain “independent” in order to avoid such involvement. Hence, my political career was short-lived.

⁹ For eight years, I was the editor of *The Journal of the Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar*, one of the many “assemblies” that are part of the National Council of Teachers of English.

¹⁰ A grammar note: some may recoil at my use of “hopefully” in this sentence, complaining that it is an adverb that doesn't modify anything. Thankfully, Martha Kolln has solved this problem by creating a grammatical category she calls a “sentence modifier” that (like “Thankfully”) works to modify the entire sentence rather than a single word, phrase, or clause (196).

with the possibility of closure, and leave the audience (*at least my audience of composition scholars*) more perplexed and unsettled than before” (“Late Style,” my additions).

Put another way, rather than simply trying to school young people in traditional rhetorical practices focusing on how to be good citizens by participating in the politics of a democracy,¹¹ I’d like to open them up to a fact that took me so long to realize—that their entire lives are rhetorical, so that no matter where they find themselves, even in a science lab or an accounting office, they are capable of using rhetoric to make their presence felt in the “water they’re swimming in.”¹² I believe that such a goal, helping students find ways to live rhetorical lives, is the very essence of a dissertation written late in life, and one that I believe I am unusually qualified to write.

In some respects, then, I think I reflect William Wordsworth’s observations in his Conclusion of *The Prelude*, when he points out that “What we have loved,/ Others will love, and we will teach them how,” a claim restated quite succinctly in Carol Witherspoon’s foreword to Robert J. Nash’s *Liberating Scholarly Writing*, “We teach *who we are*... We evoke, compose, and live the stories that shape our personal and professional lives...” (vii-viii, italics mine). In other words, this dissertation will be much more than an argument about what I see as a more productive future for first-year composition. It is a project that is infused with personal experience, particularly because this dissertation will be making some significant claims about the nature and purpose of First Year Composition, in this case to propose new strategies for teaching first year composition (FYC) centered on what I call a rhetorical life.

¹¹ I do not discount or in any way demean the role of rhetoric in the life of a democracy, only that limiting the focus of a year-long course in rhetoric to this single purpose denies students the full range of educational opportunities available to them in a course that features writing and rhetoric.

¹² A reference to David Foster Wallace’s *This is Water*.

Unfortunately, many opinions about rhetoric, formed over more than two millennia by the work of scholars, theologians, public intellectuals, and commentators, not to mention the views of ordinary individuals (those who might be called “rhetorical civilians”), maintain that the field is, at its heart, a negative force. Indeed, perhaps encouraged by the current turbulent political climate, many may find that my call for students to live rhetorical lives isn’t really very appealing at all. Indeed, it might be completely undesirable, even reprehensible.

For example, some might think that rhetoric incites violence—witness charges against former President Trump of inciting a riot with what his accusers call “inflammatory rhetoric” (Pilkington). Or, to show that this view or rhetoric is a “two-edge sword, dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow” (Hebrews 4:12) of both the political left and right, one report claimed that Chelsea Clinton’s rhetoric caused a “Muslim Massacre” (Sabia). And more recently, U. S. Representative Maxine Waters has been severely criticized for her rhetoric surrounding the trial of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin.

Others may believe that rhetoric is some sort of moral subterfuge, “to make the weaker seem the stronger cause,” a failing that Aristotle ascribes to Protagoras (*On Rhetoric*, 1402.a). An extension of this view leads others to see rhetoric as promoting the opposite of the truth: “Making the good seem bad, and the bad good.” Still other critics may contend that rhetoric is the enemy of action: “Ignore the rhetoric and get things done” (Morse); and still others, perhaps taken in (even unknowingly) by Plato’s claim that rhetoric is “cooking,” think that rhetoric is a way to obfuscate, undermine, and even pervert the truth (Beer “Socrates’ Changing Account”).

Nor do theological sources have much if anything good to say about rhetoric.¹³ For example, St. Benedict warns that “If you want to have true and everlasting life, keep your tongue

¹³ The term “rhetoric” isn’t used by Biblical sources because the word hadn’t come into existence – the Hebrew Psalms were composed long before the advent of Plato, Aristotle, and the Sophists.

from speaking evil and your lips from uttering deceit” (2). St. John Chrysostom admonishes, “Let the mouth also fast from disgraceful speeches and railings” (“Homily III”). And St. Augustine of Hippo comments on his happy departure from his job as a professor of rhetoric: “The day came when I was set free... I resigned my post, and the people of Milan would have to look for some other *salesman of words* for their students” (143, 147, emphasis mine).

Even several Psalms, far preceding the rhetoric of the ancient Greeks, warn against the evils of rhetoric. For example, Psalm 12 (circa 1015 BCE) complains that “Everyone speaks falsely with his neighbor;/ with a smooth tongue they speak from a double heart”; Psalm 55 (1023 BCE) refers to “my companion” whose “... speech is softer than butter,/ but war is in his heart./ His words are smoother than oil, but they are drawn with swords”; and Psalm 62 (also around 1023 BCE) identifies enemies who “...bless with their lips,/ but in their hearts they curse” (*When Each Psalm Was Composed*).

And finally, and perhaps ironically, another significant source of resistance to my proposal may well come from the ranks of current composition scholars who contend that my approach is detrimental to the primary purpose of college composition, namely, to prepare students to be more productive participants in American democracy, a position that unfortunately ignores the dominant role of rhetoric in just about every other aspect of our lives. Therefore, this so-called “public turn” to “civic engagement” (also called “critical cultural studies” or “CCS”)¹⁴ is as incompatible with my plan as those views that incorporate even the most unprincipled purposes of rhetoric.¹⁵

¹⁴ “CCS” or “critical cultural studies” is a term developed by Richard Fulkerson in his essay “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century,” which will be given greater attention later in this dissertation.

¹⁵ To be clear, it’s not that rhetorical instruction should avoid participation in Theodore Roosevelt’s “citizenship in the arena.” My point is that none of these concepts of rhetoric — not the idea that it

To the advocates of all these views about rhetoric I would say that their focus is much too narrow. While rhetoric may, indeed, be used to incite riots, falsely impugn sterling reputations, substitute thought for action, and even, more positively, inspire political literacy and democratic engagement, it also creates scientific and mathematical knowledge, affects the interpretation of history, lies at the heart of economic activity, influences our view art and music and literature,¹⁶ and even determines the nature of the games we play. In fact, my students have argued that rhetoric forms the foundation of every sport, game, and contest that we watch and engage in.

Indeed, current manifestations of baseball, football, basketball, and even the high jump and freestyle swimming are all rhetorical inventions. Briefly, sports rhetoric may seem at first to focus on simple arguments – the best team or the best player (or “GOAT,” the “Greatest of All Time”¹⁷) — but determining the rules that define the sport requires a complex, extended rhetorical process that actually creates the meaning of the sport and how it is played. As some long-forgotten sports academic (or an academic who liked sports) once observed, there cannot be any sport without the rules, and it is rhetoric that determines the rules defining what it means to play football, baseball, or any other sport. So, for example, the rhetoric that determined the legitimacy of the forward pass, a lower pitcher’s mound and the designated hitter, the three-point line, the “Fosbury flop” (high jump), and the 15-meter underwater rule¹⁸ and kick turn forever changed the nature of football, baseball, basketball, the high jump, and freestyle swimming.

purveys the coarsest forms of political discourse nor the belief that it creates language at its most inspiring —comes close to defining what I mean by “a rhetorical life.”

¹⁶ One of the most insightful investigations of the rhetoric of literature is Lennard Davis’s *Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction*.

¹⁷ “A Sure Way to Start Arguments” was the title of a *Wall Street Journal* review of *The Baseball 100*, a list who the author believed were baseball’s “GOATS.”

¹⁸ Competitive swimming organizations prohibit swimming under water for more than 15 meters as underwater swimming is much faster than swimming on the surface.

My thesis, therefore, is both much broader and more comprehensive than current incarnations of FYC pedagogy. I will propose that first year composition students should emerge from the course with the knowledge and belief that their entire lives have been and will continue to be lived rhetorically, as a creation of language. In other words, “rhetoric becomes something like the condition of our existence” (Bender and Wellbery, 25). As FYC students, then, experiencing their first and perhaps only encounter with the discipline of rhetoric in the college classroom, they should find a way to enhance the entire scope of their lives, not just in the public square but also in whatever realm they choose to live their lives—even in the world of business, commerce, industry, and finance.

As Wayne C. Booth puts the case for rhetoric, “It includes almost every corner of our lives” (xi). In fact, one of the most critical tasks of what many view as the dreary job of a cost accountant is actually the employment of rhetorical invention, specifically in the task of conducting discounted cash flow analysis that requires the accountant to evaluate the advisability of making capital equipment investments. In short, whether students wind up as accountants or astronauts,¹⁹ physicists or politicians, teachers or tax attorneys, artists or architects, their lives will be richer, fuller, and ultimately happier and more productive if they learn that rhetoric infuses every aspect of their existence.

One way to briefly illustrate my position is to offer the works of scholars like Deirdre McCloskey, who argues that even economics is a rhetorical construction (*Rhetoric of Economics*). Furthermore, she argues that science, history, law, and literature all have roots in

¹⁹ One of the great scenes in the movie *Hidden Figures* occurs when John Glenn questions the “ethos” of the Langley Research Center and won’t accept a “go” for the Mercury spaceship until the launch data are verified by Katherine Johnson, the Black “computer” whom he has learned to trust. “Get the girl to check the numbers,” says Glenn. “If she says the numbers are good, I am ready to go.” In other words, a key moment in the film is clearly rhetorical.

rhetoric.²⁰ And she has lots of company in her quest to bring rhetoric into just about every facet of our lives.²¹ In fact, there may not be any area of human interest, including art and architecture, business, music, sports, and fashion that are not “socially constructed rhetorical inventions.”

Indeed, the rhetorical nature of what many have come to accept as reality extends even to religion and theology.²² For example, there is an argument that the story of Jesus’s birth is a rhetorical invention — not today’s commercial invention of Christmas, but the actual nativity story. According to Biblical scholar Joseph F. Kelly, the authors of the two gospels that contain the nativity story (*Matthew* and *Luke*) constructed the story of Jesus’ birth with a rhetorical purpose. Kelly’s claim is that they were concerned that Mark, the earliest gospel writer, “implied, if unwittingly, that Jesus had been recognized as God’s Son only as an adult and only after his baptism by John” (3).²³ Therefore, they felt the need to claim the “theology of Christ” and so included the accounts of Jesus’ birth, “which recorded fulfillment of prophecies, signs in the sky, and angelic annunciations. Had the two evangelists not done such Christology, we would never have had Christmas” (3). Hence, the claim that Christmas is a rhetorical invention.

²⁰ See McCloskey’s “The Rhetoric of Liberty” and “The Essential Rhetoric of Law, Literature, and Liberty” as well as “The Rhetoric of History” with Allan Megill, “The Rhetoric of Inquiry” with John S. Nelson in *The Rhetoric of Human Sciences* that includes additional essays on the rhetoric of science and mathematics.

²¹ Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* comes most immediately to mind, a work that calls attention to Alan G. Gross’s *The Rhetoric of Science*, Randy Allen Harris’s edited volume *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric of Science Case Studies*, and Herbert W. Simons’ edited volume *Rhetoric in the Human Sciences*. In addition, numerous journal articles such “The Invention of Zero” by Maria Popova and G. Mitchell Reyes’s “The Rhetoric in Mathematics” also support the proposition that a “rhetorical life” also includes even the most positivist of areas of academic life.

²² Several rhetorical texts by philosopher George Kennedy including *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* and *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* are used in theological studies at American seminaries.

²³ This view maintains that “Jesus was simply a man who was tested by God and after passing the test was given supernatural powers and adopted as a son, which occurred at His baptism. Jesus was then rewarded for all He did (and for His perfect character) with His own resurrection and adoption into the Godhead. The Church has determined this view to be heretical because it denies the pre-existence of Christ and therefore denies His Deity” (J. Warner Wallace).

Another theological example of rhetoric that is even more extensive in its claims is found in James L. Kinneavy's *Greek Rhetorical Origins of Christian Faith: An Inquiry*. According to Kinneavy, it is not just Jesus's birth that is a rhetorical invention but the entire edifice of the Christian faith.

It is my contention... that many of the major features of the concept of persuasion, as embodied in Greek rhetoric of the Hellenistic period, are semantically quite close to the Christian notion of faith. I contend further than the writers of the New Testament were, in all probability, aware of these rapprochements. And finally, I contend the majority of the texts in the New Testament that mention *pistis* as faith can be read with rhetorical interpretation. (4)

And it's not just theology that surprises with its rhetorical foundations. Business and economic enterprise, as demonstrated by economists like Deirdre McCloskey, are equally rich with rhetoric. In fact, every page of *The Wall Street Journal*, even (and especially!) the stock tables, is evidence of men and women living rhetorical lives.²⁴

For example, a recent financial instrument “marries” an NFT with an Emjoi resulting in the birth of a “Yat” (Wolfe). Indeed, the entire financial universe can be considered a socially constructed rhetorical invention starting with the invention of the corporation, which is, according to Ambrose Bierce's *The Unabridged Devil's Dictionary* “an ingenious device for obtaining profit without individual responsibility”; more formally, “It is a legal construct, a charter granted by the state to a group of investors to gather private funds for a specific purpose”

²⁴ One of McCloskey's more interesting claims about rhetoric and economics is her essay with Arjo Klamer “One Quarter of GDP is Persuasion.” I'll argue later that her estimate dramatically understates the case, as she herself later acknowledges in her trilogy on the bourgeoisie when she claims that “the creativity of the West... arose from... rhetoric” (646, *Equality*), indeed that “rhetoric made modernity” (640, *Equality*). In short, the power of ideas, or what rhetoricians call “invention,” enabled common people (i.e., those imbued with liberty rather than nobility) to become “bold,” to take risks, and in the end become fabulously wealthy.

(“A Short History of Corporations”). More specifically, it has “five core structural characteristics: (1) legal personality, (2) limited liability, (3) transferable shares, (4) centralized management under a board structure, and (5) shared ownership by contributors of equity capital” (Armour *et al.*). In short, capitalism itself (or socialism for that matter) is a socially constructed rhetorical invention. Like the “Yat,” we invented the entire world of commerce and industry.

And while even though corporations might be considered “real,” it is only because they are a rhetorical invention accepted by what Stanley Fish would call an “interpretive community” (“Variorum” 485). Other financial instruments that are equally as “real” and equally rhetorical inventions include such novelties as “SPACs,” (a “Special Purpose Acquisition Company created for the purpose of acquiring or merging with an existing company and avoiding the legal requirements demanded of an Initial Public Offering, also a very real and very much a rhetorical invention, [Young]); ETFs or “Exchange Traded Funds” (“baskets of securities that are as easy to trade as a stock but lack the investment minimums found in many mutual funds and are generally more tax efficient and carry lower fees” [Wursthornm]); and NFTs (or “Non Fungible Tokens,” specifically works of art in digital form, “a new asset that uses the technology backing cryptocurrencies to create unique “non-fungible tokens” [Ostroff]). Other more instruments that are both “real” and “rhetorical inventions” include stock options (which now are traded on an entirely separate exchange, The Chicago Board Options Exchange or CBOE) and bitcoins (digital currency), among many, many others.

So it is this view of rhetoric, one based on the belief that “our souls persist only through language” (Baez) and “the limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (Wittgenstein), that I use to call on scholars of rhetoric and composition to assume a pedagogical version of King Henry V (himself a rhetorical invention, at least on the stage) and go “once more unto the

breech” in pursuit of discovering a better FYC pedagogy. Indeed, a fundamental concern is that the standard pedagogy in the first-year college composition course that traditionally incorporates “rhetoric” into its name strays considerably from Aristotle’s concept of rhetoric as “concerned with such things as are, to a certain extent, within the knowledge of *all* people and belong to no separately defined science” (*On Rhetoric* 30, emphasis mine).

Expanding on this definition, Aristotle further declares that “rhetoric, therefore, does not belong to a single defined genus of subject...” (*On Rhetoric* 1355b). In other words, “rhetoric” cannot be limited to issues that dominate the public square. In fact, many scholars contend that Invention and Memory, perhaps the two most important functions (or canons) of Aristotle’s rhetorical taxonomy, have been ignored for decades if not centuries, going back to the sixteenth century writings of Petrus Ramus. According to Kathleen Welch, “The modern pre-occupation with ‘style’ as a discrete part of discourse lies, of course, partly in the Ramistic cordoning off of functions of rhetoric” (Welch *Contemporary Reception*, 118 footnote).

Unfortunately, current FYC pedagogy doesn’t seem to recognize the existence of these much more expansive viewpoints. It seems to have settled into what appears to be a certain self-satisfied consensus centered on teaching how to write argument essays focusing on the virtues of civic engagement.²⁵ This current state of affairs can produce what might be called a sense of tedium among the teaching staff. I recall an FYC adjunct at the start of the fall semester bemoaning the prospect of having to read yet another student paper advocating the benefits (or drawbacks) of abortion, gun control, physicians’ assisted suicide, climate change (née global

²⁵ Two of the top-selling textbooks for FYC classes are *Everything’s an Argument* and *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. Curiously, Amazon ranks the two books in different categories, but since *TS/IS* ranks fourth in the category of “Rhetoric,” (even ahead of the venerable *Elements of Style*), pairing it with *Everything* would no doubt produce a formidable “dynamic duo” of argument texts.

warming), or scores of other pressing issues that come under the aegis of late-stage teen-age political and social justice awareness (with debates over school uniforms and an open campus having apparently been abandoned upon high school graduation).

While active participation in what is sometimes called “the public square” is undoubtedly a valuable enterprise, a rhetorical life offers much greater horizons than simply being able to write letters to editors and politicians or to participate in public meetings or debates about local, national, and international affairs with one’s friends, colleagues, or school board members. In fact, as it will become apparent, setting such a goal for a writing program may at first appear to support the idea of a participatory democracy, but it is ultimately a relatively unproductive enterprise because a rhetorical life consists of participating not just in political debate but also in the world of academics, business, and the professions—areas where most students will eventually be living their lives, and learning to live a rhetorical life will allow our students to participate in all of these arenas to the fullest possible extent.

Because no matter what their future, whether in the academy as undergraduates, graduate students, or faculty; or in politics as voters, interest group advocates, politicians, or government employees; or just “ordinary” working people pursuing careers in the professions or business or the trades, their lives will be fuller, richer, and more complete if they are lived rhetorically. And my concern is that the current direction of the field now called “rhetoric and composition,” particularly as embodied in first year composition programs, is not leading these students to learn how to live such lives.

Not surprisingly, such a pedagogical model continues to demonstrate Susan Crowley’s claim that “Composition, as it has been practiced in the first-year course for more than 100 years, has nothing to do with rhetoric” (“Composition Is Not Rhetoric”). The reason is simply this: no

matter the claims to the contrary, existing FYC pedagogical models seem to be based on the argument or thesis-support model, vestigial remnants of the “five-paragraph essay.”²⁶ And even if multiple paragraphs are required, the current “civic engagement” argument model is consistent with a pedagogical model that asks students to assume a position of truth (the thesis statement) and then develop arguments (support and refutation paragraphs) demonstrating that their position is correct — what Deirdre McCloskey, referencing Richard McKeon, calls “lower rhetoric,” or more specifically, “persuasion expositing an already known position” (*Bourgeois Equality*, 646).

Put another way, rather than asking students to pursue the goal of an academic life focused on the creation of knowledge, instead they are required only to demonstrate knowledge, a goal, which, while perhaps valuable as an exercise in the rhetorical functions of organization and style reminiscent of high school term papers and expository essays, entirely ignores the primacy of invention and memory—hence, Crowley’s disdain for current forms of FYC.

Another drawback resulting from this focus on civic engagement is that the essays lack what McCloskey calls “oomph” (for McCloskey a more passionate and productive term than “significance” or “importance”).²⁷ To apply the term to today’s FYC classroom, even if students are effective in their ability to development well-formed arguments, their essays, based as they are on “lower rhetoric,” still lack “oomph.” So, for example, even though first-year college students may in fact construct well-formed arguments in support of government action against

²⁶ In reality, the five-paragraph essay might better be called the “five-section” essay—a thesis, three support sections, and a conclusion, all of which might consist of several paragraphs. In addition, a sixth section dedicated to a Refutation, “proving” the other side’s errors, is usually required. The finished product, then, might be several pages with multiple paragraphs, but nonetheless based on the “six-section” (née the five-paragraph) essay.

²⁷ She and her co-author Stephen T. Ziliak employ the term in their exploration of what they believe is a misuse of “statistical significance,” a quality that may insure “precision,” but rarely importance or “oomph.” Or as they put it, “Precision is nice, but Oomph is the bomb” (2303).

global warming (or, less often, against it), there is little if any significance to the argument—there is, in short, no “oomph” to their essays.

Kathleen Welch appears to be discussing much the same unfortunate condition (“lower rhetoric” or lack of “oomph”) when she argues that “Many aspects of rhetoric and composition have sunk into a swamp of content devoid of their functions as faculties or abilities. Rhetoric and composition without their vital functions as faculties ultimately become trivial and boring” (*Contemporary Reception* 94). But it is not enough to simply point out the deficiency of student attempts at public policy proclamations, what the profession has come to call “civic engagement.”

If “trivial and boring” (that is, lacking “oomph”) are broadly descriptive words for student essays that lack excitement and wonder,²⁸ such criticism still lacks specifics—what, precisely, must an essay have to avoid being “trivial and boring,” to show some “oomph”? In short, in addition to defining the problem, an additional requirement is a description to show what an essay with “oomph” might look and feel like. What kind of writing should a classroom filled with recent high school graduates, even so-called “developmental students,” be able to produce? How can student writers rise above FYC’s current “dominant preoccupation” with predictable arguments trying to “challenge a flawed social order” (Kinney et al)?²⁹

So in response to recognizing the fact that current FYC Civic engagement essays may lack “oomph,” there needs to be a sense of what’s needed to produce this “oomph,” something to

²⁸ This idea of “wonder” will become much more important later on in the dissertation.

²⁹ This is not to argue that essays “challenging a flawed social order” cannot be valid projects, only that becoming fixated on this goal can become uninteresting and repetitive. When it comes to civic engagement argument essays, “What has been, will be again, / what has been done will be done again; / there is nothing new under the sun” (*Ecclesiastes* 1:9).

persuade my audience that now is the time to introduce some excitement and wonder³⁰ into the FYC project, which I will argue has become dull and predictable in much the same way that Roland Barthes finds fault with what he calls “Replete Literature” or “the monster of totality,” consisting of “a nauseating mixture of common opinions, a smothered layer of received ideas” that “extinguish... the possibility of pleasure” (Goodheart 215).

Jasper Neel defines the problem somewhat differently by describing it in terms of what he calls “the Platonic frame of reference”:

Most composition teachers carefully hold their students in the Platonic frame of reference... Such teachers want a complete essay intended to generate a certain state of mind or “a particular change in the reader’s image” (quoting Young, Becker, and Pike 217). (*Plato* 83)

But as Neel points out, this is asking students to use a “poison, the medium that allows them to present a closed, persuasive essay that could lead a reader into internal certainty” (83). In other words, Neel is also looking for some “oomph”—in his terms, “truth (that) becomes an opening rather than some closed and complete revelation” (82). Furthermore, he calls this attempt by composition students to “present as closed and complete a position as possible” (86) as “anti-writing” (84). McCloskey would call it “anti-oomph.” And Kathleen Welch, perhaps reflecting her roots in the plain-speaking state of Oklahoma, just plain “boring.”

³⁰ Here I am using “wonder” in its philosophical context as first introduced by Plato and Aristotle, which I will expand on and develop at greater length.

Prologue: “Enter Chorus” — Freshman Comp as a Red TR6 Convertible

“Your old men shall dream dreams.”

Joel 2:28

“O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention.”

Chorus, Act I, *King Henry V*

I figure if Shakespeare can use a Chorus to get the ball rolling then so can I. In fact, he and I call on our respective muses to accomplish much the same goal—to inspire the imagination of our respective audiences, his to persuade them that the stage of *Henry V* can be transformed into “the vasty fields of France,” mine to inspire belief that there should be a much grander vision for FYC pedagogy than simply encouraging participation in the public square or improving the quality of what has come to be called “civic engagement.”

Perhaps because there is this similarity in purpose, I don’t think it’s coincidental that our muses are also similar, two fiery metaphors — Shakespeare’s “muse of fire” to create the “vasty fields of France,” mine a fire-engine red TR6 to create in my audience an imaginative sense of the FYC classroom as the writing equivalent of driving one of the most exciting mass market sports cars ever produced, the 1972 fire-engine red Triumph TR6 convertible.³¹

The point is this: in the same way that Shakespeare calls upon a “muse of fire” to inspire a theatrical audience to imagine Henry V leading his men into battle on the “wooden O” so too might an iconic sports car provide the metaphorical inspiration to spur an audience of composition scholars to envision the required course in FYC as the single most exciting introduction to collegiate academics. And based on the grim opinion that many instructors

³¹ I call upon my muse with well-established credibility, having acquired a TR6 thanks to the fact that as a professionally-employed recent MBA graduate with no children, I could afford a sports car purchased from a foreign car dealer in Chicago’s tony North Shore village of Wilmette. I drove it for two years before the arrival of children, but it will forever remain one of the highlights of my life. I miss it every day. In fact, given the choice, there are many days when I’d trade my children for the car.

compositionists seem to have about the course, such an inspirational Chorus seems to be an absolutely necessary. Indeed, like Frost's narrator in "The Road Not Taken," they seem to recall their journey as FYC pedagogists with "a sigh."

For example, Erika Lindemann's comment seems to capture the overall attitude of those sighing scholars. She notes that the job of an FYC instructor is to "*drag* every first-year student through the requirement" ("No Place for Literature" 312, emphasis mine).³² Nor is she alone in her desultory mien, a state of apparent despondency that is reflected in a variety of comments by other scholars about what they seem to believe is the sorry state of FYC and its unfortunate lack of "oomph":

- Sharon Crowley sets an apocalyptic tone, calling for the dissolution of the required first-year course: "Let's abolish the universal requirement. Let's stop insisting that every student must take a required composition course" (*Composition* 241).
- Michael Seward, in a July 2021 NCTE blog post, expresses "profound doubts about the act of teaching English."
- Donald A. Daiker reports that a participant in the 1996 *Conference on Composition in the 21st Century: Crisis and Change* left the meeting "with more doubts about composition's future than I have felt in the last 10 years" (1).
- William DeGenaro likens the work of a Writing Program Administrator to the troubled and ultimately fatal life of Kurt Cobain, arguing that "Cobain's career reveals how WPAs can conceive of inward and outward directed rage..." (18).

³² I was struck by how negative this metaphor is. Does Lindemann really think that we are "dragging" students through freshman composition? If so, hers is an unpleasant thought, particularly to a student new to both the university and her class. I wonder if she shares this sentiment with her students.

- Elizabeth Ervin wonders whether “(C)ompositionists have shifted our focus to public and community contexts less of out civic-minded beneficence than out of disciplinary ennui” (38).
- Lester Faigley believes that while the “institutional foundations” of composition studies may be “more secure,” its “intellectual foundations are more disputed, and its future course more difficult to predict” (*Fragments* 28).
- Richard Fulkerson finds that Daiker’s concerns (see above) were indeed prescient, observing in 2005 that “Composition studies has become a less unified and more contentious discipline early in the 21st century than it had appeared to be around 1990” (“Composition at the Turn of the 20th Century” 654).
- David Gold confirms this gloomy outlook, citing Robin Varnum’s claim that much important composition scholarship such as Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality* presents a “façade of a master narrative,” using his current-traditional rhetoric as a “terministic screen that no one has attempted to see through” (47).
- Laura Micciche complains that a “climate of disappointment characterizes English studies generally and composition studies specifically” (432).
- Ray Wallace *et al.* also weigh in with a depressing introduction to their book *Reforming College Composition: Writing the Wrongs*: “All these (contributing) writers are concerned with *their own failure as writing specialists* to improve their own students’ writing skills. (They) examine... why our various attempts to redress such poor writing skills have for the most part failed” (xi, emphasis mine).
- In a separate article, two of the contributors and editors of *Reforming College Composition* reinforce this dreary display: “The chilling truth is that we are no closer

to knowing how to teach writing than we were at the beginning of the process movement” (Wallace and Wallace, 93).

- Jeffrey Zorn, at least as of 2013 a senior lecturer of English at Santa Clara University, lets go with both barrels, calling out English Composition as “Fraud and Failure”: “Compositionists today are laughingstocks on and off campus, notorious for babbling about borderlands narratology and ‘sustainable digitalized hyper-rhetoric’ when students cannot write a coherent paragraph...” (270).
- Nor is this distaste for the enterprise a recent development. In 1901, the Modern Language Association issued a report on “The Undergraduate Study of English Composition” that cited the following complaint in a March 1896 article in *Century Magazine*³³ about “The costly drudgery that composition work forces on teacher and pupil. There is no educational method at present that involves so enormous an outlay of time, energy, and money with so correspondingly small a result...” (Mead x). In fact, students’ “composition work” showed absolutely no results at all. Comparing essays written by students with “sound instruction in rhetorical principals” with those produced by students “with absolutely no training in rhetoric and with no practice in composition... showed the two were fully on a par” (Mead xi).
- More recently (2015), Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle confess that “What seems to be missing, since the beginning of the field and even at this late age of print, is a consensus in the field on what we might call the *content of composition* (xvii, emphasis authors’).

³³ With a circulation of over 250,000 at the height of its popularity, *Century Magazine* was the most popular magazine of the age and its editor Richard Watson Gilder the most powerful arbiter of literary tastes in late nineteenth-century America (Caron 151).

and And even composition *éminence grise* Edward P. J. Corbett reports a personal (and I suspect apocryphal for the purposes of rhetorical effect) anecdote:

One morning recently while I was shaving—probably after a period of being conscience-stricken about *my repeated failures as a teacher of writing*—I stuck this big nose of mine against the tip of the nose reflected in the mirror and shouted at the top of my lungs, “CORBETT, YOU FRAUD!” (“Teaching Composition” 452, italicized emphasis mine)

In short, for over one hundred years, there seems to have been, at best, very little enthusiasm for teaching composition on the part of many composition scholars including those who are the most recognized and respected in the field, so it’s hard to imagine that graduate teaching assistants and adjunct faculty, let alone their students, should rise much above it.

My goal, then, is quite simply to elevate the excitement in FYC to the level of driving a red sports car convertible so that these classes are not Lindemann’s “drag” but an introduction to the excitement students can experience in their excursion into the life of the academy and beyond. In other words, the purpose of this dissertation is to develop the writing equivalent of a TR6 for first year college students, a means by which they can experience the academic equivalent of driving a sports car convertible, namely, a course in composition that can open their eyes to the wondrous possibilities of academic writing,³⁴ a prospect that today is almost unimaginable given the pedestrian goals of FYC aimed merely at producing good citizens capable of civic engagement.

³⁴ I will return to the term “academic writing,” but now, to provide an immediate and brief definition, I use the term here and throughout this dissertation to identify writing, the purpose of which is to “advance knowledge.” That is, “academic writing” is the formal evidence of the work of academics, and that work is assumed to be the advancement of knowledge.

In fact, FYC seems to be not unlike the pedagogical equivalent of a Dodge Caravan—prudent and utilitarian, but definitely not the high point of either automotive or academic enjoyment—and yes, I am claiming that life as an academic can be a joyful experience, even as joyful as driving a sports car convertible—or, in the words of Richard Bernstein, “a perennial impulse of wonder” (28). In other words, the current state of FYC reflects Max Weber’s evaluation of the state of cultural development in his time — “specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart” (quoted by Bernstein, 36). Or in C. S. Lewis’s similar opinion of the “tragic-comedy of our situation,” “We clamor for those very qualities we are rendering impossible... We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise” (26).

I contend that learning how to write academic essays, even by so-called “developmental” students, can be an experience that is the academic equivalent of driving a TR6, producing the written roar of an in-line, six-cylinder, double-barrel carburetor, 150 horsepower essay,³⁵ of hearing oneself say, “Wow! Just wow!” after writing an essay that achieves the goal of actually creating new knowledge, of knowing the thrill of true academic achievement, which I define as creating new knowledge by advancing it beyond that which was, prior to having written the essay, a commonplace. Such academic achievement can be possible, even for first year college students, in just the same way that the joy of driving can be achieved only behind the wheel of nothing less than a fire-engine red sports car convertible like a TR6.

Driving a mundane Dodge Caravan, much like writing an essay arguing for the reality of climate change (née “global warming”), is not an experience that can produce much joy and wonderment. Similar essays produce the same ordinary experience over and over again — the same sound of a whining engine driven by an old, under-powered pre-rehearsed argument. There

³⁵ Admittedly, the TR6 is nowhere near the equivalent of a “muscle car,” but charm and delight and beauty rather than sheer power are the appeals of driving a TR6—as well as writing an academic essay.

must be something better than writing a civic engagement essay, the rhetorical equivalent of driving a Chevy Chevette.³⁶ There must be better options, options more enjoyable than writing arguments for (or against) abortion, gun control, doctor-assisted suicide, the death penalty, and other “topic driven” (Ritzenberg and Mendelsohn, 18-19) or “thesis/support” (Heilker *The Essay*, xix) essays, options that allow first-year students to feel the thrill of driving a Stromberg double barrel carburetor essay and hearing the roar of a well-tuned rhetorical engine all the while hurling down the open roads of invention, through hairpin turns of memory, and up steep grades of style, organization, and delivery, using every option available in pursuit of new knowledge.

In many respects, what I’m asking of my muse is to create in FYC students, teachers, scholars, and administrators alike what might be called a first-year college student version of the flâneur, a connoisseur not so much of the urban landscape as in Baudelaire’s essays, but rather the open road of writing invention, a personification of the free spirit, not beholden to a “TripTik” from AAA, but rather an explorer who goes where the senses and spirit might lead, imbued with an aversion to interstate highways and a fondness for winding two-lane roads marked, if marked they are, by road signs that read County Road K, not I- 35 — someone who, in Keith Tester’s summary of Baudelaire’s flâneur, “is driven out of the private and into the public by his own search for meaning” (2).

The sense of what I’m imagining as a modern flâneur are FYC students who are the writing incarnations of Jack Nicholson, Peter Fonda, and Dennis Hopper in their roles as George Hansen, Wyatt, and Billy in *Easy Rider*, or of Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon as Thelma and Louise — hardly examples of what Baudelaire had in mind in *The Painter of Modern Life*, but more like “teen-age flâneurs,” young men and women who embody “an ‘I’ with an insatiable

³⁶ Owning a 4-cylinder Chevette represents perhaps the low point in my automotive history.

appetite for the ‘non-I’...’ (Baudelaire 684); or, to appropriate the title of William Covino’s book, someone who can practice the “art of wondering.”³⁷

Imagining such a goal for recent high school graduates may be just an old man’s inclination to “dream dreams,” attempting to vicariously impart to a younger generation a long-held belief that the act of writing, even, or rather especially academic writing, can be a thrilling, exhilarating, wind-in-your hair experience, but a worthy goal nonetheless.

³⁷ David Scott provides a sense of my concept of the joys of driving a TR6 in his *Wall Street Journal* article, “Mourning the Manual Transmission.” According to Scott, a former professor of finance at Valdosta State University, “The sound, feel, and thrill of driving are to be relished.... Drive the Blue State Ridge Parkway (quoting the National Parks Service): ‘*A Blue Ridge Parkway experience is unlike any other: a slow-paced and relaxing drive revealing stunning long-range vistas and close-up views of the rugged mountains and pastoral landscapes of the Appalachian Highlands*) in a sports car with a manual transmission, and you too will become a believer” – or a flâneur, accomplished in the art of wondering.

Introduction: Wisdom Begins with Wonder

“What the hell is water?”
This is Water, David Foster Wallace,

Wisdom Begins with Wonder.
2019 NCTE Conference Theme

“The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.”
Ludwig Wittgenstein

Wanting to enhance the excitement level in FYC classrooms is one thing, accomplishing it is something else. One way I’ve found to engage students with this problem is by considering David Foster Wallace’s “fish story” that he uses to start his book *This is Water*:

There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning boys. How’s the water?” The two young fish swim on for a bit, when eventually one of them looks over at the other and asks, “What the hell is water?” (3,4)

After some reflection and discussion, the point starts to sink in — we take for granted as unchangeable, eternal truth that which is, in fact, a socially constructed rhetorical invention of language. Or to put it another way, at first many things may appear as foundational reality, but a closer look reveals that they are, in fact, creations of language and culture.

One obvious example is the physical reality of the classroom itself, which at first glance appears to students as completely unremarkable, a pool of water that they are swimming in. Indeed, what can be more natural, more “water-like” than a classroom, particularly for student “fish” who have been swimming in the same physical “learning lake” for twelve years or more? A closer look, however, reveals that just about everything about a classroom is a construction of language and culture, even its physical presence. For example, Einstein taught his students while walking with them outdoors without the benefit of a classroom, sharing his thoughts in an almost “stream of consciousness” style of pedagogy (*Genius*), while most students today find

themselves in traditional “classrooms” that inspire “nearly every significant education critic... to make the case that students are shuffled through an outdated industrial structure plagiarized from Henry Ford” (Bleske). In other words, a classroom—whether conducted *al fresco* by an ambulatory Einstein or by a first-year Ph.D. student standing rigidly behind a podium facing students lined up in rows of desks and chairs—is a socially constructed rhetorical invention.

Even the desks that students sit in are a creation of language and culture. For example, some argue that “(v)arious desk arrangements enhance collaboration” (“7 Ways to Arrange Collaborative Desks”), supporting the theory that “The teacher should be the ‘guide on the side’ versus the ‘sage on the stage’” (King 30). In fact, in many classrooms, desks have given way to round tables supporting a belief in the power of desk geography and design to facilitate “constructivist” learning.

But no matter the organizational style or engineering design, every student chair is the result of arguments and discussions between its designers and engineers, marketing and advertising executives, corporate accountants, personnel managers, salespeople, and even factory workers, all of whom have the goal of making sure that their chair (rather than their competitor’s) is the one that rests under student bottoms. And as a consequence, student chairs are rhetorical, part of what Kenneth Burke calls the “... the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place, the flurries and flareups of the Human Barnyard, the Give and Take, the wavering lines of pressure and counterpressure, the Logomachy, the onus of ownership, the War of Nerves, the War” (*Rhetoric of Motives*, 23). In short, every classroom chair and its student occupant along with school purchasing agents and all of the employees of the chair company, inhabit a rhetorical world. Therefore, what first appears to be “water” (a commonplace — the physical reality of a classroom or a chair) is, in fact, a socially constructed rhetorical invention. And what appears to

be a simple question asked by a fish, (“What the hell is water?”), turns out to require a rhetorical answer.

Another example of a socially constructed rhetorical invention, but in a completely different context, is the idea of the seven-day week. As *The Wall Street Journal* reviewer of the book *The Week: A History of the Unnatural Rhythms That Made Us Who We Are* puts it, “Our work and family lives are organized around a conceit that feels as constant as gravity (*that is “water”*), but the week is a human invention... An essential function of the week is to situate people within the nexus of their social and economic moment” (Pierson, italicized comment mine). The fact that these seven days which constitute a “week” is nothing more than a socially constructed rhetorical invention is brought to life in the now famous scene in the TV series *Downton Abbey* when Matthew Crawley/“Cousin Matthew” (Dan Stephens) responds to Lord Grantham’s concerns that he might have difficulty engaging in the work of the estate given his full-time employment in a local law firm. The new heir to the estate reassures everyone that he will have plenty of time to spend with Lord Grantham “on the weekend,” to which the Dowager Countess (Maggie Smith) responds, “What is a week end?” Clearly, the Countess’s world is a rhetorical construction quite different from the one inhabited by her newly discovered relative, a mere commoner, and the shock with which she responds to the term demonstrates just how much the concept of a week as seven days or the work week as five days, book-ended by this new invention called a “weekend,” are creations of language and culture.

In other words, not only students but all of us swim in rhetorical waters without realizing it, accepting without question what amounts to grand “commonplaces” about our lives, taking for granted the world that surrounds us at school, home, work, and in fact all but a few social, cultural, and even political situations in which we find ourselves. The fun for the students begins

when they find out that they themselves are capable, to use Derrida's term, of deconstructing their world and discovering that it is, in actuality, a creation of human thought, imagination, and most of all language situated in a specific time and place – a socially constructed rhetorical invention, a process in which they themselves can participate in and even direct.

But second, and perhaps even more consequential, is the fact that they realize that they can then construct their own reality and build their own world when they learn how to live their lives rhetorically. In short, unlike the fish, students can become aware of the water that they swim in, understand it, and even come to create its nature. Or to paraphrase Ludwig Wittgenstein, "The limits of their language mean the limits of their world" (*Tractatus* 5.6). Unfortunately, current pedagogical norms seem to repress rather than enhance this goal of achieving wisdom through wonder. In fact, "creating wonder" might actually be another way to describe academic writing. And if so, conversations between students and teachers should be directed to that goal of using writing to create wonder.

However, perhaps the most intense relationship between student and teacher seems to have absolutely nothing to do with creating wonder but rather suppressing it—namely, the stultifying interaction between a student's teacher and the student's text, that is, the project of commenting on and grading papers. At first glance it might seem that making comments on student papers is done in the hope that students will read and then respond, making necessary improvements to their papers. But even though commenting on student papers may have progressed from "rating" the paper (correcting grammar, punctuation, and usage errors) to "responding rhetorically" (Connors and Lunsford, 201), this trend is by no means as beneficial as it first might seem and can even result in what Nancy Sommers calls an "appropriation of the text" by the instructor in which "The teacher appropriates the text from the student by confusing

the student's purpose in writing the text with her own purpose in commenting" (149). Or even worse, there may be absolutely no student response whatsoever to teachers' comments.

According to Knoblauch and Brannon, "(W)e have scarcely a shred of empirical evidence to show that students typically even comprehend our responses to their writing, let alone use them purposefully..." ("Teacher Commentary" 1). Clearly, there must be some purpose to the efforts of both student and teacher other than mere assessment.

Even though there doesn't seem to be much evidence that there is significant productive interaction between students and teachers on the printed page, still what appears to be the most widely cited and accepted reason for instructors to teach first year composition (and for students to write their essays) is to mold young minds in pursuit of American democratic ideals. In fact, this apparently noble purpose can easily be argued as the "first principle" that launched the field back in the days of ancient Greece. But there is another reason based on an ancient source that few, if any, first-year composition teachers call upon that can also be traced to the early Greek philosophers and rhetoricians, specifically to Plato and Aristotle, who claim that our work, both students and teachers, is to discover that which is "wonderful."

For example, in response to Theaetetus's exclamation that "It's quite extraordinary what wonder I feel," Socrates explains, "The feeling of wonder is very characteristic of a philosopher. Philosophy has no other starting point" (*Theaetetus* 155d). Plato's pupil Aristotle then takes up this theme of wonder in *Metaphysics*: "It is because of wondering... that humans... began to do philosophy" (982b12). And much more recently, perhaps not to be outdone, Alfred North Whitehead continues the argument begun some 2,500 years earlier: "Philosophy begins in wonder. And, at the end, when philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains" (168).

However, there is little to indicate that current FYC pedagogy can produce, or at best encounters great difficulty in producing, such a state of wonder either in our students' work or in our own because the field seems to have lost track of the methodology that Aristotle laid out for achieving precisely that goal of wonderment, perhaps because his "endoxic method" (or to put it another way, his "writing process") is certainly not to be found in standard rhetoric and composition textbooks:

Philosophical inquiry characteristically begins by presenting the *phainomena* (or "appearances");³⁸ then collecting the *endoxa* (the privileged opinions we find ourselves unreflexively endorsing and reaffirming);³⁹ next running through the *aporiai* (or "puzzles");⁴⁰ and finally surveying the *endoxa* critically,⁴¹ learning about the constellation of concepts which must be refined if we are to make genuine philosophical progress. (Shields)

In other words, we teachers of rhetoric and composition have been charged since the inception of our discipline to elevate our work and that of our students far beyond the pedantic purposes of the often criticized but never entirely discarded so-called rhetorical "modes"⁴² or of the "Toulmin

³⁸ These *phainomena* I will be calling "commonplaces."

³⁹ These *endoxa* provide what I will call the "first glance" support for the commonplace.

⁴⁰ Here, the term I will use to discuss the *aporiai* or puzzles is "anomalies," facts that the commonplace (or "privileged opinions") cannot explain.

⁴¹ This is a process that I will call the "closer look," which is intended to reveal the refinements that must be made.

⁴² There seem to be anywhere from four to eight so-called "modes" or purposes of argument. High on everyone's lists who prescribed these modes seems to be narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. However, modes are not universally admired, indeed scorned by scholars such as Robert Connors in his "The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse."

system”⁴³ or “Rogerian Argument”⁴⁴ or of various other pedagogical models with claims and counter claims, support and refutation, and debate about the finer points of public policy and the major issues of the day. It must not be mere agonistic binary argument that motivates us but the desire to advance knowledge — it is this desire that produces the sense of wonder.

The previously cited complaints of an FYC adjunct at a pre-semester meeting of FYC instructors illustrate the inability of current FYC pedagogy to create this world of wonder (or, a “wonderful world” to invoke the title of the song made famous by Louis Armstrong) imagined by Aristotle and Plato and Whitehead.⁴⁵ Furthermore, our adjunct believed that since he already knew all of the arguments on all possible sides of every argument essay on public policy (at least those available to student discovery), he was forced to grade based on the two least interesting rhetorical canons (style and organization) while almost by necessity ignoring the two that are at the very heart of rhetoric (invention and memory) because there is, for all practical purposes, no invention or memory that a first year student can possibly bring to bear on these kinds of essays if everyone already knows the possible exigencies, arguments, rebuttals, and conclusions.

This dissertation, then, will propose that the purpose of our work is to teach our students how to live rhetorical lives that begin and end in “wonder” and to explore various pedagogical strategies to achieve that goal – including the identification of commonplaces (or “phainomena”),

⁴³ The Toulmin model (or system) is a six-part model of argument (with similarities to the syllogism) introduced by British philosopher Stephen Toulmin in his book *The Uses of Argument* (1958). The Toulmin model (or "system") can be used as a tool for developing, analyzing, and categorizing arguments (Wikipedia).

⁴⁴ Rogerian Argument is another method designed to achieve what often seems like the “holy Grail” of FYC instruction — the resolution of conflicting opinions. It is “a negotiating strategy in which common goals are identified and opposing views described as objectively as possible in an effort to establish common ground and reach an agreement” (Nordquist).

⁴⁵ Recall that the aforementioned adjunct was bemoaning the prospect of having to read yet another student paper advocating the benefits or the drawbacks of abortion, gun control, physicians’ assisted suicide, climate change (née global warming), or scores of other pressing public issues.

first glance support (“endoxa”), and anomalies (“aporiai”) followed by the development or invention of a “closer look” that does a better job explaining the anomalies. Put another way, there is so much more to first year composition than simply “civic engagement” or “critical pedagogy,” topics that now seem to have become the almost exclusive focus of FYC. Indeed, this focus on the practical, the political, and even the didactic ignores an apparent human desire to expand our rhetorical and compositional horizons far beyond the narrow confines of politics and current events and the “culture wars.” Kwame Appiah gives full expression to this situation:

One of the great freedoms that a civilized society provides is the freedom *not* to preoccupy yourself with the political. Only politicians and political theorists are likely to think that the best state is one where every citizen is a politician. When Western theorists think this, it may be because they are overinfluenced by the view of politics taken by some in the small self-governing town of Athens in the fifth century BCE. (634, emphasis Appiah)

So without this shift in focus to much broader horizons, FYC seems destined to be a very small course taught by a very large number of instructors to an even larger, but ultimately uninterested audience, an audience that has not yet discovered how to create a sense of wonder in their work and must be “dragged” through the syllabus.

In short, without recognizing that we live and move and have our being⁴⁶ in a vast sea of rhetoric, we risk reducing wonder to mere disputation. Or, to cite one of Br. Jerome Leo’s commentaries on *The Rule of St. Benedict* about those who are concerned merely “with composing a rejoinder”— “Such people do not learn. They merely joust. Life is more than that, much more.”

⁴⁶ A reference to Acts 17:28, “For “In him we live and move and have our being.”

Chapter 1: The Present, Preview—The Scope of the Enterprise

Oh Lord, you are so big,
so absolutely huge.
Monty Python, *The Meaning of Life*

What's past is prologue.
The Tempest, Act 2, Scene I

Consider⁴⁷ for a moment the fate of a brand-new first-year college student, heading off in search of a degree and hopefully a well-paying job, accompanied by as many as five million⁴⁸ other young people, spanning the spectrum of an almost every conceivable economic, cultural, social, political, ideological, racial, national, and now gendered background and identity, in most cases leaving home for the first time, many as young as seventeen (and perhaps some even sixteen), all trying with varying degrees of success to get their bearings at more than seven thousand institutions of higher learning including four-year colleges, research universities, junior (or “community”) colleges, and other degree-granting institutions (“Condition of Education”).

And almost every single one will find themselves in a classroom dedicated to teaching them how to write—the required course in first year composition. Sharon Crowley describes the immensity of this project:

The delivery of required composition instruction is a huge enterprise; at many universities, the staff of the composition program outnumbers the staff of the Colleges of Engineering and Business combined. In the academic year 1994-95, at least four million students were enrolled in some one hundred and sixty thousand sections.⁴⁹ By any

⁴⁷ I realize that addressing readers in the second person imperative is more than a bit unorthodox in academic writing, but I think it works well here.

⁴⁸ Unfortunately, it is apparently difficult to determine precisely how many of the almost 17 million undergraduates are freshmen. However, there are certainly many more freshmen than there are seniors, so the figure must be at least 5 million.

⁴⁹ This data is from the 1994-1995 academic year, so the numbers have most certainly increased. However, the key word here is “immensity,” which is clearly reflected in the 1994 numbers.

measure, required first-year composition uses enormous resources and takes up large chunks of student and teacher time” (*Composition in the University* 1).⁵⁰

There is nothing quite like this enterprise anywhere else in the academy. All other courses pale in comparison.

And since first-year composition is a course offered by almost every single American college, university, and community college⁵¹ — indeed, it might well be the single defining academic experience for all but a very few students — it should seem almost intuitively obvious that there should be agreement on the nature and purpose of this universal course. After all, the institutions are hardly inexperienced in conducting this operation. Teaching writing to first-year students has been part of the curriculum for almost one hundred and fifty years: “Ever since the late nineteenth century, instruction in composition has been required of all students who enter American higher education” (Crowley, *Composition in the University*, 1).

So at first glance, then, this should be one course where substantial agreement on its purpose, content, and pedagogy should be found, and a brief survey of two points of the current disciplinary universe — specifically textbooks and professional conferences — seems to confirm that such an agreement has largely been achieved in the form of what I’m calling the “civic engagement” argument model and termed by Gary Olson in his “Foreword” to *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse* as “public writing, (which) is clearly emerging as a powerful expression of some of the field’s most cherished values” (ix).

⁵⁰ Crowley’s observation reflects that of March 1896 article in *Century Magazine*: “There is no educational method at present that involves so enormous an outlay of time, energy, and money” (op. cit.).

⁵¹ Although hardly a “trend,” several institutions do not require a first-year course in composition. Others excuse students from FYC based on their performance in high school Advanced Placement courses, college equivalency classes, and other placement exams.

This direction can be confirmed based on some recent themes for conferences sponsored by the most prestigious academic professional organizations. For example, the themes of recent conventions of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (sometimes known as the “4C’s”⁵²) have been decidedly focused on “public writing” (or “civic engagement”) — specifically, “The Promises and Perils of Higher Education: Our Discipline’s Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Linguistic Justice” (2022), “Languaging, Laboring, Transforming” (2018); “Cultivating Capacity, Creating Change” (2017), “Writing Strategies for Action” (2016), and “The Public Work of Composition” (2013).⁵³ Even as early as 2001, 4Cs was demonstrating the “public turn” of composition studies with themes such as “Composing Community” (2001) and “Connecting the Text and the Street” (2002, an event referenced in 2005 by Paula Mathieu’s *Tactics of Hope, The Public Turn in English Composition*, 1).

Other professional conferences have offered similar topics. In 2018, for example, NCTE featured “Raising Student Voice: Speaking Out for Equity and Justice”; in 2017 “Promoting Civic Agency in the English Classroom”; and in 2016, “Faces of Advocacy.” TYCA (the NCTE-affiliated organization for “Teaching English in the Two-Year College”) advanced “Reinvigorating the Public Sphere” in 2019 and “Resist/ Persist: Teaching and Tutoring College Writers for Justice, Safety, and Progress” in 2017. Even conferences sponsored by individual institutions have taken up the civic engagement/public writing banner—for example, in 2019 a Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) conference explored “Critical Consciousness in the

⁵² The website of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (hence, the “4C’s”) bills itself as “the world’s largest professional organization for researching and teaching composition...”

⁵³ Conferences in 2014, 2015, 2019, 2020, and 2021 strayed a bit from civic engagement themes, focusing instead on “Open Sources, Access, Futures (2014), “Risk and Reward” (2015), “Performance-Rhetoric, Performance-Composition” (2019), “Considering Our Commonplaces” (2020), and “We Are All Writing Teachers: Returning to a Common Place” (2021). As noted, however, the 2022 event returned to specific “civic engagement” language for the conference theme.

Classroom: Inspiring Student Awareness and Activism.” And in 2013, with perhaps one of the strongest statements of all, the Rhetoric Society of America issued nothing less than a “manifesto” calling for FYC classes to “develop citizen participants, not simply future employees or more literature students” (Keith and Mountford, 3).

This focus on civic engagement/public writing is also reflected in the classroom as the preferred pedagogical path to be followed by the first-year course in composition. And while some of the civilian citizenry might find the nature and intensity of social, cultural, and political arguments disturbing, it’s not surprising that FYC students, scholars, teachers, and administrators believe the situation to be a bounty of riches for those with rhetorical tastes. Or as Andrea Lunsford and John J. Ruszkiewicz put it in the title of their popular textbook, “*Everything’s an Argument*.”

And even though many, both within and outside the university, seem to be a bit unnerved by what Gerald Graff calls the “culture wars,” any aversion to vigorous and often linguistically aggressive disputes hasn’t deterred an avalanche of presentations, journal articles, books, and dissertations inspired by the tsunami of current quarrels. Indeed, what Graff calls the “argument culture” (*Clueless* 83) seems to be alive and well. And his goal to “revitalize American education” by “teaching the conflicts” should by now be fully realized, thanks in large part to the dedication of FYC programs to focus students’ attention on civic engagement/public writing, apparently taking Graff at his word to make a “focused curriculum out of the (university’s) lively state of contention (*Culture Wars*, 11).

Indeed, Graff’s three most recent works (*Beyond the Culture Wars*, *Clueless in Academe* and *They Say/I Say*) seem to be a trilogy devoted to the argument culture — first identifying and defining it (*Culture Wars*), then establishing its importance (*Clueless*), and finally teaching the

“how to” of the argument culture or “arguespeak” (*They Say/I Say*). Or as Graff himself puts it, the goal is to “see conflicts as an internal principle of writing and the teaching of writing”

(*Clueless* 13). His point is clear and straightforward:

Letting students in on the dirty little secret that they will do well in school if they learn to play the game well is still an arduous task... At least, however, educators will have cleared the air about what the game of schooling is ultimately about and what students need to do to survive it and flourish in it. (*Clueless*, 13)

At this point, then, assuming the basic soundness of Graff’s claims⁵⁴, the pedagogical task seems straightforward: teach argument as the means to achieve the goal of civic engagement or public writing or public discourse. And based on a brief survey of many of the textbooks currently offered by major publishers for teaching first year composition, there seems to be little to dispute the success of Graff’s endorsement of the “argument culture.”

What’s more, the quantity of textbooks written to meet the demand for instruction in the “argument” genre seem to be, like Abraham’s descendants, “as numerous as the stars in the sky.” Current offerings include best-sellers like Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein’s *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* (at one time the #2 best seller in Amazon’s “Creative Writing & Composition” category, now #8) and Andrea Lunsford and John J. Ruskiewicz’s *Everything’s an Argument* (once ranked #36 in Amazon’s “Creative Writing & Composition” category). Other important entries are too numerous to cite here. However, the argument genre is so popular (and apparently lucrative) that even such a successful, well-known, and highly respected public philosopher as Stanley Fish, never one to leave a rhetorical dollar on the table, has entered into the fray (perhaps to collect his share of the royalties) with his *Winning*

⁵⁴ I will later be challenging the soundness of Graff’s claims, specifically his assertion that “conflicts are an internal principle of writing and the teaching of writing.”

*Arguments: What Works and Doesn't Work in Politics, the Bedroom, the Courtroom, and the Classroom.*⁵⁵ There seems to be no end to the growing bibliography of argument publications.

Because of this confluence of purpose and pedagogy, now might seem to be an appropriate moment for FYC to take a moment to indulge in a bit of well-deserved self-congratulations. By emphasizing the teaching of argument, specifically in the context of civic engagement and public writing, FYC seems to have addressed Graff's most critical point about the experience of first year college students – addressing their “cluelessness” about academia, their “bafflement, usually accompanied by shame and resentment, in the face of the impenetrability of the academic world,” their “misconception that the life of the mind is a secret society for which only an elite few qualify” (*Clueless* 1).

The secret, according to Graff, is discovering the fact that, in his view, academic writing (in fact, the entire nature of academic life) is based on an “argument culture,” noting that “works of scholarship... do not get published if they merely agree with what others have said and don't ‘stake out a position in opposition’” (*Clueless* 87).⁵⁶ Current FYC pedagogy seems to have reached the same conclusion — the dominance of argument as the purpose of FYC pedagogy. From an initial focus on the personal essay up through the early 1960s to the nebulous structure of “the writing process” through encounters with collaboration and constructivism, the nature and purpose of FYC seems to have found a teleological resting place—the teaching of argument as exemplified by civic engagement.

⁵⁵ Fish's book, however, is really not a textbook. It seems to exist simply to enjoy some of the sales revenue generated by argument texts.

⁵⁶ Graff neglects another option — namely, the journal articles (and even books) that do, in fact, take a position of agreement with what others have said, but demonstrate that there is still more to be said about the issue that enhances the position and makes it stronger. More about this option later.

Moreover, this current state of FYC pedagogy has been achieved, at least according to the many historical narratives of the field, after what is often called a series of pedagogical “turns”⁵⁷—a term that contains an implied binary: on one hand is the turn *towards* the specified pedagogy, and on the other, the turn *away from* the pedagogy being left behind, that which the new “turn” rejects. For example, so-called “process pedagogy” was a “turn” towards a pedagogical emphasis on teaching how writing is produced rather than the writing product itself, pedagogy that was also known as “current-traditional,” one that values the writing “product” (usually thought to consist of prescribed grammatical, syntactical, and rhetorical forms such as the five-paragraph essay).

Similarly, what has come to be known as the “social turn,” while not specifically rejecting “the writing process,” certainly resulted in a diminished if not a complete rejection of the personal or “expressivist” form that initially served as the model for process pedagogy. This turn, at first thought to be more of an advancement rather than a rejection of the process approach, was followed by a subsequent “turn” towards critical pedagogy (more about that later), culminating in what seems to be the current (early 21st century) “turn” towards what is being called “civic engagement” (or the “public turn”), a position that apparently has become firmly planted in the bureaucracy of first year composition departments, as evidenced both by composition textbooks and by the themes of several conferences and journals sponsored by various professional organizations, primarily NCTE and its subsidiaries such as 4Cs and TYCA

⁵⁷ Composition scholarship is not the only discipline that records the presence of “turns.” As James F. Bohman *et. al.* point out, “It is now popular to mark shifts in philosophical method... as turns” (1). The authors note that the “epistemological turn dominated philosophy for two centuries only to be replaced by the ‘linguistic turn,’” a shift that Herbert W. Simons categorizes as “The Rhetorical Turn” (1). But the arguments are similar—whether composition or philosophy or even science with its changing Kuhnian “paradigms,” “way leads on to way” (in the words of Robert Frost) or according to King David, “One day tells its tale to another, / And one night imparts knowledge to the next” (Psalm 19: 2, 4).

but also by a “manifesto” issued by the Rhetorical Society of America seeking to advance this “public turn.”

At first glance, then, the history of FYC as a series of “turns” appears to be a happy tale of progressive improvements – if FYC were a consumer packaged good, it might come in a box with a dramatic design shouting “**NEW AND IMPROVED!**” The point to be made is that the historical record of FYC seems to present the discipline as a logical, sequential development, a linear process with an almost certain inevitability culminating in what might first appear to be a state where students can at last fulfill their purpose as citizens of a democracy by learning how to participate in the public square with compositions of “civic engagement.” Indeed, the field seems to have achieved what appears to be an almost teleological moment that finally clears the air of the dust generated by academic battles of the past and finally gets down to the business of “seeking a world in which average citizens can perform rhetorical analyses of the discourse around them and ask productive questions of politicians, employers, business, and community leaders, and each other, as fellow citizens” (Keith and Mountford, 3).

This “eureka” (or perhaps “at last”) moment is captured by composition scholar Gary Olson, in his “Foreword” to Christian Weisser’s *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere*, agreeing that this public pedagogical paradigm is in fact the future made present for FYC programs. He relates a meeting he had with a sales representative of a major textbook publisher (unnamed) who was looking to discover whether “senior compositionists had a clear, consensual notion of ‘where the field is heading,’ ‘what new pedagogical and intellectual directions it was likely to take’” (ix, “Foreword” *ff*). When Olson revealed to the sales rep his view that “public writing, especially as it is linked to service learning” would be “the area I thought would most like lead us all into the new decade,” the

rep's 'eyes lit up,'" and Olson thought he could see "dollar signs shining in his pupils."

Exclaimed the rep, "This is incredible. Practically everyone that I've consulted has said the exact same thing."

To sum up, then, FYC pedagogy seems to be unabashedly presenting itself to be as good as it gets — perhaps not as good as it's ever going to get, but to paraphrase French psychologist and pharmacist Emile Coué, "Every day in every way, FYC is getting better and better."⁵⁸ Or to situate the discipline in the 1759 world of pre-revolutionary France, FYC pedagogy might be said to reflect Pangloss's remark that "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds" (Voltaire, 40). Except that in this world, unfortunately, there seems to be no "wonder."

⁵⁸ Coué's "method" sounds a lot like one of today's self-help mantras as popularized by Al Franken's *Saturday Night Live* character Stuart Smalley, who begins each segment by looking at himself in the mirror and chanting, "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like me."

The Present: Part I—Civic Engagement and the Need for a New FYC Pedagogy

The strength and worth of rhetoric seem, however,
to be tied to the art of invention; rhetoric tends
to become a superficial and marginal concern
when it is separated from systematic methods
of inquiry and problems of content.
Young and Becker, “Toward a Modern Theory of Rhetoric”

Unfortunately, just as FYC seems to have reached the apex of pedagogical purpose, a closer look reveals that what appears to be a crowning accomplishment is, in fact, just the most recent iteration of the old “current-traditional” model that prizes the rhetorical canons of organization and style while de-emphasizing (at best) or eliminating (at worst) invention and memory.⁵⁹ While the “argument” model, which has come to dominate the course,⁶⁰ has a patina of rhetorical sophistication, it, like the other “current-traditional” forms preceding it, is in a word, boring,⁶¹ because at the very start of these exercises in student exhortations (taking what the writers must believe are important stands for or against such “hot-button” topics as climate change, abortion, gun control, doctor-assisted suicide, immigration, or the presidency of Donald Trump among others), most, if not all (or certainly almost all), composition instructors already know every argument that the writer will employ.

⁵⁹ I will deal with “Delivery” only tangentially, noting that this canon must be interpreted far differently than it was by early rhetoricians and even by many current compositionists. In addition to physical human speech, “Delivery” today is more relevant in terms of what might be called a “delivery system,” that is, the discourse format – written formal essays, PowerPoint or Prezi, email, Facebook, Twitter, or any of the other rapidly developing formats. Not only does each require a different form and style of “delivery,” they can each have a different impact on persuasive effectiveness. So, for example, a street protest, repeating the chant of “What do we want? (FILL IN THE BLANK)! When do we want it? Now!” may have a much greater impact on public policy than a well-written essay arguing the same point in the FYC classroom.

⁶⁰ Other models have dramatically declined in popularity in the FYC classroom such as the literary response essay, the personal essay, and the expository essay (or research project), perhaps in response to the effectiveness of Lester Faigley’s arguments in *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition* maintaining that these forms are not consistent with the rhetorical nature of post-modern thought, a problem that he attempts to solve with his “epistemic” approach to composition.

⁶¹ I am certainly not the first to complain about the boring nature of FYC texts. As Kathleen Welch notes, “Rhetoric and composition without their vital functions of faculties ultimately become trivial and boring” (*Contemporary Reception*, 94).

Given the basic structure of the current argument model, there is little if anything that students can do to enhance anyone's knowledge (or, rather, the knowledge of any reasonably well-educated person) about these issues. And even if they did manage to offer something new to the argument, the chances of their having any impact whatsoever on anyone other than their classmates and instructor are slim at best. In fact, members of the football team may have a better chance at making an impact on public policy. As reported in the University of Oklahoma student newspaper, "Head Coach Lincoln Riley and former Sooner J. C. Watts praise team's commitment to *civic engagement*..." (Engelbrech, emphasis mine). I doubt that the *OU Daily* has ever praised FYC students for their "civic engagement" essays.

In other words, the argument model, as currently envisioned by just about every textbook writer, is completely lacking in invention. As an instructor, then, the only thing left to grade is the writer's command of only two rhetorical canons—organization and style. The argument essay as presented to students today is clearly an updated revision of the much-maligned five-paragraph model, which may have grown in length (these essays usually must be at least five pages, not just five paragraphs) but has clearly not succumbed to decades of criticism of the despised form.

Fortunately, there is an alternative to this dreary discourse — to present students with the possibility of experiencing what Bernstein calls a "perennial impulse of wonder" (28)⁶² that "thrives on a practical 'being-in-the-world'" (Jost and Hyde, xii), a being that can be called a "rhetorical life." Teaching students how to lead such a life and express it in their writing should become the purpose of FYC courses. Rather than promoting what Richard Lanham would call

⁶² Richard J. Bernstein's *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* discusses two different natures of philosophy—one based on foundationalism, which he rejects, and the other exhibiting what he calls a "perennial impulse of wonder" (28).

the life of a “serious man,” who lives in a “single, homogeneously real society, communicating facts, with the goal of ‘clarity’, and emotions with the goal of ‘sincerity’” (1), FYC should be enabling Lanham’s “rhetorical man,” who is a far different person: “(He dwells) not in a single value-structure but in several. He is thus committed to no single construction of the world; much rather, to prevailing in the game at hand. He makes an unlikely zealot... No golden-ager, he, and no Utopian either” (4). In short, only “rhetorical man” can possess an “impulse of wonder,” while serious man becomes the “zealot” and clearly the author of argument essays as currently taught in FYC classrooms all across the country.

To put it another way, the current argument model actually limits the options to such an extent that, in comparison to the vast number of those available, they are actually quite small, so small in fact as to practically squeeze the life out of the rhetorical canon — that is, if the two canons of invention and memory are considered to be the very heart and soul of rhetoric. In fact, the absence of these two functions from the rhetorical canon has been noted for decades, and unfortunately there seems to be no inclination to restore them in spite of claims to the contrary.⁶³ In fact, the model found in today’s most widely used composition texts falls woefully short in meeting the needs of students in their attempts to deal not only with the world of political argument but also the world of academic discourse and beyond, extending to that life some call the “real world,” that is, the world of business, science, technology, sports, and the arts—movies, music, and even fine art.⁶⁴

⁶³ Kathleen Welch argues that “removing memory and delivery from the canons (undermines) contemporary work in rhetoric by diminishing its range” (99, *Contemporary Reception*).

⁶⁴ Deirdre McCloskey and other scholars have explored the application of rhetoric to what might at first seem non-rhetorical topics, demonstrating the truth of Aristotle’s claim that “Rhetoric does not belong to a single defined genus of subject” (*On Rhetoric* 1355b). For example, in addition to McCloskey’s contributions to *The Rhetoric of Human Sciences* (see footnote #19), Renato Rosaldo argues for “The Rhetoric of Anthropology,” Donal E. Carlston for “The Rhetoric of Psychology,” and David E. Klemm for “The Rhetoric of Theological Argument.”

It is perhaps, then, a bit ironic that it is only what I call an academic model of writing — which I define as discourse that attempts to advance knowledge by questioning current models or paradigms or commonplaces, discovering anomalies, and proposing new models or paradigms in their stead⁶⁵ — best serves all of the situations and stakeholders in which FYC students find themselves today, from the day-to-day demands of political, cultural, and social discourse to what some might consider the prosaic concerns of business and industry to the most intellectual (and to which some might add the adjective “narrow”) interests of academic researchers, even including the modern-day “STEM” quadrivium of science, technology, engineering, and math that Thomas Kuhn addresses in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (see footnote #65 below).

The reason for the suitability of the academic model is that it is the only one whose primary purpose is to create new knowledge rather than demonstrate existing knowledge — first, by proposing a “commonplace” (what “most people” believe “at first glance” to be the current state of knowledge); next, presenting anomalies that cannot be explained by this commonplace; then, taking “closer look” revealing new theories that do a better job of explaining the phenomenon at issue; and finally, exploring subsequent “lines of inquiry”⁶⁶ that will help to expand this new knowledge.

This process of academic inquiry,⁶⁷ a process that first examines a “common” belief supported by an “interpretative community” (to use Stanley Fish’s descriptive terminology that

⁶⁵ This definition follows Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. New knowledge, he says, is created “when the profession can no longer evade anomalies that subvert the exiting tradition of scientific practice” (6). In short, academic writing is always in the business of challenging itself.

⁶⁶ “Lines of inquiry” is term of art in police procedurals, a genre that reflects this academic model. Perhaps it is a bit ironic that a politic detective or a medical diagnostician (like Dr. Gregory House on the TV show *House*) provides the most visible and public models for academic inquiry.

⁶⁷ Zak Lancaster pursues this question of established forms of academic discourse in “Do Academics Really Write this Way: A Corpus Investigation of Moves and Templates They Say/I Say.” He neglects, however, to consider Aristotle’s “endoxic” model, which is much closer to the way that “academics really write.”

he develops in *Is There a Text in This Class?*), then explores the reason why “at first glance” the community believes the way it does, next finds “anomalies” that call the belief into question, and finally contests (or more fully supports and explains) that belief based on a new understanding of the issue and proposes a revised “commonplace” that does a better job of explaining the disciplinary phenomena.

It is this process, then, that will prove more productive and more effective for teaching first-year composition than any of the other current instructional models including but not limited to the most recent argument model that has come to be called “civic engagement,” a model that now seems to be the focus of both FYC classrooms as well as most major professional organizations whose focus is teaching composition, specifically the Conference on College Composition and Communication (4Cs), the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA), and their parent organization, the National Association of the Teachers of English (NCTE), all of which mount national conferences focusing on just such a pedagogical model.

This academic model reflects what has been called “the old quarrel” between rhetoric and philosophy to advance an understanding of how to produce a working pedagogical model that can help FYC students (or any student for that matter) confront and eventually employ the ever-troublesome function of rhetorical invention, a function that has long been recognized as perhaps the most important as well as the most problematic of all the rhetorical canons, approached perhaps only by memory in terms of its elusive nature and at the same time critical importance (Roochnik, 225).⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Sharon Crowley’s complaint that “Composition, as it has been practiced in the required first-year course for more than 100 years, has nothing to do with rhetoric” has never been adequately addressed. Today’s “civic engagement” model (as noted above), with its insistence that “everything’s an argument (to use the title of Andrea Lunsford and John J. Ruskiewicz’s popular textbook) does nothing to resolve Crowley’s complaint (“Composition Is Not Rhetoric”).

This investigation will lead to the argument that current models of teaching writing continue to ignore, as they have in the past, perhaps the most important canons of rhetoric, that of invention and memory, thereby preventing FYC students from realizing the fact that rhetoric infuses every element of their lives and that learning how to live a rhetorical life can and should be the goal of the course in first year composition, a goal that will empower students to be full participants not just in the academic life of the university but in the “life in the world to come”⁶⁹ outside the academy.

⁶⁹ A secular and much less eschatological rendition of the Nicene Creed proclaiming that “we look for the life of the world to come.” Here, I propose that rhetoric enables us to live more productive lives in the immediate world to come, not necessarily the world in a presumed hereafter.

The Present, Part II—The Neglect of Invention and the Decay of Rhetoric

What to write about is the first problem...
Richard M. Weaver, *Handbook*

“How are things down at the idea factory?”
Donna Leon, *A Noble Radiance*⁷⁰

I dream of things that never were
and say, “Why not?”
G. B. Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*, Act I
(Also, John and Robert Kennedy)

“Alcohol. The cause of and solution to
all of life’s problems.”
Homer Simpson

Richard Weaver’s observation might at first seem somewhat obvious—of course, finding something to write about has to be at the top of the list for any writer (*Handbook*, 3). What elevates his observation is the following: “This question (*what to write about*) arises not from the actual lack of material but from failure to take the right view of it” (3). Unfortunately, Weaver does not provide a ready answer to the next obvious question: what *is* the right view?

Curiously, this is a question that scholars seem to have some difficulty answering. For example, the best that one essay can apparently offer is either to create a tautology — “An issue arises when we make an issue of it” — or to obfuscate — “In order to make an issue of some matter, the arguer will have to (a) render it as determinate as required for the particular situation, and (b) show that, under the circumstances, it is worth arguing” (Goodwin, 86 and 88). I doubt that this explanation of the writer’s task will do much to help FYC students select a topic for their argument papers. In fact, other than repeat the old “writing process” formula that calls for “brainstorming” or other similar techniques such as pre-writing or freewriting, there does not

⁷⁰ The source of this epigraph requires a bit of explanation. It’s a line delivered by a character in a mystery novel who is attempting to take an interest in the work of his wife, who is a professor of English at an Italian university. It’s relevance here is that the line gets at the heart, although somewhat crudely, of the academic enterprise— the academy as an “idea factory.”

seem to be any current FYC textbook that offers the student much help in developing a topic. In short, the rhetorical function of invention, the only function that deals with the topic of discourse, the writer's first job, has been seriously neglected.

For example, neither of what seem to be the two most popular composition textbooks once mention the term "invention." Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* and Lunsford and Ruskiewicz's *Everything's an Argument* are both silent on that specific topic. Graff and Birkenstein, do, however, offer their eponymous template as an apparent form of invention technique (without identifying it as such), but a closer look reveals that it is primarily a tool for merely responding to the ideas of others rather than "inventing" an idea of one's own: "If there is one point that we hope you will take away from this book, it is the importance not only of expressing your ideas ("I say") but of presenting those ideas as a response to some other person or group ("they say") (3). In other words, responding to the ideas of others will certainly generate a topic, but there's no attempt to determine just why that topic might be rhetorically interesting. In other words, the template may generate an argument, but does little to create new knowledge.

Everything also skirts the topic of invention, discussing *Kairos* (or "context" or the "rhetorical situation") and its role as part of the rhetorical triangle, specifically as "issues that weigh upon the people you write to and for" (25). However, Lunsford and Ruskiewicz seem to regard *Kairos* (or again, the rhetorical situation) as an effect of invention, not part of the cause: "The moment you find a subject, you inherit all the knowledge, history, culture, and technological significations that surround it" (25). In other words, *Kairos* is to be considered once the invention process is complete.

Other textbooks recognize the term, but only in the context of writing process terminology. For example, Rebecca Moore Howard's *Writing Matters: A Handbook for Writing and Research* (the required FYC text at Oklahoma City Community College) devotes only four pages to the topic while failing to offer a definition and only mentioning "invention techniques" that have been in use since the start of the writing process movement such as "freewriting, brainstorm, and mapping," which according to the text will "help you devise and develop a topic," with no comment on why these exercises might be useful in generating a topic nor any guidance on how productive such a topic might be (18).

The current textbook used for FYC classes at the University of Oklahoma offers no more than a passing commentary on "invention," framing the problem only in the context of its discussion of "stasis theory" (315).⁷¹ Therefore, invention becomes, as it does for Lunsford and Ruskiewicz in *Everything's an Argument*, an effect rather than a cause. The example provided by the text features the (unlikely) prospect of a student making an argument about linking mass incarceration to President Trump.⁷² In other words, according to this text, invention has no role in the development of the topic, only in its presentation. To cite the text, "indicating that time in prison does not lead to a decrease in recidivism rates... meets the stakeholder audience in stasis" (315). Put another way, invention is a tool only for choosing which level of stasis on which to base an argument, not for creating the argument itself.⁷³

⁷¹ As mentioned earlier, FYC pedagogy seems fixated on resolving arguments, which is the subject of "stasis theory."

⁷² This is an excellent example of the problem of using "civic engagement" as the pedagogical basis for teaching FYC. Student essays, regardless of their quality, have little if any chance of making any affect whatsoever on the issue with which they are engaged.

⁷³ The text presents stasis theory as a solution for the "he said/she said" problem brought on by the seemingly never-ending arguments caused by such "hot-button" topics as abortion, global warming, and climate change (née global warming). However, as will be seen, there are other ways to deal with this problem

Other prominent textbooks are equally neglectful of the first of the rhetorical canons. For example, *Writing Arguments: A Rhetoric with Readings* (a Pearson imprint based on the so-called “Toulmin System” and a former prescribed FYC textbook at the University of Oklahoma) also avoids the term “invention,” relying instead on the writing-process terminology of “freewriting and playing the believing-doubting game” (Ramage *et al.* 58). It, too, relegates *Kairos* to a discussion of the rhetorical triangle, admonishing readers “that for an argument to be persuasive, its timing must be effectively chosen and its tone and structure in right proportion or measure,” but nowhere does it offer advice on what constitutes “effective timing” or the “right proportion or measure” of the “tone and structure” (60).

Textbooks from other prominent publishers offer the same unfortunate lack of focus on the first canon (or function) of rhetoric. For example, *Discovering Arguments: An Introduction to Critical Thinking and Writing with Readings* (another Pearson/Prentice Hall imprint) offers the following advice on “Finding Your Subject”: “Look for something in the real world that concerns you and other people, something that matters” (Memering and Palmer, 11). However, there seems to be no mention of why a topic that interests you might also interest other people, nor is there any advice about why “something that interests you and others” might also be something that “matters,” or even more problematic, what criteria should be used to determine if and when something (whatever it might be) actually does “matter.”

Like many other texts, *Write for College: A Student Handbook* from the Thoughtful Learning Company relies on the prescriptions developed by the writing process movement, specifically those called for in the “pre-writing” process, which in the case of this text is defined only as “collecting ideas and gathering and focusing one’s thoughts” (Sebranek *et al.*, 2-3). And finally (at least for this discussion – there are far more textbooks that cannot possibly be covered

here), there is the McGraw-Hill Education publication *The Aims of Argument: A Text and Reader*, which purports to “not just show you how to construct an argument but also to make you aware of why people argue and what purposes argument serves” (Crusius xi). However, nowhere does the text mention invention, *Kairos*, or the rhetorical situation. In short, while certainly not an all-inclusive list of the textbooks available for FYC instruction, it seems clear that there is much evidence to support the claim that invention, the first canon or function of rhetoric, receives little support in the classroom from textbooks purporting to teach the subject.

Fortunately, I do not seem to be alone in this conclusion about the dearth of rhetorical invention in the FYC classroom and the potential for the resulting neglect causing decay in the discipline. For example, in the “Introduction” to the collected volume *Perspectives on Rhetorical Invention*, Janet M. Atwill points out that “since the beginning of the millennium, Janice Lauer (co-editor) and I have both expressed frustration over what we perceived as the neglect of the rhetorical canon of invention” (xi), and as a result, according to Janice M. Lauer in her “Foreword” to the same work, “interest in invention appeared to wane” (x). Furthermore, Lauer argues that “a number of earlier emphases in scholarship on invention have either disappeared or been marginalized,” specifically mentioning “the heuristic function of invention as a kind of thinking that stimulates new knowledge...” (2).

One of these long-lost studies specifically mentioning this heuristic function is the “Report of the Committee on the Nature of Rhetorical Invention,” part of *The Prospect of Rhetoric* published in 1970 by the Speech Communication Association, which specifically proposes that invention is “that aspect of the art that constructs its subject matter... Invention in this context becomes a productive human *thrust into the unknown*” (Scott *et al.* 229, emphasis mine). In other words, invention is the cause of the topic, not its effect. According to the

Committee, “this view requires an expansion of most conventional treatments of rhetorical invention,” specifically pointing out the one conventional view that “comes into play only after the speaker has decided upon the proposition he will advocate... Then he invents arguments to make it appealing to the audience” (Scott *et al.* 229). This “conventional” view assumes that invention is the effect not the cause.

Furthermore, it is this “conventional” view that appears in all of the texts mentioned above, although perhaps most succinctly stated in *Argumentation in Practice* with its definition of what the author calls “inventional capacity,” which “refers to the size of one’s stock of available arguments” (Hample 337). However, such an approach is also illustrated in the popular “forms of argumentation”—either arguments based on Aristotle’s three rhetorical appeals (Emotion/Pathos, Reason/Logic/Logos, and Credibility/Ethos) or on levels of “Stasis,” which are based on Aristotle’s “Judicial Species” of rhetoric (“Arguments of Fact,” “Arguments of Definition,” “Arguments of Evaluation,” and finally “Arguments of Policy or Proposal”).⁷⁴

Essays based on these “forms” essentially require the writer to “load up” on arguments dictated by whatever form is being employed—for example, the Emotional Argument for gun control would be expected to feature all of the children who died at the hands of the shooter.⁷⁵ Or an Argument of Fact for climate change would concentrate on all of the scientific evidence showing global warming. The point is that with these conventional approaches, rhetorical invention has nothing to do with the creation of the basic thesis, only on coming up with evidence to support the claims (essentially the basis of a Toulmin argument). Cicero’s concept of rhetorical invention, as endorsed by Young and Becker, reflects this “conventional” view:

⁷⁴ This list is taken from the Table of Contents, *The Engaged Citizen* and from the text’s discussion of Stasis Theory, pages 309-398 (Mountford *et al.*)

⁷⁵ I refer to this as the “dead baby argument” in classroom discussion.

“Invention is the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one’s cause plausible” (*Contemporary Rhetoric* 126).

The conclusion seems clear: to once again reference Deirdre McCloskey in support of Richard McKeon, FYC classrooms seem focused on “lower rhetoric” or “persuasion expositing an already known position” instead of on “higher rhetoric” or “exploring positions in a real conversation” (*Bourgeois Equality*, 646). It is this “lower rhetoric” that “frustrates” Janet Atwill and Janice Lauer, just as “higher rhetoric” inspires the Committee on the Nature of Rhetorical Invention to claim that “all concepts and even all things in man’s world were once – were first – discoveries... They continue to exist and exert influence in man’s world only so far as men’s minds and beliefs sustain them...” (Scott *et al.* 229-230). A perfect description of my goal — the rhetorical life.

The Present, Part III — The Abandonment of Memory, the Mother of Invention

Try to remember the kind of September
When life was slow and oh, so mellow.
The Fantasticks

Memory/ All alone in the moonlight...
Let the memory live again.
Cats

Take one fresh and tender kiss,
Add one stolen night of bliss...
Memories are made of this.
Dean Martin, “Memories Are Made of This”

Motherless children have a hard time
when mother is dead, lord.
Eric Clapton, “Motherless Children”

If the rhetorical canon of invention has been neglected, the canon of memory has been all but completely abandoned — ironically, and to put it bluntly, entirely forgotten. So when it comes to writing in the FYC classroom, there is no motivation to recall “September’s slow and mellow life,” no need to “let memory live again all alone in the moonlight.” Forgotten is “a stolen night of bliss and a fresh and tender kiss.” And if memory is, as I will argue, truly the mother of invention, then invention is now living in the “hard times,” one of Eric Clapton’s “motherless children.”

Indeed, at first glance, the fourth canon of rhetoric may not seem like it has much if anything to do with FYC — after all, we are not in back in the seventh grade having to memorize famous speeches, and even then it was more likely to be the Gettysburg Address than a speech by some old dead Greek white guy⁷⁶ who nobody in Mrs. Betts’⁷⁷ class had ever heard of. Of course, since memory got its start in ancient Greece as a subject of rhetorical focus and eventually became

⁷⁶ Or so we thought at the time and continued to believe until the publication of Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena*.

⁷⁷ Mrs. Betts was my 7th grade English teacher who is remembered by her students for her “prescriptive” approach to the topic, particularly grammar instruction.

one of the five canons of rhetoric, the topic should certainly be considered an important part of rhetorical history and therefore worthy of study. But as the need to actually memorize speeches became less and less important and in fact, practically non-existent (even the Gettysburg Address has fallen on tough times—does anybody commit it to memory anymore?), the fourth canon also began to be noticeable by its absence in the field of rhetoric even as early as the middle of the eighteenth century until by the middle of the twentieth century, memory, at least in its original meaning as memorization, had all but died out from the rhetorical canon.⁷⁸ “Memory,” then, has become something to study rather than something to do. Therefore, if memory is limited to memorization, there seems to be little reason for it to be part of the rhetorical canon.

But if memory is not mere memorization, then what is it? Perhaps one difficulty in defining the canon of memory is that its relationship to rhetorical persuasion seems to be somewhat different from the other four canons. Invention, arrangement, style, and delivery are all used to develop and produce the “available means of persuasion.” Even delivery, which like memory had seen better days, now seems to be re-emerging as an important function of rhetoric, particularly as different delivery systems, from Power Point to Youtube video to TikTok, become more important in rhetorical production.

In other words, if the importance of delivery as means of persuasion had to depend on learning how to effectively deliver live speeches without a written text, it would probably be as inconsequential as memory. As Kathleen Welch points out, the importance of delivery is “weakened if it refers only to the gesture, physical movement, and expressions”; delivery, however, “has been reconstructed through electronic forms of discourse. Delivery, in its life as medium, has acquired enormous power in the twentieth century” (*Electric Rhetoric* 153).

⁷⁸ See discussion below in the section “Dating the Demise of the Fourth Canon.”

Unfortunately, memory has no such ally in the digital world; in fact, internet search capabilities seem to reduce rather than enhance the need for subject-specific knowledge and memory. In other words, computing power seems to have had the unfortunate result of diminishing whatever practical need there might be for memory, and not just memorization. Simply put, there doesn't seem to be an urgent demand on the part of rhetoricians for the fourth canon – unless, of course, it can be shown to have a much broader and more powerful purpose than mere memorization.

Indeed, memory should have an absolutely essential place in the canon because it serves two critical roles – first, it is a means of rhetorical production actually creating discourse; but second and perhaps even more important, memory can also be a consequence of that production. In other words, like the other four functions, memory can be used to create effective means of persuasion – for example, identifying commonplaces, developing topoi, and inventing arguments among others. But unlike the other four functions, memory can also be the focus and purpose of that production; that is, memory can be both the means and the ends of rhetorical persuasion. In short, memory can produce new versions of itself. Or to put it another way, memory is unique in the rhetorical canon in that it can create and even recreate itself by means of its own rhetorical invention. In other words, memory seems to be in a constant state of rhetorically constructing and reconstructing itself.

It is this unique quality that is wonderfully exemplified both in Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen* as well as in recent scholarship that has become something of an *Encomium of Gorgias* to restore and enhance his reputation among Greek sophists and philosophers. In other words, I will hope to show that memory, as a vital part of the rhetorical canon, was key to Gorgias's attempt to “reprove (Helen's) detractors as prevaricators”; equally important, moreover, is the role of

memory in the attempt of modern scholars to accomplish the same goal of “reproving (Gorgias’s) detractors” – to write, as it were, the *Encomium of Gorgias* (Sprague 50).

Dating the Demise of Memory, the Fourth Canon

Many scholars (some with a sense of melancholy, others bereavement, and still others disbelief and even anger) note what might be called the “passing” or “demise” of memory as one of the five canons (or functions⁷⁹) of rhetoric. Thomas Frenz observes that “the traditional canon of memory is no longer an essential concept in rhetoric, having lapsed into little more than a trace of historical arcana to inflict upon new initiates in the discipline” (243). Kathleen Welch calls it “the deletion (of memory),” something that has become a “commonplace in rhetoric and composition studies” (*Contemporary Reception* 96). And John Frederick Reynolds illustrates Welch’s observation when he claims that “Almost never is the original five-part scheme presented completely or explicitly in any of the hundreds of textbooks used to teach oral and written communications” (2). His conclusion seems both straightforward and compelling: “the tendency has been for modern rhetorical theory to abandon, remove, neglect, ignore, limit, simplify, misrepresent, and/or misunderstand both memory and delivery” (3).⁸⁰

While all of these articles reflect the sorry state of the fourth canon, they might also be a bit misleading in that they seem to imply that the disappearance of memory is a relatively recent occurrence. It appears, however, that rhetoricians have actually been mourning – or have been anticipating the prospect of mourning – the loss of the fourth canon for quite some time. For example, Wayne E. Hoogstraet’s “Memory: The Lost Canon?” appeared over sixty years ago in

⁷⁹ Kathleen Welch remaps “function” onto the term “cannon,” adding depth and precision along with analytical power to an understanding of the standard term (“Reconfiguring Writing” 17).

⁸⁰ The thoroughness of this list tends to restore faith in the thesaurus as a productive tool for effective composition, although I do wonder if he used all of the available synonyms or simply decided that adding any more would just be piling on.

a 1960 issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. And the very first article Hoogestraat references is a 1926 *Quarterly Journal of Speech* article by Bromley Smith about none other than the loss of memory as a canon of rhetoric. And the very first reference in Smith's article is a 1563 text (Thomas Wilson's *The Art of Rhetoric*) that, while extoling the virtues of all five canons, minimizes memory and delivery by "devoting only nine pages to Memory and four to Utterance," which leads Smith to speculate that Wilson "may have had a faint premonition of their future," (Smith 129). That's over six hundred years that memory has been in the process of being forgotten.

Memory as Memorization: The "Poison Pill" for the Fourth Canon?

According to Smith, the wait time for the demise of memory after the publication of Wilson's 1563 book was quite short, at least compared to the history of memory that he traces from the time of its dramatic invention by Simonides⁸¹ to its apparent first use in actual rhetorical practice by Hippias of Elis⁸² up to the day "when memory joined with invention, arrangement, diction, and delivery in becoming the fundamental subjects of an orator's education" when Cicero "divided the art of the orator into five parts," (Smith 137, 138).

But by the middle of the eighteenth century, just two hundred years after Wilson's 1563 text,

the important rhetorical works of Blair, Campbell, and Kames had dropped memory. In the 19th century the texts of Whately, Hill, and Genung fail to notice the subject. Thus, after two thousand years (*and well before Welch and Reynolds*), the principles taught by

⁸¹ See below for a more thorough discussion of Simonides' contribution.

⁸² According to Donald E. Haegis, "Hippias of Elis might well be called the 'father of memory' as he appears to be the only Sophist who paid any attention to it" (114). However, he, too, seems to regard memory as primarily a device for memorization.

Hippias vanished from the art of public speaking” (Smith 137, italicized comments mine).

While some of the details may vary, what all these accounts of the demise of memory have in common is the definition of memory as rote memorization. Equating memory and memorization was “retained automatically for centuries” (Smith 139). To remember is to memorize.

But as the world became more “modern” and the reliance on oral speech declined, the apparent need for memorization also diminished. As Frenzt puts it, “When speeches could be written, the elaborate mental operations necessary to retrieve them quickly became obsolete” (243). And without the need for memorization, the need for the fourth canon – defined as memorization for over two thousand years – was similarly affected, or so the devolution of rhetoric from five functions to three seems to indicate. Therefore, the most significant observation that Reynolds makes is not so much the fact that “In composition studies of late, memory issues have been ignored or dismissed” (that’s pretty much old news) but rather that he identifies the cause of this dismissal – “the firmly entrenched and faulty assumption that memory issues are limited to memorizing the speech” (3-4).

In other words, the history of the decline of the importance of memory seems to be strongly associated with the definition of memory as memorization; in short, the more that memory is equated with memorization, the easier it becomes to dismiss it. And Mary Carruthers, while not tracing the decline of memory nearly as far back as Smith and Hoogestraat, also indicates that the cause of memory’s decline is its identification with memorization. “When we think of our highest creative power, we think invariably of the imagination⁸³... Memory, in contrast, is devoid of intellect” (1).

⁸³ Here, Carruthers seems to be using “imagination” very much like rhetorical invention.

In fact, if the disappearance of memory can be equated with its identification with rote memorization, it could be said that memory's fate to be eventually dismissed as one of rhetoric's canons (or functions⁸⁴) was sealed at the very moment that it was "discovered." According to Sharon Crowley, "Almost all ancient authorities credit a fifth century magician named Simonides⁸⁵ with the invention of artificial memory... Simonides concluded that a mental construction, consisting of a series of images of places that were somehow orderly, would assist people in remembering lists of names or items..." ("Modern Rhetoric and Memory" 36). What Crowley leaves out are the gruesome details that led Simonides to come to this conclusion, details that reinforce the ancient designation of memory as a device for memorization.

Using Cicero's account, Frances Yates fills in these details, beginning when Simonides recites a poem at a party in honor of his host Scopas of Thessaly, an effort that did not quite meet the host's standards for the high quality of praise that he expected from a poet whom he was paying to deliver that praise. In the middle of the banquet, Simonides was unexpectedly called to meet two men outside the banquet hall⁸⁶ when suddenly, the roof collapsed, crushing to death Scopas and all of his guests (less, of course Simonides) to such an extent that no one could be identified even by their relatives. Simonides, however, "was able to remember the places at which they had been sitting and was therefore able to indicate to the relatives which was their dead," and the march of memory into a unique place in the rhetorical canon had begun (1-2).

⁸⁴ Kathleen Welch remaps "function" onto the term "cannon," adding depth and precision along with analytical power to an understanding of the standard term ("Reconfiguring Writing" 17).

⁸⁵ *Circa* 556-468 BCE (Yates 27 footnote). Instead of being a magician, Yates credits him as "one of the most admired lyric poets of Greece, the 'honey-tongued', who particularly excelled in the use of beautiful imagery (27-28).

⁸⁶ However, there was no one there when he went out to meet them. According to Yates, they were Castor and Pollux whom Simonides had praised in his poem, the act that incurred Scopas's ire.

Yates also uses this incident to frame her book, which seeks to trace the path of memory as a part of rhetoric:

The first basic fact which the student of the history of the classical art of memory must remember is that the art belonged to rhetoric as a technique by which the orator could improve his memory... And it was a part of the art of rhetoric that the art of memory travelled down through the European tradition in which it was never forgotten, or not forgotten until comparatively modern times. (2)

In other words, Yates, too, defines the fourth canon as memorization and points out that this definition is the cause of its disappearance. Therefore, given this long association of memory with memorization (and identifying this association as a leading cause of memory's elimination from the canon), then expanding the definition of memory beyond memorization becomes a primary strategy for achieving the goal of restoring its position as a co-equal member of the rhetorical canon.

Restoring Memory to the Canon

Reynolds begins this restoration by using a four-part taxonomy to establish canonical memory as consisting not just of memorization but also of "Mnemonics, Memorableness, Databases, and Psychology" (7-12).⁸⁷ While these taxonomies can be useful, they do not generate the kind of urgency for the project that Welch provides in her assertion that "The reduction of the five canons to three (to invention, arrangement, and style) divorces rhetoric from social context, from cultural power, and from the dailiness of ordinary language"; and she might have added that it is only through such a connection with social context, cultural power, and

⁸⁷ Of these four categories, Welch finds Psychology to be the most important ("The Platonic Paradox," 7).

ordinary language that rhetoric achieves its relevance and significance (*Contemporary Reception* 131).

In fact, she establishes the vital importance of that connection in her discussion of “the essential role of memory in Plato’s philosophy” (130):

Memory cannot be interpreted as mere rote remembering, as a simply summoning of past events.⁸⁸ It is not just a recalling, for example, of a portion of one’s lived human experience. Rather, memory is an exclusive system of mind and soul that transcends the individual person’s ability to encompass it and at the same time offers that individual a way to realize his or her capacities more fully; that is, memory enables an individual to achieve his or her *arete* or unique excellence. (130)

In other words, memory is much more than a (re)collection of stable facts.

Scott Consigny continues to build on this theme and relate it back to Gorgias:

“(D)iscourse communicates those truths fabricated by its own apparatus. Gorgias’s theory of rhetoric is thus ‘relativistic’ in Brummett’s sense, one wherein what is accepted as ‘real and true is determined only by the social, symbolic, and historical context from which the knowing human arises” (“Use of the Epideictic,” 287). Put somewhat differently, it cannot be said that “memory” operates on its own, divorced from the other four canons. Or more strongly yet, it can be argued that memory itself is a complex, socially constructed, rhetorical invention, a creation of composed language itself.

As Welch summarizes the dynamic interchange, “The five canons work together to maintain this synergistic, mutually dependent relationship” to generate the “symbiotic

⁸⁸ In other words, Simonides’ act of recalling the seating arrangements of the dead guests doesn’t fit into Plato’s meaning of the word “memory.”

relationship with... culture and politics” (*Contemporary Reception* 96). Sharon Crowley expands on this relationship between memory and the other canons, particularly invention:

In ancient times, even people who could write easily (like Cicero, for instance) relied on their memories, not merely as storage facilities for particulars (*memory as memorization*), but as structured heuristic systems. In other words, memory was not only a system of recollection for ancient and medieval peoples; it was a means of invention. (“Modern Rhetoric and Memory,” 35, italicized comments mine)

Therefore, any reading of ancient rhetorical texts must take into account the entire range of the rhetorical five canons. More specifically, only with an understanding of how memory connects both rhetor and audience in a “symbiotic relationship with culture and politics” can a reading evoke the full impact and meaning of a text” (Welch *Contemporary Reception* 96).

Such is the case with Gorgias’s *Encomium of Helen*, for reading merely the written text, without any insight into the role of memory, would commit the reader to making the same error as those who think that only invention, style, and arrangement are the relevant functions of rhetoric. To repeat Welch’s argument, leaving out memory “divorces rhetoric from its social context (and) cultural power” (*Contemporary Reception* 131). It will be the purpose of this chapter, then, to show how the fourth canon can expand and extend a reading of Gorgias’s *Encomium of Helen* and then extend this strategy with the goal of helping to restore memory as a necessary function in today’s world of rhetoric and composition thereby supporting Bruce E. Gronbeck’s project to establish Gorgias as one who “offer(s) an analysis of those arts (rhetoric and poetic) as attractive as Plato’s” (38).

At first glance, however, it might appear that nothing about Gorgias could possibly serve as a positive alternative to Plato, an opinion based in large part on Plato himself. Just as in more

modern times, an admonition has been to avoid all mention of one's name in the media, so too would an equivalent warning in ancient Greece have been to avoid serving as the title of one of Plato's dialogues. Such, however, was Gorgias's fate. And so for millennia, based on Plato's dialogue that bears his name, the man who was perhaps Athens' leading rhetorician has been identified as nothing more than a mere cook, at least according to Plato: "(A)s make-up is to gymnastics, so is sophistic to legislation; and as cookery is to medicine, so is rhetoric to justice... Now you have heard what I say rhetoric is: the counterpart of cookery in the soul, as cookery is the counterpart in the body" (*Gorgias* 26).

As Gronbeck points out (referencing a particularly convoluted English translation of a section of the *Encomium on Helen* by LaRue VanHook), "Modern students, who seldom get beyond Plato's degradation of Gorgias in his dialogue of the same name, tend to find this passage evidence enough to relegate the father of Attic prose either to the garden of ego-eloquence or to the asylum for antithetical maniacs" (27). In other words, any reading of Gorgias's extant writings⁸⁹ can be significantly influenced by how Gorgias is remembered, and if Plato provides metaphorical mnemonic devices for how Gorgias will be remembered, it's likely that the result will not be pleasant – whether it comes from Plato or the most unscrupulous sophist, rhetorical flattery is a two-edge sword that can cut both ways (to mix a metaphor).

Therefore, the role of memory that goes beyond a simple definition of mere memorization will be a powerful factor in how any work is read, but particularly a work by someone whose status and stature is as highly contested as Gorgias's. In other words, if Gorgias

⁸⁹ In many respects, calling the *Encomium of Helen* an example of Gorgias's extant writing may not be entirely accurate. As many scholars point out, the text of *Encomium* could easily be an anonymous scribe's attempt to record what was and always had been spoken rather than written text. Furthermore, even if Gorgias actually used a stylus to write the speech (he does say that he "wrote" it – Sprague 54), his original text could have been changed over the centuries as different scribes recorded new copies.

is seen not as a serious philosopher and profound thinker but rather, in George A. Kennedy's words as "quite incapable of conceptualizing or analyzing what he does," then it will be difficult to imagine his *Encomium of Helen* as anything more than the work of a "clever rhetorician rather than a philosopher" (35). What's required, then, is to produce what amounts to an "Encomium of Gorgias" in order to develop a full appreciation of his own *Encomium of Helen*.

The Twin Encomiums: Gorgias and Helen, "the Encomium of Gorgias"

If this section has had an epistemological epiphany, it is the realization that Gorgias finds himself in almost precisely the same predicament as Helen – just like Helen, he is badly in need of a rhetorical restoration of how he is to be remembered. Or to apply Gorgias's own words to himself,

Man and woman and speech and deed and city and object should be honored with praise if praiseworthy and incur blame if unworthy, for it is an equal error and mistake to blame the praisable and to praise the blamable. It is the duty of one and the same man both to speak the needful rightly and to refute the unrightfully spoken. Thus, it is right to refute those who rebuke *Gorgias*... For my part, by introducing some reasoning into my speech, I wish to free the accused of blame and, having reprov'd *his* detractors as prevaricators and proved the truth, to free *him* from their ignorance. (Sprague 50, my changes from "Helen" to "Gorgias" italicized)

Of course, the exact same reasoning can't be applied in its entirety – for Gorgias, there is nothing comparable to Paris, who is used to provide two of the four reasons for absolving Helen (rape and love) – but broadly speaking, much of Gorgias's analysis can still be made to work in comparing his situation with Helen's.

For example, instead of using the Greek gods, Plato and Aristotle will do nicely. Instead of being forced to abandon his home, Gorgias is still, like Helen a foreigner in a land in which foreigners have less than full rights. Arguing that both Gorgias and Helen were “seduced” by words may be the most direct of the comparisons, and he was clearly possessed by a love of speech and rhetoric. On all of these counts, Gorgias has been pilloried like Helen, and for the same reasons he should be “utterly acquitted of all charges, whether he was denigrated because of his love of rhetoric, or because others were persuaded by the speeches of his antagonists, or because he was limited by laws against foreigners, or because he was constrained by philosophical powers greater than he was” (Sprague 54, revised).

Gorgias’s ill repute continued through the eons and still exists even today. As Scott Consigny points out, “This construal of Gorgias has been remarkably resilient, and many academic philosophers today still dismiss Gorgias as clever wordsmith rather than a bona fide philosopher,” citing John Robinson’s 1973 “On Gorgias” opinion of *On Not-Being* as a “silly, embarrassing, and specious text” and Martha Nussbaum’s 1990 *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* dismissal of Gorgias as a “shallow opportunist” (Consigny *Gorgias: Sophist and Artist* 36). Robinson and Nussbaum, of course, are simply “toeing the party line,” as Bruce McComiskey so engagingly puts it (5), following what might be called the negative historical collective memory of Gorgias that includes many more anti-Gorgians than just Plato: “Aristophanes describes Gorgias as a member of a ‘rascally race’; Plato condemns (him) on intellectual, moral, and stylistic grounds; (and) Aristotle... portray(s) him as a derivative stylist without serious views” (Consigny *Gorgias* 213).

To employ an old cliché, with friends like these, Gorgia has no need of enemies. What’s ironic, of course, is that just as Gorgias found Helen to be in need of an encomium, so too have

many classical rhetorical scholars found that Gorgias is also in need of the same rhetorical treatment. So just like Gorgias used what might be called “rhetorical memory” to “refute those who rebuke Helen...” (Sprague 50) by reimagining the circumstances of her departure from Sparta to Troy, so too do scholars such as Scott Consigny refute what we are called to remember about Gorgias by both ancient and more modern detractors of Gorgias, “a figure who has been marginalized in Western thought and culture ever since he was depicted by Aristophanes as a barbaric sycophant, by Plato as a shallow opportunist, and by Aristotle as an inept stylist” (Consigny *Gorgias* 1).

Bruce McComiskey credits W. K. C. Guthrie for taking up what might be called the nascent “Encomium of Gorgias” movement in his book *The Sophists*:

Until comparatively recently the prevailing view, the view in which a scholar of my own generation was brought up, was that in his quarrel with the Sophists, Plato was right. He was what he claimed to be, the real philosopher or lover of wisdom, and the Sophists were the superficial, destructive, and at worst deliberate deceivers, purveyors of sophistry in the modern sense of that term. Since the 1930s, however, we have seen a strong movement to reinstate the Sophists and their kin as champions of progress and enlightenment, and a revulsion from Plato as a bigoted reactionary and authoritarian who by blackening their reputation has ensured the suppression of their writings. (10)

While McComiskey is not entirely satisfied with this analysis (“these new interpretations did not challenge the very doctrines Plato ascribed to the Sophists..., beliefs that they probably would not have held”), Guthrie nonetheless does more than a credible job beginning the movement to absolve Gorgias and the Sophists from the hold that Plato (our stand-in for Helen’s gods) crippled them with for more than two millennia (McComiskey 4).

Perhaps more difficult to refute authoritatively are the varying opinions about Gorgias's style and language – he was, by almost all accounts, a compelling speaker, but opinion seems to be divided about whether he was just as repelling as he was the compelling. The primary problem here, of course, is memory – since nobody can remember ever having seen Gorgias deliver a speech, it becomes difficult to actually criticize or praise him for what he did or didn't do – like Helen, all criticism (as well as praise) is based on memory that is socially constructed and rhetorically invented.

Perhaps Gorgias is fortunate that Plato, who undoubtedly was quite familiar with Gorgias's speeches, limited his criticism primarily to Gorgian content rather than speaking style, but Aristotle, who was only a boy when Gorgias died, seems to think that he was there for a live presentation. According to Aristotle (cited by Consigny), "The majority of the uneducated think that such persons (as Gorgias) express themselves most beautifully, whereas this is not the case, for the style of prose is not the same as that of poetry" ("Use of the Epideictic" 282). Consigny goes on to quote a later Greek historian Diodoros, writing when Gorgias had been dead almost four hundred years, who complains of Gorgias's "extravagant figures of speech marked by deliberate art... which seem tiresome and often appear ridiculous and excessively contrived"; next comes Dionysius, Diodoros's contemporary, remarking that Gorgias's style was "labored and bombastic"; then Cicero, who notes that Gorgias "immoderately abuses festive decorations"; followed by a nineteenth century scholar R. C. Jebb who observes that Gorgias's style "seems incredibly tasteless now"; and finally a later twentieth century scholar E. R. Dodds who notes that Gorgias's style seems to us as it did to later antiquity, affected and boring" ("Epideictic" 283).

There is, however, one person who was in attendance at all of Gorgias's speeches and provides some first-hand comments – and that person, of course, is Gorgias himself, who seems to confirm other reports on the existence of his great good humor and sense of fun – even by Aristotle who, letting a compliment sneak through, attributes to Gorgias the saying that “the opposition's seriousness is to be demolished by laughter, and laughter by seriousness” (Fragment B12, Sprague 63). And George Kennedy, typically harboring uncomplimentary views of Gorgias as a serious philosopher, finds himself upbeat about his speaking style, seemingly able to analyze it in terms of what might have been the values of the times rather than through modern eyes, noting Gorgias's “playfulness” that he apparently shared with other sophists of his day. And then there is Gorgias himself in the *Encomium of Helen*, telling us how much he enjoys his job as a rhetorician: “To tell the knowing what they know shows it is right but brings no delight” (Sprague 51). And what a “delight” it must have been to be Gorgias in fifth century Athens, as he was in the business of telling the knowing what they did not know – to challenge their memories by contesting their ideas of the past.

Kennedy goes on to confirm Gorgias's ability to “wow” his audiences (but unfortunately without attribution, perhaps deriving his conclusions from written texts and histories), asserting that Gorgias had a “remarkable oratorical style and his dramatic presentations attracted much attention... On Gorgias's lips oratory became a tintinnabulation⁹⁰ of rhyming words and echoing rhythms” (34). And Diodorus, previously noted as a Gorgian critic, apparently could be balanced in his reporting of what Gorgias must have been like to listen to, basing his remarks presumably on an actual report of Gorgias's initial presentation to the people of Athens to enlist their support for Leontini in a war with the Syracusans:

⁹⁰ It's nice to see somebody other than Edgar Allen Poe use this word in a sentence!

By the novelty of his style, he amazed the Athenians, who were cultivated and fond of letters. He was the first to use extravagant figures of speech marked by deliberate art: antithesis and clauses of exactly or approximately equal length and rhythm and others of such a sort, which at the time were thought worthy of acceptance because of the strangeness of the method. (Fragment A-4, Sprague 33)

Of all the recent critics, however, Scott Consigny is the one who offers the most fully realized version of what it must have been like to actually experience Gorgias in person.

Consigny offers extended detailed arguments about Gorgias's public performances, which even though they are by and large unsupported by direct evidence (which of course is a near impossibility), are nonetheless extraordinarily convincing in their imagined detail— a significant contribution to the use of rhetorical memory both to remove blame from and extend praise to Gorgias. For example, much of the criticism of Gorgias seems to focus on his radical departure from what most readers of ancient classical Greek rhetoric and philosophy probably have probably come to expect from old guys in white robes – namely, the reasoned, elegant language of Plato through his spokesman Socrates engaged in intense dialectical conversation with other learned Greeks.⁹¹

From Consigny's description, Gorgias provided a dramatically contrasting figure who was a highly popular entertainer just as much as he was a philosopher and sophist, “engaging in exaggerated theatricality or ‘acting,’ wearing the traditional purple robes of the rhapsodes”⁹²

(*Sophist and Artist* 167). What differentiated Gorgias, of course, was that he entertained by

⁹¹ A reading of Plato's *Symposium* quickly puts to rest any stereotype of Socrates spending quiet evenings engaged in elegant, elevated conversation and theoretical debate with those of similar mind. Instead, he can carouse and “hang with guys” in what can only be called “party animal” mode. *Symposium* is in some ways reminiscent of *Animal House* with John Belushi.

⁹² A rhapsode (Greek: ῥαψωδός, rhapsōdos) or, in modern usage, rhapsodist, refers to a classical Greek professional performer of epic poetry in the fifth and fourth centuries BC (and perhaps earlier). They were frequently itinerant performers, moving from town to town (Wikipedia).

delivering speeches. Consigny even speculates that a highly romantic view might imagine Gorgias as “a soul unwilling to settle for the conventional, an exile whose Sicilian home has been destroyed, wandering restlessly through Greece in pursuit of what he loves” (*Sophist and Artist* 108). Although Consigny doesn’t subscribe to this extreme version, he does have Gorgias “presenting many of his works at festivals, venues in which participants would expect parody, novel wordplay, and theatrical display (*Sophist and Artist* 108).⁹³ Clearly, Gorgias isn’t the Greek version of “Mr. Chips,” even after he loosens up when he marries Greer Garson.

Earlier, I argued that perhaps there wasn’t a figure who corresponds to Paris in this imagined Encomium of Gorgias, but now, on second thought, perhaps there is, particularly if the correct analogy to Paris is someone or something that can “constrain” the lover, and such might have been the case with Gorgias and his role as rhetorical performer – “If, therefore, the eye of Gorgias, pleased by the figure of a sophist performing at the festival, presented to his soul eager desire and contest of love, what wonder?” (Sprague 54). And if he was persuaded by the power of his own words, then the argument clearing Helen from blame because she was “by words seduced” can be applied equally to Gorgias (Sprague 51).

Or in Gorgias’s own words (or rather a parody of them, which Gorgias might have appreciated), “How, then, can one regard blame of *Gorgias* as just, since *he* is utterly acquitted of all charge, whether *he* did what he did through falling in love (*with his job*) or persuaded by speech (*his own*) or ravished by force (*wars that forced him to emigrate*) or constrained by divine constraint (*Plato’s antagonism*)?” (Sprague 54 with my revisions and comments italicized). In

⁹³ In fact, the closest example of Gorgias that we might have experienced in relatively recent memory (with “recent” being during the past two hundred years) is Mark Twain who toured the country delivering speeches to adoring audiences, perhaps seeing himself as a more palatable version of the King and the Duke in *Huckleberry Finn*.

other words, negative memories of Gorgias have now been rhetorically rebutted, and it is time to see how Gorgias has employed rhetorical memory in support of Helen.

Twin Encomiums: Gorgias and Helen, “the Encomium of Helen”

If rhetorical memory – new interpretations challenging and changing the old – have been effective in restoring Gorgias’s reputation, the same analysis should be able to demonstrate how Gorgias employed an equivalent strategy – using rhetorical memory to change how people viewed Helen, thereby “removing her disgrace” (Sprague 54). The argument of Gorgias’s *Encomium* is deceptively simple and succinctly summarized by Stephen Makin:

Gorgias picks someone of mythic status who is almost universally reviled for a disastrously bad decision – absconding to Troy with Paris, leaving her own city (*not to mention abandoning her husband and child*) and thereby triggering the Trojan War.

Gorgias then argues that she should not be blamed for thus action, but that we should rather pity and sympathize with her. (Makin 291, italicized additions mine)

But a closer look, of course, reveals that this speech is anything but simple.

First of all, it seems like Gorgias has set himself an almost impossible task. Given what must have been his audience’s aversion to the woman for whom he is asking “to end the injustice of blame” and even accusing them, if even only indirectly, of the “ignorance of public opinion,” it would seem incredulous at the time it was delivered to expect it might actually accomplish its stated goal. In fact, the apparent impossibility of success might even offer a reason why he ends the speech by linking his “praise (of) Helen” to “a diversion to myself (*translated elsewhere as “amusement” or “plaything”*)” (Sprague 54). In other words, the end could be seen as the Gorgian equivalent of making some outlandish claim (a practice that apparently was not unknown to him), followed by the disclaimer, “Just joking!” Another possibility that Makin

suggests is that the conclusion might serve as the closing frame for a speech designed as a display piece to demonstrate his prowess as a speaker – a statement approximating “Look what I have done!” (292).

Makin, however, develops another much more complex argument in which Gorgias’s purpose is much more serious, intending not to fool anybody or sell anything but to lead the audience to a rhetorical conclusion, namely that Helen is indeed blameless and deserving of praise – his goal from the very beginning. What is also important about this argument is not so much its details but its reliance on showing how Gorgias’s goal is achieved through the use of memory as a rhetorical device. His argument, in short, doesn’t question the ability of his audience to follow his reasoning; in fact, it depends on it. Rather, he challenges only the accuracy their memories, to persuade them to admit that they have been fooled not by Gorgias but by their own memories of prior events, to reach the conclusion that perhaps events didn’t go quite the way they had been led to believe in their collective recollections about Helen.

In other words, Gorgias calls upon his audience to recall other versions of Helen’s history and, for the moment at least, imagine other causes for her actions, and finally, to ask themselves “How then, can one regard blame of Helen as just, since she is utterly acquitted of all charge, whether she did what she did through falling in love or persuaded by speech or ravished by force or constrained by divine constraint?” (Sprague 54). In short, the *Encomium* is a classic dialectical argument in which by accepting a premise – namely, that if the events that led to Helen’s departure for Troy could be interpreted differently from those embedded in popular memory – then she must be held blameless and in fact perhaps even praised.

In fact, asking an ancient Greek audience to reconsider their interpretation – to revise their memory – of the events of the Trojan War was not such a radical request as it may first

seem since there were, in fact, other versions of Helen's history extant at the time of the *Encomium*. One example is Stesichorus's *Palinode* that retracts his previous criticism of Helen – in other words, a statement that his version (or memory) of events surrounding Helen was not what he originally claimed. As reported by Plato in the *Phaedrus*, when he explained why he needed to give a second speech supporting the god of love to overcome the sin in his first speech which ascribed evil to that same god, “I must purify myself. For those who have sinned by lying about gods or heroes, there is an ancient rite of purification... When (*Stesichorus*) was struck blind for speaking ill of Helen, he... recognized the reason and immediately wrote these lines:

‘It is not true, that tale!
You never embarked in the well-decked ships,
Nor came to the towers of Troy’” (23, italics added).

Gorgias doesn't go as far as Stesichorus to actually contradict the facts as popularly received. He leaves the traditional facts alone. But he does challenge his audience's interpretation of the facts – the way in which they remember what the facts mean. John Poulakos follows this line of reasoning:

Working in the spirit of the new rationalism of his time, Gorgias wanted to reconsider a culturally produced view (*a rhetorical invention*) so as to demonstrate the power of his rhetorical art to challenge and replace traditional beliefs (*or memory*). As such, he exploits the capacity of logos as reasoning, exposes the weakness of the old arguments against her, and formulates new and stronger arguments in her favor. (302, italicized addition mine)

In other words, Gorgias is not arguing the facts; he's challenging the way in which people remember the facts – their interpretation of what at the time amounted to the historical record, in short, their rhetorical memory.

In fact, this strategy of challenging the accuracy of human memory is reminiscent of the 1950 Japanese film *Rashomon* in which four different witnesses (the nobleman's wife, a bandit, a local villager, and even the dead man himself, who speaks through a medium) to the death of a Japanese nobleman present four entirely different and conflicting accounts of the event in a forest outside a small rural village. While hardly based on ancient Greek rhetoric and philosophy, the idea is that even eye-witness testimony can't be trusted, a belief shared by the ancient Greeks who had a distinct distrust of eyewitness testimony.⁹⁴ The reason for the differences in testimony is not that eye-witnesses necessarily lie to protect themselves. In fact, as Wendy Roth and Jal Mehta point out, the *Rashomon* characters actually implicate themselves as they tell their versions of the incident (132). Memory, in short, is in the eye of the beholder. Or to put the point another way, memory is a rhetorical invention contingent on socially constructed experience.

Therefore, the questions that Roth and Mehta pose about *Rashomon* can be applied to any story involving contingent truth such as Helen's story in the *Iliad*. As they put it, "When multiple sources relate different and sometimes conflicting accounts of an episode, how do we decide who is 'right'? Is it possible that they all are right?" (132). Indeed, what they call the "Rashomon Effect" is evident in Homer's version of Helen's story in the *Iliad*, and like *Rashomon*, the story keeps changing based on who's telling the story; and the story changes even when it's told by the same person but from a different perspective and another time frame.

⁹⁴ I have been unable to find the reference to document this claim that the Greeks distrusted eye-witness testimony, although I know that it does exist.

For example, as argued by Hanna M. Roisman, Helen is both the cause of the Trojan War and its victim:

Helen is depicted within a framework of multiple constraints in the *Iliad*. She is captive and a possession in a world in which women are possessions. She is subjected to the wishes of the gods in a world ruled by the gods. And she is an abhorred foreigner viewed as the cause of suffering and strife, a disadvantage she shares with no one else in the epic.

(2)

This depiction sounds like it could have been taken directly from Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen* – in other words, it's not entirely clear how Helen's role in the Trojan War should be viewed.

What's more, Helen's own views on what happened to her are less than clear. "She says that the 'godlike Alexandros led me to Troy,' but the verb can refer to a groom leading his bride to a new home... or refer to carrying off a captive or war spoils" (Roisman 4). And the story continues to avoid providing any kind of firm judgment on just what the role of Helen is in the conflict. For example, just before Menelaus and Paris fight their duel, Iris tells Helen that she will be wife of "the man who wins you. She is clearly viewed as an object who may be fought over; she is not to have any choice in the matter" (Roisman 4).

Roisman's first point, then, (that "women are possessions") is actually the second point in Gorgias's argument – that women are objects and possessions in Greek culture and as such can't be held responsible for their fate. "But if she was raped by violence and illegally assaulted and unjustly insulted, it is clear that the rapist, as the insulter, did the wronging, and the raped, as the insulted, did the suffering... And surely it is proper for a woman raped and robbed of her country and deprived of her friends to be pitied rather than pilloried" (Sprague 51-52). Being "ravaged by force," then, is one way that Helen is "utterly acquitted of all charge" (Sprague 54).

Such treatment of women as objects and possessions would have come as no great shock to Gorgias's audience, so it's not as if he's asking them to change their worldview to consider the possibility that they should not be blaming Helen. In fact, the objectification of Helen is how Gorgias contextualizes his speech – that it is her body, her “godlike beauty” that “was the cause of bringing together many bodies of men... And all came because of a passion which loved to conquer and a love of honor which was unconquered” (Sprague 51). In other words, Helen was an object of great desire through which men could display their power over objects. No surprise there for an ancient Greek male audience.

Roisman's second point – that the fate of humans is subject to the will of the gods – is precisely the same as Gorgias's first, that Helen was subject to the “will of Fate and decision of the gods”; that “god's predetermination cannot be hindered by human premeditation”; and that “god is a stronger force than man in might and in wit and in other ways”; and that, therefore, “one must free Helen from disgrace” (Sprague 51). Roisman's other point – that Helen was an “abhorred foreigner” (“a stranger in a strange land” – *Exodus* 2:22) – isn't mentioned by Gorgias, and instead of cultural conflict, he relies instead on rhetoric – that she was either “by words seduced” or “by love possessed” (Sprague 51).

The point is simply this: Gorgias's audience would not be as resistant to his arguments as it might first appear to a modern reader imbued with the belief that the mere mention of Helen's name would be, to use as current cliché, a “dog whistle” to ancient Greek audiences. In other words, Gorgias's audience would be much more amenable to his argument, more in line with Burke's concept of “identification and consubstantiality” – not yet in total agreement with the speaker, but ready to listen. “In pure identification, there would be no strife. Likewise, there

would be no strife in absolute separateness... But put identification and division ambiguously together... and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric” (*Rhetoric of Motives* 25).

This insight may in fact explain why Gorgias considered his speech to be a “diversion” or an “amusement” – when rhetoric is an exercise in “cooperation” rather than “exploitation”; when “men collaborate in an enterprise to which they contribute different kinds of profit”; when “mediatory ground makes communication possible” – then rhetorical exchange and speech-making might actually be fun (Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 25). In other words, what could provide better entertainment than to “honor the praiseworthy with praise,” particularly if she who is being praised has previously been blamed? (Sprague 50).

Gorgias in fact explicitly recognizes the importance of challenging the memory of his audience to establish the “mediatory ground that makes communication possible.” In other words, before he can challenge the reliability of their memories about Helen (to establish, as it were, the Rashomon Effect), he must first get them to agree that such an act is not only possible but desirable. And he does this by reminding his audience of the fact that “opinion is slippery and insecure”; therefore, “if all men on all subjects had both memory of things past and awareness of things present and foreknowledge of the future, speech would not be similarly similar since as things are now it is not easy for them to recall the past nor to consider the present nor to predict the future” (Sprague 52). In other words, we need rhetoric in order to form opinions about the past, the present and the future.

Although he uses this logic to build an argument about Helen’s susceptibility to the power of the drug of speech, the same argument can be applied to his audience – that the power of speech, even “the verbal disputes of philosophers” can make “the belief in an opinion subject to easy change” (Sprague 53). What Gorgias does, then, is establish commonplaces based on

shared memories as points of agreement with his audience, which he then uses to persuade them to consider other probabilities about Helen's actions – the power of the gods to control the fate of humans, the power of men to control their female possessions; the power of persuasive speech to act like a drug and “impress the soul as it wishes”; and the power of love, either as a human condition to “afflict” the lover much like a “disease,” or as a “divine power of the gods” that cannot be refused.

How can Gorgias's audience not consider his proposal favorably? By rhetoricizing memory, by making memory contingent first on the gods, then on physical strength, next on persuasive speech, and finally on love, he has successfully created the conditions by which the audience might consider a new way to remember Helen, which will “remove disgrace, end the injustice of blame, and the ignorance of opinion” (Sprague 54). In sum, when it comes to the mother of rhetorical invention, it is memory rather than necessity that best serves that role.

At this point, then, the problem becomes how to construct a pedagogy that features the rhetorical canon (or function) of invention inspired by the second canon of memory. In short, how can FYC overcome Sharon Crowley's observation that “Composition, as it has been practiced in the required first-year course for more than 100 years, has nothing whatever to do with rhetoric” (*Enculturation* 5.1)?

Chapter 2: The Past, Preview — Prior Pedagogies, Roads Taken and Not Taken

Every English teacher acts on the basis of theory.

W. Ross Winterowd

It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.

Alfred Tennyson, "In Memoriam A. H. H."

If there is one thing that the enterprise known as First Year Composition has not managed to avoid, indeed has even seemed to have welcomed, it is new pedagogies. In fact, at times it seems that the very nature of FYC is to seek out new methods for teaching the subject, reflecting Joseph Harris's claim that from 1966, composition is a "teaching subject." From oratorical declamations of the 1800s to the daily themes of the early to the mid-1900s (along with their attendant focus on grammar, style, and the five-paragraph essay) to the heady, liberating days of process and expressivism in the 1960s and 1970s that evolved into "critical pedagogy" of the 1980s and 1990s, eventually transforming into "civic engagement" (or "public writing") at the start of the twenty-first century — FYC pedagogy seems to have been in an almost constant state of flux.

What needs to be noted in this brief summary⁹⁵ is that each "turn" (the term frequently employed by the FYC community to signify what at the time is considered to be a significant change in pedagogical approaches) has been accompanied by what can only be called major academic support including journal articles, books, and professional conferences featuring leading composition scholars. In other words, FYC pedagogy has followed what is apparently a time-tested path of academic advancement—first, criticism of accepted practice, followed by development of new approaches, and finally culminating in the professional acceptance of the new "turn." In short, no one can say that the FYC community changes how the subject is taught

⁹⁵ This does not purport to be anything approaching a complete accounting of FYC pedagogical history.

simply for the sake of change, but rather, like any effective rhetorical project, builds powerful and persuasive arguments for the latest, and let it not be overlooked, greatest “turn.”

Therefore, any new pedagogy for teaching FYC cannot simply strike out on a different path from previous models without first identifying their shortcomings and at the same time recognizing their strengths. In fact, as it will be seen, prior pedagogies have often neglected this step, overstating the shortcomings of the methods they sought to replace (or merely dismissing them out of hand or conveniently overlooking them), while at the same time ignoring, overstating, exaggerating, or at least severely overestimating their own strengths. In other words, prior pedagogies were rejected too quickly, and new ones accepted too readily.

For example, while claiming to correct what was believed to be the weak writing skills of entering freshman in the late nineteenth century, the newly instituted Harvard theme method, with its concentration on grammar and sentence correctness, swept away almost without notice the oratorical traditions of 18th and 19th century America. Grammar instruction met a similar fate with the advent of the process movement, an event that was eventually codified in 1985 when NCTE issued a “Resolution” “urging the discontinuance of testing practices that encourage the teaching of grammar rather than English language arts instruction.” In both instances, many a “baby was tossed out with the bathwater”⁹⁶ – the benefits of instruction in oratory and grammar were lost as FYC moved on to apparently more advanced pedagogies.

In other words, building a new pedagogy must recognize, define, and analyze not just the problems that supported the demise of prior or current methods but also the promise that they

⁹⁶ One of my French teachers provided an explanation for this curious phrase. In the days when families and even whole communities shared a bath, mothers and babies bathed last. Not surprisingly, by this time, the water had developed an ever-increasing level of opacity. So when the last bather finished and the bath water was tossed out, oft-times (at least according to folk lore) a baby was left unseen in the murky depths and was thus “tossed out with the bathwater.”

offered. In addition, it will be helpful to explore why still other approaches were not adopted, particularly the proposals put forward by the self-proclaimed “post-composition” scholars. And then, if W. Ross Winterowd is to be taken at his word (“Insofar as teachers choose readings and plan instruction, they are implementing a theory,” [“Introduction” ix]), the theory on which this new pedagogy is based must be made explicit.

The Past, Part I: Beyond the Illusion of Oratorical Pedagogy

Speak the speech I pray you,
trippingly on the tongue.
Hamlet Act 3, Scene 2

An historically significant event usually occasions the reporter's traditional litany of questions: the "who, what, why, where, when, and how" questions. But the larger question that reporters really can't answer about the event — because such a question first needs to be processed socially, culturally, and politically over time—is "so what?" What is its significance? And such is the case regarding one of the key events in the history of first year composition pedagogy, namely the demise of oratory and oratorical instruction.

The date that oratory all but disappeared as a primary component of the college curriculum is well established. In 1873, Harvard instituted English A, the mandatory course in first year composition, (although at first it was a sophomore course) and relegated oratory (or elocution) to elective status. The events leading up to this moment have produced volumes debating the newspaper questions, but curiously the "so what?" question (what was the impact of the event?) – seems to have been all but overlooked, namely, that the demise of oratory, as embodied in the tradition of classical rhetoric, resulted in the equivalent demise of what I'm calling in this paper "civic engagement" but others such as S. Michael Halloran term "public discourse" or "communication on public problems, problems that arise from our life in political communities," all of which were the focus and primary purpose of oratory and oratorical instruction (246). "Speaking truth to power" did not just suddenly appear in the late twentieth century but was flourishing during the first one hundred years of the American experiment and even well before that.

Clearly, the imposition of English A at Harvard (and similar required courses in first-year composition in colleges and universities all across the country) was not conducive to civic engagement because the purpose of the course was to instill the correct use of language rather than its persuasive use. And the consensus about the ramifications of this historical event does not seem to have changed much over the years. In fact, the “Mt. Oread Manifesto,” a 2013 pronouncement on the “so what” of the decline of public oratory published by the Rhetoric Society of America (RSA), decries the loss of what the authors call “the civic dimension of the rhetorical tradition,” a dimension that is “plainly crucial to producing students with the communicative capabilities needed in this world” (2). In other words, it can be argued that the decline of oratory caused the loss of an essential component enabling debate about public policy, the inability to “advance an idea in the public sphere and engage in meaningful deliberation about ideas” (Keith and Mountford, 3).

To help buttress this claim, scholars point out that while oratory reigned, there was little debate about its historical importance. For several hundred years (and some would argue that it has been really well over 2,000 years), oratory rather than writing was the medium that defined and ruled the shape of public discourse. In short, the “cultural ideal of the rhetorical tradition was the orator” (Halloran 246). This focus on oratory and the orator held sway in American colleges and universities from their very beginnings. For example, as reported by Richard L. Johannesen in a 1962 *Central States Speech Journal* essay, one of the mainstays of collegiate education since its inception in colonial America was instruction in and practice of oration:

- “In 1642, orations were among the speaking activities required at Harvard College. Original orations were given by first, second, and third-year men at 9:00 AM on Fridays” (276);

- “In 1764, seniors at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) gave original orations at monthly oration days” (276);
- “In 1806, as part of his duties as the newly appointed Boylston Chair of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard, John Quincy Adams presided over student orations on Friday afternoons” (278).

Connors *et al.* reinforce the oratorical focus of American colleges at the time, citing “the use of oral examinations and recitations and the public disputations associated with commencement at most colleges...”, the purpose of which was to produce, reminiscent of Quintilian’s ideal of a “good man speaking well,” “good citizens skilled in speaking” (“Revival” 2).

And the importance of oratory as part of a student’s collegiate experience was reflected in the world of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries outside the university. According to Gerald Graff, “Declamation competitions and literary and debating societies constituted a link between classroom work and the world outside the college” (*Professing Literature*, 46). And indeed, the outside world was a strongly oratorical world. Not only were college students preparing themselves for professions based on oratorical performance (specifically the law, politics, and ministry — *Professing Literature* 43), the social, cultural, and political world of the 1800s was profoundly oratorical. “Across the country, lecture halls, lyceums, and churches were filled with people who wished to be educated and entertained and also to become active participants in the major decisions and events of their day” (*Public Speaking in an Outspoken Age*).

Oratory was also the foundation of pre-Civil War politics featuring debates between such rising stars of mid-eighteenth-century politics as Abraham Lincoln and Steven Douglas:

Thousands of spectators and newspaper reporters from around the country watched as the two men battled over the primary issue facing the nation at the time: slavery and its extension into new territories. Despite their length and often tedious format, the debates became a huge spectacle, attracting crowds of up to 20,000 people. Thanks to the many reporters and stenographers who attended, and new technologies such as the telegraph and the railroad, the candidates' arguments drew national attention... ("Lincoln-Douglas Debates").

And oratory was by no means limited to politics. Perhaps no American figure better exemplifies the oratorical nature of the culture than one of the most popular writers of the age, Mark Twain.

Fortunately for Twain and his bank account (he always seemed to be in need of money), "The second half of the nineteenth century was a golden age of lecturing and speeches, and Mark Twain established himself as one of the most popular lecturers and speakers of his time" (Wooster, 119-120). Of course, Twain was just one of hundreds of speakers drawn to the stage by public demand, with "every occasion requiring one or more speeches with detailed accounts appearing in newspapers, pamphlets, and books" (*Public Oratory*).

But in the same way that other established institutions, principles, practices, and cultural icons eventually lose their significance, so too did oratory decline as the primary outlet for rhetorical expression, a process that was already underway even as its dominance seemed unquestioned. Again citing Johannesen's essay, even the likes of John Quincy Adams seemed powerless over the demands of a changing college curriculum that was moving away from oratory:

During this period (post-1800), oratory was forced to yield to other types of literary art such as composition and criticism. Between 1825 and 1850, elocution gradually became

separated from rhetorical education, as evidenced by the creation of separate professorships, even though Harvard still required weekly orations and declamations for each class. And from 1850 to 1875, although oratorical training continued, it increasingly gave way to literature and criticism. And in the 1890s, traditional courses in rhetoric were largely concerned with written discourse. (278)

So in what Gerald Graff calls “the waning of the oratorical culture,” “by the late 1860s, the heyday of American oratory was fast fading from respectability in the academic community” (*Professing* 46).

In 1873, the stage was now set for Harvard to consign elocution to the “optional” category and establish English A, “the standard required composition course, first given in the sophomore year, then moved to the first year” (Brereton 11). Suddenly, the same Harvard faculty who not long before had evaluated their students by means of oral public examinations and listened to them deliver regular oral recitations in the Great Hall — “disputations in the forenoon, declamations in the afternoon, and Biblical analyses after supper” (Wozniak 3) — discovered that “the best students in the country attending the best university of its time had difficulties in writing” (Berlin, 24).

In fact, by the end of the nineteenth century, it wasn’t just Harvard, as expressed in its manual for *Freshman English and Theme-Correcting*, that had discovered the need to “drill into Freshman the habitual use of correct and intelligent English” (Copeland and Rideout, 2). All across the country, it seemed that first-year college students had somehow become “illiterate and inarticulate” and could only hope that by the end of their first year they might “arrive somewhere near the adequacy of expression and structure” (Copeland and Rideout, 2). So it should have come as no surprise that not many years after the birth of freshman composition in 1873 that

oratory, as embodied in speech communications and elocution courses, would in 1914 set itself entirely apart from written composition (a “divorce” according to Mountford) when “seventeen speech teachers left NCTE to form the National Association of Academic Teachers of Speech (now the National Communication Association)” (Mountford “A Century after the Divorce,” 409).

In other words, the decline of oratory, along with the rise in composition courses focused on grammar and usage rather than public issues, seemed to produce what the RSA “Manifesto” presents to the academy today as a crucial issue: fewer citizens who can “perform rhetorical analyses of the discourse around them and ask productive questions of politicians, employers, business, and community leaders, and each other as fellow citizens” (3).

Unfortunately, this claim linking the decline of oratory to the lack of civic engagement seems to be, at the very least, vastly overstated. If anything, oratory—both in the university and the public square—is today even more focused on debate about public issues than ever before. For example, it’s almost impossible to turn on the news without hearing a report containing what can politely be called “vigorous” student responses to policy presentations by both public figures and university academics at major colleges and universities.

Many of these reports concentrate on how these disruptive student protests are “unacceptable when (they) obstruct the basic exchange of ideas” (Brown University “Protest and Demonstration Policy”). However, what these criticisms fail to recognize is that politics, particularly those involving “hot button” issues and personalities (for example, the Brown protests were aimed at New York City police commissioner Raymond Kelly), can be, to vastly understate the tenor of these events, a less than polite experience that is not for the timid or faint of heart, features that only add to the claim of the importance and impact of oratory in today’s

social and cultural environment. In short, today's student oratory makes a profound impact on our social, cultural, and political life.

Moreover, not only does today's oratory seem at least as influential as it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it may also be even more widespread today than it was in its "heyday," reaching and influencing far more people, both in absolute numbers and population percentages, than ever before in history. One needs only to access hundreds of politically oriented talk shows on radio and TV⁹⁷ along with thousands of podcasts, blogs, Twitter feeds, Youtube videos, and other new and previously unimaginable ways utilizing the fifth rhetorical canon (delivery) to engage not just in political debate and discussion but thousands of other topics of interests to hundreds of millions if not billions of people all over the world.

One example of the current success of what might be called a revival or even the continuation of the oratorical tradition is the emergence of TED Talks as an international oratorical phenomenon. In response to my question to TED Conferences, LLC about the reach of its TED Talks, I received an email from "Jamey" at TED who reports, "It's safe to say that TED digital media has been viewed or heard *several billion* times" (emphasis mine), an oratorical achievement almost beyond belief particularly since the first TED Talks proved so discouraging, losing money in the 1984 debut, and "it wasn't until six years later that Richard Saul Wuman and Harry Marks (the founders) tried again" ("History of TED"). The next attempt produced results that were decidedly different. When the first six TED Talks were posted online on June 17, 2006,

⁹⁷ One indication of the volume of political oratory is the shift in focus of late-night talk shows. "In what will inevitably be called the Donald Trump era, the relationship between joker and target became a blood sport. It was surely not that way during the long dominance of Johnny Carson in late night" (Bill Carter).

“by September, they had reached more than one million views” and by the fall of 2012, “TED Talks celebrated its one billionth view” (“History of TED”).

The decline in oratory in the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, then, has resulted in anything but a reduction in civic engagement as feared by the RSA and its “Manifesto” but rather a story of recovery and growth, indeed an explosion of different forms of oratorical expression. At first glance, though, the apparent lone holdout—lack of instruction in oratory and elocution in higher education—might seem ripe for the kind of criticism expressed in the RSA “Manifesto,” but even their concern about the need “to develop. citizen participants” has proven to be all but inconsequential, particularly in light of the intense focus on writing instruction, as noted throughout this paper, on “civic engagement” in the FYC classroom. In a world that today often seems to be consumed by what many have called the “culture wars,” it would be difficult to argue that FYC students are not taught “the civic tradition of the rhetorical tradition” or lack the “ability to use language to write (perhaps just not to speak) about public issues, indispensable for citizens in a free society” (“Manifesto” 2).

What emerges, then, from a careful examination of the decline of oratory and the rise of composition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is the conclusion there has been no substantial effect on the ability of American citizens, including college and even high school students, to engage in extensive and intensive oratory, from political disputations to social, cultural, and economic arguments that often mix the physical with the metaphysical. Even the course in first year composition seems to have been able to break from the restrictions imposed by English A and so-called “current-traditional” rhetoric. For example, it would seem odd for a modern FYC assignment to reflect the instructional prescriptions as set forth by Harvard’s *Freshman English and Theme Correcting*: “By far, the greater bulk of the daily themes must deal

with the writers' new surroundings" (Copeland and Rideout 2). Furthermore, Harvard freshmen "must *not* dream dreams or see visions" (3, emphasis mine). Nor is it the job of the instructors to "make the themes interesting but to make them correct" (9). These prescriptions and proscriptions would strike today's FYC faculty and students as hopelessly out of date.

So while the first weekly theme for Harvard freshmen was "Who Am I, and Why I Came to Harvard?" (42), a twenty-first century FYC essay might instead focus on current social, political, cultural, or economic issues, including persuasive arguments for specific public policy proposals. The conclusion is clear: while the decline of oratorical instruction may have had an immediate impact on late nineteenth and early twentieth century FYC classrooms and the ability of their students to participate in civic engagement, there has certainly been no long-term effects that are recognizable in today's classrooms. Civic engagement, although perhaps not expressed orally as frequently as prior decades, is without a doubt alive and well in FYC classrooms, and certainly throughout the larger culture, where there has been an even greater focus on oral rhetoric, or as Kathleen Welch puts it, there has been a "reassertion of orality in the twentieth century" (*Contemporary Reception*, 3). So if there is (or should be) little concern about teaching and encouraging students to engage in debate about public issues in today's FYC classroom, what, then, is lacking in today's FYC classroom that demands the new approach to FYC pedagogy that I am suggesting?

Missing in the historical reviews and analyses of oratory and writing in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century is the distinction that Kathleen Welch and others make between sophistic and philosophical rhetoric, specifically as addressed by Plato in *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*. As Welch points out, "Plato distinguishes between sophistic rhetoric and philosophical rhetoric. He denounces the former and praises the latter" ("Platonic Paradox" 9).

This is basically the same point made by Andrew Beer in a presentation to the American Philological Association, in which he argues that Plato provides “an account of two different kinds of rhetoric—one of which is rightly condemned (*Welch’s “sophistic rhetoric”*), while the other is exalted as a noble and worthy pursuit (*Welch’s “philosophical rhetoric”*)” (“The Two Kinds of Rhetoric,” italicized textual additions mine).

Following the path from the demise of oratory in the late nineteenth century to the rise of current-traditional rhetoric in the early twentieth century and finally to the dominance of political and cultural argument (or civic engagement) today can be directly attributable to the lack of a signpost along the way warning that if “Plato is made to disappear or more seriously to stand against rhetoric (*Welch “Paradox” 4*),” then “rhetoric is well on its way to becoming trivial...” (*Welch “Paradox” 15*). In short, what ties today’s civic engagement pedagogy with the oratory of the early days of college education is “the tendency to consider classical rhetoric exclusively as a public art—to envision a formal speech delivered to an assembly—has dominated contemporary studies of rhetoric” (“Platonic Paradox” 11).

This view of rhetoric dramatically limits the enterprise because in a public forum, “the audience works as a group and is largely passive. The speaker does not depend as thoroughly on the audience as the individual, dialectical version of rhetoric does” (*Welch “Paradox” 11*). On the other hand, “Plato’s rhetoric is much less concerned with a large assembly of hearers or readers than he is with a series of one-to-one dialectics formed by rhetoric” (*Welch “Paradox” 10*). In other words, there is far more to rhetoric than mere argument, whether presented orally or in writing.

While rhetoric, as James L. Golden observes by citing Quintilian, “is crucial to the task of conducting our public and private affairs,” he returns to Plato to point out that another important

aspect of Plato's theory of discourse is "an abiding belief in the premise that a major function of rhetoric is to *generate, create, and discover knowledge*" (19, emphasis mine). Or, as Lunsford and Ede put the problem, quoting Daniel Fogarty's *Roots for a New Rhetoric*, "The new rhetoric will need to broaden its aim until it no longer confines itself to teaching the art of formal persuasion..." (37).

Unfortunately, while the destination may be clear, little seems to be available providing directions about how to get there, although there is some appreciation about the difficulty of achieving that goal. Jasper Neel sets up the dilemma in his discussion of the problems presented to his apocryphal composition teachers who

carefully hold their students in the Platonic frame of reference while at the same time precluding dialectical writing. Such teachers want a complete essay intended to generate a certain state of mind, (which is) one thing they will never get if their students use Platonic writing, for Platonic writing, regardless of its point of departure or 'topic', will finally carry students into a dialectical search for truth. (83).

What Neel has done is describe the elements that produce what I have earlier referred to (quoting Deidre McCloskey and Richard McKeon) as "lower rhetoric," or "persuasion expositing an already known position" (*Bourgeois Equality*, 646) and that Welch unabashedly terms "trivial and boring" (*Contemporary Reception* 94).

This is a condition that Neel calls (using Derrida's "Pharmakon" inspiration) "the disease of internal certainty," which he claims is brought on by the "poison" that "allows them (FYC students) to present a closed, persuasive essay that could lead a reader into internal certainty" (83). The result is what Neel calls "anti-writing," and the example he uses ("Three Reasons for Stopping X") bears a strong resemblance to the much-maligned five-paragraph

essay—a thesis statement (“X is one of the most important problems in today’s modern society”) followed by three levels of support (the “three main reasons why X should be stopped” with a paragraph detailing each reason), culminating in a conclusion containing some policy prescriptions and a final exhortation proclaiming the truth of the thesis statement – “X should be stopped” (84).

Unfortunately, Neel offers no practical way out of this dilemma because the only alternative he has for “anti-writing” is what he calls “Platonic writing”—an “eternal, internal dialectical journey toward truth” (90). In short, FYC pedagogy is stuck, as the cliché goes, between the rock of what Sharon Crowley calls a “self-sealing argument” (or “anti-writing” or “lower rhetoric”) and the hard place of an essay that cannot reach a conclusion because as William Covino puts it in his essay in *Freshman English News*, “all writing takes place without finality” (2) with “truth is opening endlessly before them” (Neel, 91). In short, there is no conclusion to reach.

Put another way, Neel finds himself (to use a more elevated yet equally relevant cliché) between Scylla and Charybdis, what some have called the “ancient quarrel between philosophy and rhetoric” (Levin). For some reason, he ignores the only lifeboat really available to him, the one provided by the relatively recent theory of “anti-foundationalism,” which allows for what might be called conditional certainty grounded on the beliefs of what Stanley Fish calls “the interpretive community” (*op. cit.* “*Variorum*”).

In summary, then, what’s missing from FYC pedagogy is not to be found trying to resurrect oratorical pedagogy in the pursuit of an already vibrant “civic engagement” pedagogy, but what Welch calls “philosophical rhetoric” or, more simply, rhetorical invention.

The Past, Part II: Grammar — A Source for Invention and the Creation of Meaning

The Middle Ages envisioned Grammatica, the goddess of grammar, as a severe old woman with a scalpel and a large pair of pincers. Her right hand grasps a bird by its neck, its mouth open, as if in a gasp or a squawk. Lord, how fitting the choices of emblem – the living thing being strangled, beak open but silent, muted by the goddess Grammatica. And the scalpel, the pincers, are reminders to the teacher to be vigilant for error, to cut it out with the coldest tool.

Mike Rose, *Lives on the Boundary*

Grammar can be a door to rooms you might never otherwise discover,
a way to realize and articulate your visions in language.

Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux,
The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry

There is, quite simply, so such thing
as a human being walking around using bad grammar.

John McWhorter, *Doing Our Own Thing*

If, in an attempt to improve FYC pedagogy, there has been too much hope placed on oratory, far too little has been accorded a pedagogy based on grammar. Indeed, the years have not been kind to English grammar pedagogy. Today regular instruction in formal grammar has all but disappeared from composition classrooms, reduced by the “grammar wars”⁹⁸ into what scholars like Mike Rose envision as a “squinting figure... vigilant for error” even to the point of “strangling” students making them “mute” (1-2). Clearly, there seems to be almost universal agreement, at least among most English teachers and scholars, that grammar is not suited to be a part of the creative, inventive work of the writing enterprise. Useful to detect and correct errors, perhaps, but certainly not for much of anything else.

But instead of Rose’s repressive, frightening creature, what if grammar can actually enable thought rather than inhibit it, enhance creativity instead of stifle it, and stimulate ideas as opposed to suppressing them—in short, what if grammar can be a tool for invention and the creation of meaning? Or, to quote poets Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux, “a way to realize and articulate your visions in language” (171). If so, then the elimination of formal grammar

⁹⁸ See works like *The War Against Grammar* by David Mulroy and *Beyond the Grammar Wars*, Terry Locke, ed. along with other references to the grammar wars.

instruction from the FYC classroom may well have resulted in the loss of a powerful pedagogical tool, one that can be used to enhance the entire writing process as part of discovery, invention, and the creation of meaning.

What little grammar that is included in first-year composition classrooms is usually taught peripherally, separated from the main enterprise of actual composition, typically introduced after first drafts have been written and it's time to start checking for errors. This final step in the writing process may follow some form of Constance Weaver's *Teaching Grammar in Context*, a method that uses actual student writing to teach grammar instead of sentences dreamed up by authors of grammar texts and workbooks. But what Weaver teaches is still formal grammar – students learn grammatical definitions and apply the terminology to the analysis of written texts.

Based on the “Sample Lessons” (“Learning the Names of Basic Parts of Speech” and “Understanding Subjects and Verbs and the Concept of Clause”) in the Appendix to her book (188, 193), it is clear that what Weaver teaches isn't much different from Lowth's approach in his 1794 book, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (“Pronoun,” “Adjective,” and “Verb” – 27, 36, 40), or more recently Senn and Skinner's *Heath English 9*, the book I used to teach grammar in an inner city alternative charter school (“Nouns and Pronouns,” “Verbs,” and “Adjectives and Adverbs” – 560, 574, 596). Weaver's grammar exercises, then, are pretty much the same today as grammar exercises always have been, at least since the middle of the 17th century. So even though extended formal grammar instruction may be rare, when grammar is taught in today's composition classroom, no matter how briefly, the content (even Weaver's “grammar in the context of writing” version) hasn't changed much in several hundred years.

Many authors of more recent grammar books, particularly the ones authored by those associated with NCTE affiliate Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar (ATEG), would take exception – our grammar is different, they claim. Martha Kolln, for example, substitutes what she calls “form and structure classes” for the traditional eight parts of speech (*Rhetorical Grammar*, 238). To be sure, Kolln still provides us with nouns, but rather than defining them as the names of people, places, things, and ideas, Kolln’s nouns are words that can be made plural and form possessives. Put another way, a noun is a word that acts like a noun – a word that possesses, for lack of a better term, “noun-ness.” But no matter what the term, definitions are still definitions. Specific content might change, but grammar pedagogy remains the same – students must learn terms and definitions and apply that knowledge in sentence analysis.

However, even the purveyors of this supposedly new approach to grammar don’t claim that their approach should replace the major project of the composition classroom – composing itself. The purpose of grammar, even “new and improved” grammar, is still for detecting and correcting errors, editing and revising text, and improving style and enhancing rhetorical effects. Not even ATEG authors presume to include grammar instruction as part of invention, discovery, and the creation of meaning – deemed the most important parts of the writing process – as it is almost universally accepted that focusing on grammar at the start of the writing process interferes with creativity and meaning-making. “Don’t worry about your grammar!” is a teacher’s standard mantra at the beginning of a writing assignment.

Indeed, making students learn grammar terms and definitions – still the major work of grammar instruction – has never been proposed, at least since the beginning of the writing process movement, as having a place at the start of the writing process, except perhaps in ESL classes, although even in this context, “there is debate about the value of treating grammatical

errors in students' writing" (Casanave 88). So the current paradigm in English composition classrooms limits grammar to a narrow range, and most composition scholars seem to agree with Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer's 1963 "harmful effects" claim that "teaching formal grammar has a negligible or . . . even a *harmful effect* on writing" (37-38, emphasis mine).

In fact, this claim was enthusiastically endorsed in 1986 by George Hillocks, Jr., who proclaimed, "My colleagues and I *rejoiced*" upon finding Braddock's famous statement (xv, emphasis mine) and went on to actually expand Braddock's findings to an even more thorough condemnation of grammar: "In short, the findings of research on the composing process give us no reason to expect the study of grammar or mechanics to have any substantial effect on the writing process or on writing ability as reflected in the quality of written products" (*Research* 227).

Braddock apparently had an equally significant impact on NCTE resolution writers as he did on Hillocks *et al.* Although the Council does not reference Braddock's 1963 "harmful effects" claim, their 1985 "Resolution on Grammar Exercises to Teach Speaking and Writing" was obviously profoundly influenced by his work: "Research has shown the teaching of grammar in isolation does not lead to improvement in students' speaking and writing, and that in fact, it hinders development of students' oral and written language." The subsequent resolution based on this finding of fact was a clear dismissal of the importance of teaching grammar: "Resolved that NCTE urge the discontinuance of testing practices that encourage the teaching of grammar rather than English language arts instruction."

These three works (Braddock, Hillocks *et al.*, and NCTE) seem to form the foundation for the subsequent elimination, or at least the drastic reduction, of formal grammar instruction in both college and high school classrooms as evidenced by the focus of professional journals on

the importance of grammar, or rather its lack of importance. Although grammar had been the focus of continued debate from the early days of the *English Journal*, continuing all through the 1990s and even into the 21st century with issues of NCTE's flagship publication dedicated to such topics as "The Great Grammar Debate Once Again" (September 1993, Vol. 82 No. 5), "The Great Debate (Again)—Teaching Grammar and Usage" (November 1996, Vol. 87 No. 7), "Revitalizing Grammar" (January 2003, Vol. 92 No. 3), and "Contexts for Teaching Grammar" (May 2006, Vol. 95 No. 5). However, the publication seemed to want to call a halt to what had become a well-worn topic when it announced that its March 2011 issue would feature "Beyond Grammar: The Richness of English Language," an apparent reference to the earlier 1985 "Resolution" that made a clear distinction between grammar and "language arts instruction." In other words, NCTE and its *English Journal* determined that the "richness of the English language" was "beyond grammar" and so called a halt to dedicating special issues to grammar debates.

In fact, perhaps the biggest surprise arising from what seemed to be the end of the grammar debate is that it took so long. Almost since the beginning of the "current-traditional" adventure with the introduction of English A at Harvard, there were outbursts against formal grammar instruction. For example, in the very first issue of the *English Journal*, Edwin M. Hopkins, a founder and former president of the National Council of the Teachers of English, proclaimed the following almost as a matter of fact needing no further justification: "Grammar by itself is lifeless, and the study of it bears pitifully small fruits" (49).

And that might seem to be the end of the matter — after almost exactly 100 years, teaching formal grammar would be no more. However, regardless of the opinion of NCTE and various English scholars and curriculum experts, the fact remains that English teachers who are

“in the trenches,” and specifically those English teachers who toil in inner-city high schools, are called upon to teach precisely the kind of formal grammar that composition scholars have so thoroughly discredited. For in spite of what the English profession seems to believe are significant advances in its approach to students who speak and write “AAVE” (African-American Vernacular English) with pronouncements such as “Students’ Right to Their Own Language (Committee on CCCC Language, 1974) and more recently in 2020, “This Ain’t Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice!” (Baker-Bell *et. al*), documents that purport to be more accepting (and in the case of the “Demand for Black Linguistic Justice” *much more than accepting*) of AAVE, inner-city schools in general, and in particular the school where I taught for seven years (the Academy of Scholastic Achievement or “ASA”), maintain the necessity of teaching its students standard written English along with all the attending grammar rules and usage conventions required by that form.⁹⁹

Black educators like Lisa Delpit recognize the error in the assumption that “to make any rules or expectations explicit is to act against liberal principles, to limit the freedom and autonomy of those subjected to the explicitness” (294). Or to put it another way, grammar instruction is not repressive. Furthermore, parents of Black children also recognize that while “Black linguistic justice” may be a current educational buzz-word, it doesn’t help their children be successful in school or at work. “They want to ensure that the school provides their children with discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in a larger society” (Delpit 285). One parent succinctly summed up the situation: “My kids know how to be Black—you all teach them how to be successful in the White man’s world” (285).

⁹⁹ A point of reference: almost all ASA students are African-American.

At this point, the profession may seem to be facing another “Scylla and Charybdis” moment—stuck between scholarly conclusions that formal grammar instruction “has a negligible or . . . even a harmful effect on writing” and the “real world” demand that learning grammar, or more precisely, the rules of standard written English, is an absolute necessity for children, and, according to many Black educators, particularly Black children, to achieve success in modern American life.

This was the situation I faced at the start of the 1999 academic year as the only English teacher at the Academy of Scholastic Achievement (ASA), an all-Black alternative¹⁰⁰ charter high school on the far West Side of Chicago¹⁰¹ where, in the required course “Grammar and Composition,” my students and I came face to face with Senn and Skinner’s *Heath English 9*, a grammar text with all the standard definitions, terms, explanations, examples, and drills that students were required to memorize and apply in sentence analysis — in short a textbook that was the very embodiment of everything that Edwin M. Hopkins, Mike Rose, Richard Braddock *et al.*, George Hillocks, and the NCTE find wrong about grammar instruction.

However, in my ignorance as a newly certified English teacher right out of ed school, I was excited about the challenge of enlightening a class of minds previously benighted to the glories of English grammar. This was the grammar I grew up with – formal grammar, traditional

¹⁰⁰ Whereas some school districts use the term “alternative” to designate a school for students with behavioral problems or developmental disorders, an “alternative high school” in Chicago is what might be called a “last chance” school for students who have either dropped out or been kicked out of school, perhaps for a number of semesters, but who have reconsidered and decided that they should get a high school diploma. In fact, then, ASA students are highly motivated and well-disciplined.

¹⁰¹ For those familiar with Chicago neighborhoods, ASA is located right in the middle of “K-town,” so named because its north-south streets start with the letter “K” (Keystone, Karlov, Kedvale, Keeler, Kenneth, Kilbourn, Kildare, Kolin, Kirkland, Kolmar, Komensky, Kostner, Kilpatrick, Kenton, Knox, and Keating). According to Chicago native John W. Fountain in his 2005 book, *True Vine: A Young Black Man's Journey of Faith*, “I used to joke that the ‘K’ stood for ‘kill’ (as) it had developed a reputation for being one of the rougher places in the city” (258-259).

grammar, school grammar, the grammar of rules and regulations, do's and don'ts, prescriptive grammar, Jacob Horner's¹⁰² grammar. I knew it thoroughly and felt capable of teaching it to even the most grammatically challenged students. This was my moment to shine in my very first teaching assignment.

Unfortunately, success was not to be mine, or my students, unless "success" is perversely measured by our ability to meet the expectations of anti-grammarians who are almost universal in their condemnation of what has come to be called "drill and kill" exercises as completely worthless pedagogical tools. Students drilled on the subject matter as presented in the text— recognize sentences, subjects, and predicates; defining and identifying nouns, pronouns, prepositions, adjectives, and adverbs; and most important verb usage—action verbs, helping verbs, and linking verbs, as well as tenses and voice. Results were miserable – students did not "kill" the tests; the tests "killed" them. First quarter grades averaged 45%, while second quarter performance climbed to 51%.

Clearly, something had to be done, and the result from my summer restructuring of the course was a program of learning that I came to call "Grammar for the Right Brain." As the Student Writing Samples (Appendices A through F to this chapter) demonstrate, students were able to use grammar in precisely those ways that writing process theory, and even post-process theory, apparently think is impossible – they use grammar as a tool for the invention of topics; the discovery of the means of argumentation and support; the development of unified and coherent texts; the creation of new meaning in ways that are authentic, situated, and fully contextualized; and finally, the ability to write and compose more freely and more powerfully

¹⁰² Jacob Horner is the literary creation of John Barth in his novel *End of the Road*. He teaches grammar—"the rules, the truth about grammar"— at Wicomico State Teachers College (259).

and with fewer constraints and restrictions than they did prior to learning “Grammar for the Right Brain.”

By the start of the next year, I had devised a new approach to grammar, this time as a way to teach them how to write – not by teaching definitions and terminology but by using the considerable amount of grammar that students already knew, what Patrick Hartwell calls “grammar in our heads” (111). It had occurred to me, without really knowing much about the current state of academic research, that my students already knew a great deal of grammar. Everybody seemed perfectly capable of using all the parts of speech and major grammatical constructions (dependent clauses, prepositional phrases, gerunds, appositives, and participles). They may not have known which part of speech or construction they were using, and I doubt that anybody could have defined “dependent clause,” let alone identified one in a sentence. But they all knew how to use them. For example, I was certain that all my students could create and complete a sentence beginning “I was late because...” And none of them would ever say, “I put the book the table” because as native speakers, they all know how to use prepositions, if not how to define them or pick one out in a sentence.¹⁰³

Therefore, there was no need to teach definitions of dependent clauses or prepositional phrases or any of the other parts of speech or major grammatical constructions to students who were already skilled at using them—perfect examples of McWhorter’s claim that “There is, quite simply, so such thing as a human being walking around using bad grammar” (17).

Looking again at the Student Writing Samples (Appendices A-F), it’s instructive to see how this strategy works with actual students. With absolutely no instruction whatsoever in formal grammar, students were able to use all of the constructions assigned to them and to use

¹⁰³ English language learners have a great deal of difficulty with prepositions because of “a lack of collocational knowledge and the multi-functional nature of prepositions in English” (*Games4esl.com*).

them without error. Note, for example, how effectively Student B creates the four different kinds of “Why” meaning (simple explanation, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, and conditional cause and effect) using the dependent clause choices available to her in the handouts.¹⁰⁴

The point here is not that she is learning grammar, but that she is using grammar she already knows in order to learn how to write. Her last sentence is really the crown jewel of this exercise as she demonstrates her ability to create three parts of meaning (When, Where and Why) in the same sentence using single word adverbs, prepositional phrases, infinitive phrases, and dependent clauses – again, all without learning any definitions or terms and without conducting any form of sentence analysis that would have been part of a traditional grammar lesson. It’s difficult to make the point too many times – students do not have to learn grammar to learn how to write, but they can use grammar they already know to write more effectively, more intentionally, and even more authentically.

In other words, native speakers do not have to *learn* grammar in the same way as English Language Learners. Rather, students use “Grammar 1,” a term coined in 1954 by W. Nelson Francis to describe the grammar that “all speakers of a language above the age of five or six know how to use with considerable skill” (quoted by Hartwell, 109); a skill that Patrick Hartwell subsequently called “Grammar in Our Heads” (Hartwell 111). Therefore, since students don’t have to *learn* grammar – at least not in the way that formal grammar instruction requires them to learn terminology, definitions, and sentence analysis – they are free to learn how to *use* the grammar they already know to create meaning. “Grammar for the Right Brain,” then, is a method that teaches students how to use this grammar to invent, discover, and create meaning –

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix A

particularly meaning that I have categorized as the Six Parts of Meaning (Who, What, Why, Where, When, and How—again, see Appendices A, B, and C at the end of this chapter).

While the basic process behind Grammar for the Right Brain is using grammar and grammatical forms to create and enable various types of meaning, in order to even consider the possibility of accomplishing this goal of using grammar to create meaning (rather than merely identifying and correcting errors), grammar must be reimagined in much the same way that J. L. Austin reimagines speech acts — as sentences that, in Derrida’s words, actually “produce or transform a situation” (“Signature” 13). Or as he restates the case, “The performative is a ‘communication’ which is not limited strictly to the transference of a semantic content that is already constituted and dominated by an orientation toward the truth” (“Signature” 13-14). The question then becomes how grammar can be constitutive of performative sentences. Put another way, how can composition students learn to use grammatical constructions to create meaning either by expanding what Austin might call “constative” or kernel sentences (such as *The boy ran*, or *The baby cried*) into performatives by using these constructions to evoke performative sentences of the students’ own creation.

In the case of using grammar to teach writing, acquiring knowledge of how grammatical forms — or to use Paul Ricoeur’s term “configurations” (159) — can produce meaning is the goal. As Stanley Fish puts it:

Most composition courses that American students take today emphasize content rather than form on the theory that if you chew over big ideas long enough, the ability to write about them will (mysteriously) follow. The theory is wrong. Content is a lure and a delusion, and it should be banished from the classroom. Form is the way. (“Devoid of Content,” *New York Times* Op-Ed).

In another *Times* column, Fish proposes that the job of composition instructors is to “Drill students in the forms that enable meaning, not inert taxonomic forms, but forms of thought. What students must learn are the forms; the content will follow. The content is variable and abundant — the form is unvarying.” (“What Should Colleges Teach? Part 2”).

Paul de Man joins Fish in this positive opinion of the capability of forms—and grammatical forms in particular—to generate content. Referring approvingly to A. J. Greimas, de Man points out that one of the great benefits of language is that there is no “necessity of constructing a grammar for each particular text... (T)he essence of grammar is its ability to account for a large number of texts...” (14). Fish reinforces this thought when he explains that in his composition classes, “students produce sentences with twenty different contents [*De Man/Greimas’s ‘large number of texts’*], but only one form [*or ‘grammar’*]” (“What Should Colleges Teach? Part 2,” my additions italicized). Clearly, in order to employ grammar in pursuit of the goals that Fish, de Man, and Greimas outline, an entirely new pedagogical approach must be developed, one that moves beyond the now discredited method of requiring students to memorize, define, and identify the eight parts of speech. In short, the focus must be completely re-directed from teaching grammar in the hope of detecting and correcting error to using grammar and grammatical forms for the creation of meaning.

Although not specifically mentioning grammar, Lisa Delpit directly and forcefully addresses the absolute necessity of forms for African-American children to succeed in the classroom: “The students I have spoken to seem to be saying that the teacher has denied them access to herself as the source of knowledge necessary *to learn the forms* they need to succeed” (288, emphasis mine). Reinforcing the importance of Delpit’s call for the instructor to be “the source of knowledge necessary to learn the forms” is Myna Shaughnessy, “among the greatest of

those who have understood that intelligence is not determined by privilege” (Maher, quoting Adrienne Rich, 247). Shaughnessy taught her students how to use grammatical forms—not terminology and definitions—to improve their writing.

Her idea was for students to “expand base sentences” with “*major grammatical devices* – single word modifiers, prepositional phrases, modifying clauses, etc. – *even though they may not know the formal grammatical term* of the devices they are using” (131, emphasis mine). This method produced some remarkable results, at least in the case that Shaughnessy uses as an example – a “timid writer at the outset of the semester” who created the following sentence at semester’s end:

The problem will be solved with the help of the Almighty, who, except for an occasional thunderstorm, reigns unmolested, high in the heavens above, when all of us, regardless of race or religious difference, can come together and study this severe problem inside out, all day and night if necessary, and are able to come to you on that great gettin’ up morning and say, “Mrs. Shaughnessy, we do know our verbs and adverbs.” (132)

This is a production of considerable value, an example of drills that did not kill. Indeed, it is an example of how grammatical forms can achieve the goals of the writing process—how grammar can result in invention, discovery, and the creation of meaning in the act of composition.

Poets Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux provide more ways to demonstrate how grammatical forms can create meaning, or as they put it, “certain grammatical structures will do wonderful things for your writing” (171). They show, for example, what happens to poems when writers apply such constructions as appositives and noun phrases to their texts. They begin with a kernel or “constative” sentence (*My grandmother stands in the kitchen*) as the first line of

a proposed poem and proceed to show how grammatical forms (specifically appositives) can change what speech act theory would call a constative into the following performative illocutionary speech act that creates the very essence of Grandma Stella:

*My grandmother, Stella, a tiny woman
with long white hair and the face
of a Botticelli angel,
stands in the kitchen, a long low room
filled with the smell
of grilling onions and roasting garlic,
a smell I remember from childhood. (173-174)*

The result, according to Addonizio and Laux, is that “Appositives are a way to say more, to go further in the implications of your thoughts; they’re *a process of discovery*” (175, emphasis mine).

“Appositives are a process of discovery”—in what is little more than throwaway line, they propose that a grammatical construction can be used as a process of discovery. In the world of poetry, then, grammar creates meaning. Or to use the language of speech act theory, grammatical forms enact that which they state—the form of an appositive creates that which it names, turning Grandma from someone who “stands in the kitchen” into a “Botticelli angel” in much the same way that the form of the marriage ceremony turns two people standing at an altar into a married couple. It’s not unreasonable to claim that a student who can accomplish this feat has truly achieved the goals of a composition class.

Clearly, then, grammar can be performative in much the same way that Austin’s linguistic forms accomplish that which they proclaim. In other words, grammatical forms produce what they state—appositives, as the example here, (re)create Grandma Stella on the

page or in the case of a fictional character, the appearance of a Grandma Stella. Whether real or fictional, Grandma Stella is a creation of grammar. But Addonizio and Laux don't stop with one example of the performative power of grammar. They also demonstrate how it might actually work in the classroom by proposing, of all things, grammar drills:

“The following are sample sentences; study them, and then complete the blanks with your own appositives, noun phrases, prepositional phrases, verbs, adjective clauses, and adjective phrases.

MODEL: I wanted to return to that place, the tiny fishing village in Mexico.

*YOUR SENTENCE: I wanted to return to that place, _____
_____.” (177-178).*

The list of sample sentences goes on to include verbal phrases with even more grammar drills. But the idea is clear—grammar does not interfere with the process of discovery, invention, and the creation of meaning, it actually embodies them. Grammar and, more specifically, grammatical forms (or configurations) help poets create good poetry.

Addonizio and Laux aren't the only ones to connect grammar and poetry. In the March 2011 issue of *English Journal*, Lance Massey clearly sees the relationship between poetry and grammar by demonstrating “how reading ‘The Red Wheelbarrow’ for grammatical features, such as adjectives, adjectivals, adverbs, and adverbials, can help students develop a richer understanding of how language works to evoke mood, setting, and more” (66). “We do not,” he claims, “put down our grammar books and then pick up our poetry books; they are the same book” (68-69).

And although neither Massey nor Addonizio and Laux refer to Roman Jakobson, he pursues what amounts to much the same thesis, that grammar is an essential part of creating

poetry and interpreting it. As Jakobson puts it, “(B)riefly, the poetry of grammar and its literary product, the grammar of poetry have been seldom known to critics and mostly disregarded by linguists but skillfully mastered by creative writers” (90). He then demonstrates this assertion by analyzing how “the main dramatic force of Anthony’s exordium to the funeral oration for Caesar is achieved by Shakespeare’s playing on grammatical categories and constructions” (90).

Stanley Fish performs much the same analysis, only much more broadly, of *Coriolanus* in which “the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius decide that in order to bring about the hero’s downfall, they need only leave him to his own (verbal) devices” (Fish “How to Do Things” 983). They rely on what might be called the grammar of convention. According to Fish, “The conclusion is inescapable: declarative (and other) utterances do not merely mirror or reflect the state; they are the state...” (Fish “How to Do Things” 997). Put another way, grammar is constitutive of meaning.

There is clearly something going on here that suggests, even demands, a grammatical approach to writing instruction that goes far beyond relegating grammar to the role of error detection and correction. Just listing the lineup of scholars who endorse the role of grammar in the creation of meaning should present an anomaly of sufficient consequence to question the authority of those who dismiss it. However, no matter how enthusiastically de Man might proclaim that “the study of grammar... is the necessary pre-condition for scientific and humanistic knowledge” (15), the weight of the research (particularly the work of Hillocks along with Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer) shows, as Fish himself concedes, that “teaching grammar out of context is ineffective (because) drilling students on parts of speech doesn’t work” (“What Should Colleges Teach, Part 2”).

But if traditional grammar instruction is ineffective, there is a dearth of grammar texts showing how to teach grammar so that it is effective; there doesn't seem to be any pedagogical practices that are based on anything else other than learning rules and terminology. So while even the stones may be crying out for a way to connect grammar with writing, recent grammar books written by members of the NCTE affiliate Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar (ATEG) present an argument that is precisely counter to the position of Addonizio and Laux along with Fish, Jakobson, and De Man that grammar can be an effective way to teach invention, discovery, and the creation of meaning. For example, two recent efforts—*Grammar Alive! A Guide for Teachers* (2003) and *Engaging Grammar: Practical Advice for REAL Classrooms* (2007)—both rely on teaching precisely what almost every composition scholar believes is inimical to the writing process—memorization of grammar terminology, rules, and definitions. For example, here is one of the primary goals of a joint ATEG effort, *Grammar Alive!*

Every student will complete school with the ability to analyze the grammatical structure of sentences within English texts, *using grammatical terminology correctly* and demonstrating knowledge of how *sentence-level grammatical structure* contributes to the coherence of paragraphs and texts. (Haussamen 4, emphasis mine)

And in her book *Engaging Grammar*, former ATEG President Amy Benjamin proclaims, “*I believe that terminology is powerful*, that students should understand *the terms* found in the glossary of this book, as well as the basic sentence patterns and how to diagram them... (6, emphases mine). These two examples demonstrate just how far apart the advocates of grammar instruction and the practitioners of writing instruction really are.

Some of the more recent grammar texts tout that there is a new “rhetorical way” to teach grammar, a view that has been advanced in teacher education circles by ATEG founder and

former president Martha Kolln based not on the traditional parts of speech but on what Kolln calls “form and structure classes” (*Rhetorical Grammar* 238). Both approaches, however, require that students learn terminology and definitions, precisely those activities that composition scholars argue should not be part of the writing process. As Stanley Fish puts it in *How to Write a Sentence*,

Now of course you can give these words, phrases, and clauses technical names. You can call them prepositional phrases; you can call them past or present participles; you can call them adverbs; you can call them nouns; you can call them adjectives. And you can subdivide these terms and produce ever finer distinctions. But to what end? You can know what the eight parts of speech are [*or Kolln’s form and structure classes*], and even be able to apply the labels correctly, and still not understand anything about the way a sentence works. (19, my italicized addition)

The surprising thing is that it was not very long ago that the idea of teaching students sentence-based forms to create meaning was considered an exceptionally effective way to teach writing, indeed the wave of the future in composition instruction.

Robert Connors calls this time, beginning in the 1950s, an “extraordinary moment in the sun for sentence-based pedagogies (*particularly sentence combining*) that rose from older syntax-oriented teaching methods bidding fair to become methodologically hegemonic” (Connors 97, my italicized note). According to Connors, “(any) questions (about the effectiveness of sentence combining as a pedagogical tool) were put to rest in 1973 with the publication of Frank O’Hare’s research monograph *Sentence Combining: Improving Student Writing without Formal Grammar Instruction*, which “showed beyond a doubt that sentence combining exercises, without any grammar instruction at all, could achieve important gains in

syntactic maturity for students who used them” (105). However, as Connors describes the mysterious history of this movement, there was “an astonishing reversal of fortune for sentence rhetorics”:

We had said we wanted newer and better teaching techniques, and the sentence rhetorics of the 1960s and 1970s provided them. And then, as a discipline, we peered quizzically at what we had wrought, frowned, and declared “No,” this was not what we had really wanted. We had seen what it had to offer. And after a while, we did not go back any more. (107, 109)

And while some of these “sentence rhetorics” such as sentence combining do appear from time to time in the current literature (usually in recognition of their effectiveness), they have by and large disappeared from the composition classroom. What appears to be the case, then, is that while there used to be every reason to employ grammar in the composition classroom, today there aren’t any acceptable methods by which to accomplish that goal.

One of the features—and surprises—of sentence instruction was that while formal grammar instruction was for all purposes abandoned, writing ability nonetheless improved. As Connors put it, “(These) teaching methods succeeded, repeatedly and incontrovertibly, in producing better sentence writers” (109-110). Such results were a clear indication that composition scholars were, in fact, on the right track when they managed to eliminate what is often called “drill and kill” grammar instruction from the composition classroom while maintaining a focus on sentence construction. However, when they abandoned formal grammar instruction, they also lost the opportunity to connect grammar to speech act theory—using grammar, and more particularly grammatical forms, to teach writing. In other words, the two major pedagogical practices (sentence combining and sentence imitation) did not rely on any use

of grammatical forms to create meaning. Stanley Fish explains the connection between form and content in *How to Write a Sentence*:

Without form, content cannot emerge. When it comes to formulating a proposition, form comes first; forms are generative not of specific meanings but of the very possibility of meaning.¹⁰⁵ Despite the familiar proverb, it is not the thought that counts. Form, form, form, and only form is the road to what the classical theorists call ‘invention,’ the art of coming up with something to say... This, then, is my theology: You shall tie yourself to forms, and the forms shall set you free. (27, 33)

This is the essence of Francis Christensen’s 1963 call for a “rhetoric of the sentence that will do more than combine the ideas of primer sentences. We need one that will *generate* ideas” (155, original emphasis).

What Fish and Christensen are both proposing, then, is a radical view of grammar that does more than provide a way to “organize ideas before beginning to write” (de Beaugrande 241). According to Christensen and Fish, forms don’t organize ideas; they generate them. It seems like it is finally time, then, to try to answer Christensen’s call with an approach to grammar that does precisely what he asks, an approach that uses grammatical forms to generate ideas, forms that, to repeat Fish’s prescription, *enable meaning*.

The problem at this point becomes one of identifying the forms that can enable meaning and defining what is the “meaning of meaning.” Meaning can be difficult to define, and there are probably few if any first-year students (let alone their instructors) who would even attempt it. But if the goal of a writer is to create meaning, then everybody involved in the enterprise should have some idea of what they’re being asked to do. What is this “meaning” that they’re supposed

¹⁰⁵ See the prior reference to Griemas’s claim that there is no “necessity of constructing a grammar for each particular text... (T)he essence of grammar is its ability to account for a large number of texts...” (de Man 14).

to create? Fortunately, there's a relatively simple, fairly straightforward definition of meaning that can be identified, explained, illustrated, readily understood—and even more important actually used by students.

The definition consists of the well-known “who, what, why, where, when, and how” heuristic—what might also be called the “Six Parts of Meaning” (instead of the eight parts of speech). It may not be an all-inclusive or totally satisfying definition, but it is capable of being understood and best of all used by students at all levels of academic sophistication because each one of the “Six Parts of Meaning” can be created using specific grammatical constructions. To see how this approach might work in an actual composition classroom, I have provided real student samples from a class at an alternative inner-city high school located on the west side of Chicago¹⁰⁶ and from a class in basic writing (ENGL 0113) at the University of Oklahoma.

The first assignment is to build sentences using adverbs, prepositional phrases, and dependent clauses (all provided to the student for constant reference¹⁰⁷ so nobody has to memorize anything, neither the vocabulary nor the definitions). The first assignment is to create “When” meaning (using the “When Study Guide”), and then “Where” meaning (using the “Where Study Guide”), and finally to create both When and Where meaning together. Students start with simple kernel sentences such as “the boy ran” and then use grammatical forms to create meaning. So, for example, students can successfully create “When” meaning by simply affixing a single-word adverb to the start of the sentence—*Yesterday, the boy ran*. Once students become comfortable with single-word adverbs, they can then try using two or more adverbs—*Late last night, the boy ran*—and then move on to adding “When” meaning through the use of prepositional phrases and dependent clauses.

¹⁰⁶ See writing samples for Students #1 and #2 (Appendix D and E on pages 28-29).

¹⁰⁷ See sample handouts and worksheets pages (Appendix A, B, and C on 25-27)

Once students practice creating When and Where meaning, they then move to create the four different kinds of “Why” meaning (simple explanation, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, and conditional) using infinitive phrases, prepositional phrases, and dependent clauses (without ever having to know the words or their definitions). Finally, a set of culminating exercises involves creating all three types of meaning in a single sentence using as many different grammatical constructions as possible.¹⁰⁸ Future exercises would include creating who, what, and how meaning. These exercises give all students, and particularly basic writers, a feeling of confidence that they can control the language, a feeling enhanced by the fact that they don’t have to learn any grammatical terms or definitions. Students simply call these words “adverbs” or “prepositional phrases” or “dependent clauses” without having to define the terms—the definition determined entirely by usage. Terminology, then, becomes almost optional. If everyone had to understand the terminology before writing or speaking, all would remain silent, which is the basic complaint of the scholars who argue against teaching formal grammar.

It’s instructive to examine Student #1’s efforts to build “where” meaning (Appendix D, page 28). First, she starts by creating Where meaning with a Where adverb, “away” — “The boy ran *away*.” Next, she adds more Where meaning with a prepositional phrase, “from” — “The boy ran away *from the kitchen*.” And finally, she completes the process of inventing and discovering Where meaning with a dependent clause “where” that explains what had been going on in the kitchen — “The boy ran away from the kitchen *where he had been fighting with his sister*.”

This process illustrates how these exercises can answer an objection often raised against grammar drills—namely, that they are not “authentic.” Student #1’s sentences are as

¹⁰⁸ Student #2 shows how this is done in her “baby cried” sentence—see Appendix E (page 125).

contextualized, situated, and authentic as those produced in the most post-modern, post-process composition classroom. It's also important to note that she invents her subject matter as she writes, rather than responding to a pre-assigned topic.

She continues to demonstrate her inventive powers as she creates her next sentence by creating *Where* meaning, telling "where the girls went." First, she makes a one-word adverbial choice that the girls are going *together* (without, of course, having to learn what an adverb is because she already knows intuitively "in her head" what adverbs are and how to use them).

Next, she uses the prepositional phrase *across the street* creating further information about where the girls went together (again without having to learn anything about terminology or definitions of prepositions, prepositional phrases, or objects of prepositions).

And finally, she reveals the girls' destination by the use of a dependent clause—*where bootleg CDs are being sold*, once again without ever having been taught the definition of a dependent clause or how or why to use one—she uses the form of a dependent clause to create meaning, which she as a native speaker already knows. Student #2 also demonstrates how to use other grammatical forms to create "Why Meaning" by building a cause-and-effect sentence about a crying baby—each part of the sentence (new information) builds on what comes before (old information), creating a wonderfully unified and coherent picture of a real family, totally contextualized and completely situated, all the result of using grammar to create meaning.

It can't be emphasized enough that students do not have to learn formal grammar terms and definitions in order to create meaning using these grammatical constructions. All that's required is to employ grammatical forms, and unique content follows—precisely as Fish, Felman, de Man, Greimas, Jakobson, Massey, Addonizio and Laux, Delpit, Shaughnessy, and Austin predict.

APPENDIX “A”— CREATING “WHEN” MEANING

“When” Adverbs

Today, yesterday, tomorrow, last night, tonight, daily, weekly, now, then, early(ier), late(r), soon(er), always, never, immediately, sometimes, seldom, often, occasionally, finally, eventually, ultimately, next, after(wards), first, last, not, at, yet, again, every (hour, day, week, time, year, etc.)

These words may be modified to provide more detail—for example,
Late (or later or early or earlier) last night . . .

EXAMPLES: Tomorrow, he will return to school. **Or**, He will return to school tomorrow.

As a general rule, however, WHEN adverbs should come at the beginning of a sentence.

“When” Prepositions

Before, after, during, in the middle of, past, prior to, until, since, as, at, upon, for, on, about

A NOTE ABOUT PREPOSITIONS: All prepositions are followed by a noun or a pronoun.

“When” Dependent Clause Words (Subordinating Conjunctions)

Before, after, when, until, while, as long as, as soon as, as

A NOTE ABOUT DEPENDENT CLAUSE WORDS (ALSO CALLED “SUBORDINATING CONUNCTIONS”): Some of these words—specifically *before* and *after*—are the same as prepositions. The difference between a preposition and a subordinating conjunction is simply this: a subordinating conjunction is followed by an entire sentence—a subject and a predicate—rather than just a noun or a pronoun.

APPENDIX “B”— CREATING “WHERE” MEANING

“Where” Adverbs

<i>ahead, behind</i>	<i>apart, together, alone</i>	<i>away</i>
<i>back, front</i>	<i>around</i>	<i>backward(s), forward(s)</i>
<i>near(by), far</i>	<i>up, down</i>	<i>in, out</i>
<i>here, there</i>	<i>outside, inside</i>	<i>sideways</i>
<i>anywhere, everywhere, nowhere, somewhere</i>		

EXAMPLES: *He went outside. He walked inside. He moved sideways. He jumped up. He sat down. He looked around. Leave me alone. Please come here. Go over there. She searched everywhere. Don't look back. Don't go far. Stay nearby. Let's go together. I left it somewhere! I can't find it anywhere! Drive through; Go around instead. Let's stay behind.*

“Where” Prepositions

<i>in(to), out (of)</i>	<i>above, below</i>	<i>across (from), next to</i>
<i>through, throughout</i>	<i>far (from)</i>	<i>on top of</i>
<i>at</i>	<i>inside (of), outside (of)</i>	<i>along (with, side of)</i>
<i>by</i>	<i>between</i>	<i>upon</i>
<i>under, over</i>	<i>underneath</i>	<i>beneath</i>
<i>about</i>	<i>before, after</i>	<i>ahead of, behind</i>
<i>near(by/to),</i>	<i>around</i>	<i>in back of, in front of</i>
<i>beside</i>	<i>beyond</i>	<i>among/amid</i>
<i>apart (from)</i>	<i>against</i>	<i>away (from)</i>
<i>up (from), down (from)</i>	<i>to, from</i>	<i>with, within</i>
<i>on(to), off (of)</i>	<i>with/without/within</i>	<i>toward, at</i> <i>opposite (from)</i>

EXAMPLE: *He walked outside around the block.*

“Where” Subordinating Conjunctions

Where

EXAMPLE: *He walked outside around the block where his friends were waiting.*

APPENDIX “C”— CREATING “WHY” MEANING

“Why”—A Simple Explanation

A simple explanation gives no real reason to answer the question why. There are two basic structures used to answer this question—the infinitive phrase and the prepositional phrase.

Infinitive Phrase Words *to . . .* OR *in order to . . .*

EXAMPLE: *I’m going to the store (in order) to buy some milk.*

Prepositional Phrase Word—*for*

EXAMPLE: *I’m going to the store for some milk.*

“Why”—Cause and Effect

The question “why” can also be answered by telling how one event causes another event to occur. This is the “standard” or expected answer to the question “why”

Prepositional Phrase Words: *because of, by means of, in view of, on account of, due to, for, upon*

EXAMPLE: *Due to our lack of milk, I’m going to the store to buy some more.*

Dependent Clause Words: *because, in order that, since, so that, as, for, when (past tense only)*

EXAMPLES: *I have to go home now because I am very tired. OR for I am very tired. OR as I am very tired. OR since I am very tired. OR so that I can sleep. OR in order that I can sleep. OR (past tense using “when) I had to go home when I was tired.*

“Why”—Comparison and Contrast

Comparison and contrast is the logical opposite of cause and effect—namely, one event should have caused another to occur, but didn’t; or, one event should *not* have caused another to occur, but it happened anyway. For example:

Prepositional Phrase Words *in spite of, aside from* **EXAMPLE:** *In spite of our lack of milk, I’m not going to the store to buy some more.*

Dependent Clause Words—*although, though, even though, aside from the fact that*

EXAMPLES: *Although we still have some milk, I’m going to the store to buy some anyway. Aside from the fact that I’m tired, I’m having a great time. Even though I woke up late, I still made it to school on time.*

“Why”—Conditional Cause and Effect

Conditional Cause and Effect describes how one event *may* cause another event to occur, but it hasn’t happened yet.

Dependent Clause Words—*Unless, Until, As long as, As far as, as soon as, if, if . . . then, when, whenever, provided (that)*

EXAMPLES: *Unless you get ready to go right now, we can’t leave on time. Until you’re ready to go, we can’t leave. As long as you’re not ready, we can’t leave. As far as I can tell, you’re not ready to go. As soon as you’re ready to go, we can leave. If you’re ready to go, we can leave. If you’re ready to go, then we can leave. When you’re ready to go, we can leave. Whenever you’re ready to go, we can leave. Provided (that) you’re ready to go, we can leave.*

APPENDIX D, STUDENT #1

Creative Writing "Where" Study Guide Name

1. Consider the sentence The boy ran. "Stuff" the sentence as follows:

- a. Use an adverb to answer the question **WHERE** the boy ran.

The boy ran away
↑
ADV

- b. Use a prepositional phrase – in addition to the adverb – to answer the question **WHERE** the boy ran.

The boy ran away from the kitchen
prepositional
phrase

- c. Use a dependent clause – in addition to the adverb and the prepositional phrase – to answer the question **WHERE** the boy ran.

The boy ran away from the kitchen where
he had been fighting with his sister

2. Consider the sentence The girls went. "Stuff" the sentence as follows:

- a. Use an adverb to answer the question **WHERE** the girls went.

The girls went together

- b. Use a prepositional phrase – in addition to the adverb – to answer the question **WHERE** the girls went.

The girls went together across the street

- c. Use a dependent clause – in addition to the adverb and the prepositional phrase – to answer the question **WHERE** the girls went.

The girls went together across the street
where they were selling bootleg CDs.

***MAKE SURE THAT ALL "WHERE" INFORMATION FOLLOWS THE SUBJECT AND PREDICATE AND THAT YOU DO NOT USE A COMMA TO SEPARATE THE SUBJECT AND PREDICATE FROM THE WHERE INFORMATION!**

APPENDIX D, STUDENT #1 – PAGE 2

- ① The baby cried ^{ADV} down stairs.
The baby cried ^{PREP} in the crib.
The baby cried ^{PREP} in the crib ^{DC} where her mother went to pick her up.
- ② The monkey swung ^{ADV} around.
The monkey swung ^{PREP} around from tree to tree.
The monkey swung ^{PREP} around from trees to tree ^{DC} where her baby hung on tightly.

NOTE: Rather than being provided with a topic, Student #1 uses grammatical constructions – adverbs, prepositional phrases and dependent clauses – to create her topic of a boy running away from a fight with his sister. Similarly, Student #2 begins to develop an argument about why babies cry using the grammatical constructions for creating cause and effect meaning. And both students' compositions are evidence of a highly contextualized, authentic writing.

APPENDIX E, STUDENT #2

CREATIVE WRITING MIDTERM NAME

PART I - CREATING MEANING

Provide additional meaning to the sentence "The baby cried . . ." using the following constructions:

1. Why - Simple Information *The baby cried for some milk.*

2. Why - Cause and Effect (Dependent Clause) *The baby cried because there was no milk.*

3. Why - Comparison and Contrast (Dependent Clause) *The baby cried even though there was milk.*

4. Why - Conditional Cause and Effect (Dependent Clause) *Whenever there was no milk, the baby would cry.*

5. Choose any sentence from #1-4 above and communicate complete **WHEN** and **WHERE** information using all available constructions listed on your handouts. *yesterday in the middle of the night while his parents were asleep, the baby cried in his crib where his mother had put him to sleep because there was no milk.*

APPENDIX F, STUDENT #3

1. Student #3 Story: “Halloween Nightmare” (Excerpt)

Late last night in the middle of the Halloween Nightmare party while everyone was dancing, the girls grabbed their purses and ran as fast as they could out the door until they reached the car and drove away to the nearest police department where they could find help because while the girls were at the party they found a dead body in the basement! Although at first the girls thought it was a costume, they discovered after poking and messing around with the body that it was in fact a dead person, and as soon as the girls realized this they quickly reached for their phones and tried to call for help but did not have any service, but there wasn't a home phone that they could use.

2. Student #3 Grammatical Analysis (Excerpt):

The sentence begins with WHEN information (Late last night) followed by a WHEN preposition (in the middle of the Halloween Nightmare party) and finally by a dependent clause (while everyone was dancing). I was able to follow the order of the recommended structural form. After following the form in which WHEN adverbs go in the kernel sentence, a WHY cause and effect is placed (the girls grab their purses and ran as fast as they could) although this does not follow the structural form, it fits much better and helps explain why and how the girls ran.

3. Student #3 Rhetorical Analysis (Excerpt)

The story begins with a young boy named Fred being killed without mercy. Shortly afterwards, three girls find his body and consequently lose their lives because of the crime they walked into. The story is credible through its use of ethos, pathos, and logos. For example, the credibility of the characters is established by demonstrating how Fred is a scrawny young boy who can easily be killed by the grim reaper who is described as a heartless man who is also capable of killing the three girls. In addition, the story stirs up the emotions of the readers, particularly because Phil kills without any mercy, which makes the readers dislike Phil. Lastly the logos or logic of the story shows how bad things happen to innocent people for simply being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

The Past, Part III: Process and Post-Process Pedagogies — Promises and Problems

Don't let it be forgot
That once there was a spot
For one brief shining moment that was known
As Camelot.

Alan Jay Lerner, *Camelot*

I can see clearly now the rain is gone
I can see all obstacles in my way...
Johnny Nash, "I can see clearly now."

Perhaps like any advancement in any other academic field, the process theory of writing in the composition studies was born of controversy. From the very start of the historic 1966 Dartmouth Seminar, considered by some as the event where the first hints of a new approach to teaching writing had emerged¹⁰⁹, there was dissension about the nature and purpose of composition. Christine Donahue's 2016 "Brief History of the Dartmouth Institute and Conference," written on the occasion of its 50th Anniversary, explains the difference in position of the two sides—the Americans, represented by Albert Kitzhaber, and the British by James Britton¹¹⁰:

Albert Kitzhaber's working paper ("What Is English") presented English as a triad of grammar, literature, and communication skills, whereas James Britton's response (Institute of Education, London) sparked a shift in a new direction, defining writing as "a space where we should encourage students to use language in more complex and expressive ways," emphasizing process rather than only product. (Donahue)

¹⁰⁹ Joseph Harris clearly considers this conference to be of critical importance, as he dates the beginning of his "teaching subject" from the start of that conference (ix). And according to Christine Donahue in her official 50th Anniversary "Brief History" of the Dartmouth Institute and Conference, "This seminar laid the foundation for the US field we now know as Composition or Writing Studies."

¹¹⁰ This event reminds me of Bernard Shaw's famous quip, "England and America are two countries separated by the same language!"

As Joseph Harris explains the British side of the debate, “British theorists invoked the idea of *growth*¹¹¹ as part of an attempt to shift work in English away from the analysis of a fixed set of great books and toward a concern with the uses that students make of the language” (*Teaching*, ix, italics Harris). In short, students were to become producers of language rather than just consumers—users of language instead of analysts.

The assembled writing scholars debated and eventually emerged from their Seminar with a consensus: “generally proposed that English courses should emphasize student growth and literary processes rather than specific content to be mastered—a (partial) triumph of Britton (the English educator) over Kitzhaber (the American)” (Vee). But while today there seems little debate that the Seminar was an important event in the history of composition, there was still some early dissent. For example, Joseph Harris was so unimpressed that he was moved to claim that “the Dartmouth ideas seem to have failed to have much practical effect on what actually goes on in many English classrooms” (“After Dartmouth” 632). Yet Dartmouth remains as a touchstone of the shift in English instruction from the earlier and well-entrenched “current-traditional” model to the sweeping changes brought forth by the writing process model.

Although there doesn’t seem to be any research that substantiates the following claim, it seems to me that there was one unique publishing event that became the turning point in the process movement. It was as if the publication of this one essay served as the spark, the catalyst, the inciting incident, that before its publication, the movement (if indeed it could even have been called a “movement” at the time) was deemed by Wayne C. Booth to offer “nothing radically new” (quoted by Harris in “After Dartmouth,” 632). But after this iconic essay, to quote Louis

¹¹¹ One of the books to come out of the Seminar was John Dixon’s book *Growth through English*. Peter Smagorinsky exclaimed that after reading the book in 2001, “Dixon’s illustrations sound as though they are taken from post-millennium schools rather than schools of the 1960s” (24).

XV out of context, there was “le déluge,” a veritable tsunami of “writing process” literature that engulfed the world of composition pedagogy. And the singular publishing event that marked this event was Donald M. Murray’s brief essay, “Teach Writing as a Process Not Product.” His words would be reflected in almost every book, journal article, and conference presentation thereafter:

Once you can look at your composition program with the realization that you are teaching a process, you may be able to design a curriculum which works... The writing process itself can be divided into three stages: *prewriting* (everything that takes place before the first draft), *writing* (the act of producing the first draft), and *rewriting* (reconsideration of subject, form, and audience) (3-4, emphasis Murray).

The result was that this four-page essay seemed to galvanize the entire world of English teachers and focus the attention of the field on an apparently remarkable new way to teach composition.

The advent of the process theory of composition pedagogy made an impact that was apparently without equal in the history of the discipline, at least in terms of the excitement it generated in the field, termed by one scholar as “our field’s founding paradigm” (Yood 4). It can be seen as almost the equivalent of Saul at the end of his journey on the road to Damascus when the scales fell from his eyes (Acts 9:18); or the blind man regaining his sight after washing off the mud that Jesus had applied to his eyes (John 9:6-7); or, more contemporaneously, the composition community joining together to sing the Johnny Nash song, “I can see clearly now!”; or, to revert to another popular culture reference, it was, in the words of Sondra Perl, the equivalent of John Kennedy’s “Camelot,” a “shining moment” (xi).

This joyous reaction to what was billed as the answer to the long-vilified “current-traditional” rhetoric was apparent almost from the beginning of what can only be called a

movement the likes of which had never been seen before in the annals of FYC pedagogy. Some even viewed the arrival of process pedagogy as the start of “a cult... promoted with a degree of missionary zeal that would have made an itinerant preacher proud” (Rodrigues 24). Other composition scholars continued this comparison of process pedagogy to a religious experience, with one scholar referencing his reaction as an audience member at a 4Cs presentation: “I was myself one of the true believers, ... all of us caught up in the fervor of the newly converted, embracing a new orthodoxy...” (McCleod 16). Still others, like Lad Tobin, were caught up in “stories about the miraculous changes brought about the writing process movement...,” stories that led to what he calls “conversion narratives” (1).

Other more established figures in the discipline, whose seniority perhaps should have made them less prone to hyperbole, seemed to be equally effusive in their praise of this new development in the teaching of writing, and their enthusiasm was still very much in evidence well into the 1980s. For example, in 1982 Maxine Hairston, (quoting Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*), saw process pedagogy as nothing less than a “paradigm shift,” a “revolution” that she predicted would spread throughout the nation’s classrooms (76). Somewhat later, in 1986, Lester Faigley determined that “No development has been more influential than the emphasis on writing as a process...” (“Competing Theories” 527).

Unfortunately, as with many religious-like movements, what often begins with an abundance of faith and unquestioning belief eventually loses its momentum. For example, Sondra Perl neglected, perhaps inadvertently, to use the complete title of William Manchester’s book—*One **Brief** Shining Moment: Remembering Kennedy*—in her paean to the process movement. Camelot, that of the Kennedy administration (according to Manchester) and King

Arthur's court (according to Alan Jay Lerner) — were moments both “shining” and “*brief*” (italicized emphasis mine).

In fact, almost as soon as the new pedagogy began its seemingly triumphant march through the classrooms, winning adherents almost everywhere within the field, many scholars began to discover problems with what others were embracing with unrestrained exuberance. For example, in 1984, only two years after Hairston's rousing recommendation of the writing process method, George Hillocks, earlier made famous with his claim that “the study of grammar does not have any substantial effect on writing ability” (*Research* 227), determined in another research project that the process approach was not, in fact, the most effective method for teaching writing. Far better was a method that he called the “environmental mode” that

... places priority on structured problem-solving activities, with clear objectives, planned to enable students to deal with similar problems in composing. On pretest-to-posttest measures, the environmental mode is over three times more effective than the process mode. (“What Works” 160).

According to Hillocks, it is this “environmental mode” rather than the process method that “brings teacher, student, and materials more nearly into balance and, in effect, takes advantage of all resources of the classroom” (“What Works” 160).

A year later, in 1985, just three years after Hairston's announcement of the revolutionary paradigm shift, Raymond Rodrigues, referencing the religious nature of the process movement, gave his essay the title “Moving Away from Writing Process Worship,” an essay that starts with a critique of the writing process method that many others would adopt, namely, that “Writing without structure accomplishes as little as writing a mock structure” (26). Others reached much the same conclusion. For example, Rodrigues reports that Miles Myers and James Gray, “two

key names associated with the Bay Area Writing Project, that same project that many of us associate with *the* writing process,... tell us that there are additional ways to teach writing beside the process approach” (25).

What appeared, then, to be anecdotal questioning of the writing process method soon became a trend. For example, in 1987, just five years after Hairston’s foundational essay extolled the creation of the new paradigm, Edward P. J. Corbett reflected:

Like most good things, the emphasis on process was susceptible to abuse, and eventually, it did get abused. In some cases, the emphasis on process became so extreme that attention to the product virtually dropped out of sight... It is the product, after all, that represents the bottom line of the writer’s efforts... Readers do not care about the process that produced the product” (“Teaching Composition” 451)

Unfortunately, Corbett did not identify any of the specific “abuses” that he referred to, although other scholars provided the evidence Corbett needed to support his “abuse” claim.

For example, Rodrigues pointed out what had apparently become obvious to many teachers and scholars who attempted to realize the promises of the writing process method: “In meeting after meeting at both the NCTE national conference and the Conference on College Communications, speakers have been telling us that there is no such thing as *the* writing process: there are writing processes. Different writers write in different ways” (25, italicized emphasis Rodrigues). Furthermore, Rodrigues explored other difficulties plaguing the writing process method, specifically that:

Writing process converts believed in initially in what was essentially a linear process: pre-writing, then writing, then responding and revising, then editing, then publishing, the

same steps for all students. But researchers discovered that it did not reflect the ways that writers actually write... The model was actually recursive. (25)

After reflecting on these developments, Rodrigues reached what seemed to be a natural and logical conclusion: “The unfettered writing process approach has been just as artificial as the traditional high school research paper” (26).

This conclusion is supported by George Hillocks in his essay “What Works in Composition: A Meta-Analysis of Experimental Treatment Studies,” one that reinforced Rodrigues’s view about the students’ need for structure, something that he called the “Environmental Mode” of writing, which is clearly different from the process method (what he calls the “Natural Process Mode”). Rather than employing “generalized objectives, free-writing, writing for audiences of peers, generally positive feedback from peers, opportunities to revise and rework writing, high levels of interaction among students, and relegating the instructor to a role as facilitator” (all characteristics of the natural process mode), the Hillocks’ “Environmental Mode” featured “clear and specific objectives, materials and problems selected to engage students..., activities focused on problem-centered discussions,” encouraging teachers to interact with students (144, 145). And as previously discussed, Hillocks claimed that this structured approach “is over three times more effective than the process mode” (160).

Other scholars engaged in similar taxonomies with similar results. Lester Faigley, for example (previously cited for his claim that “no development has been more influential than the emphasis of writing as a process”), categorized writing into three categories (or theories)—the expressive view, the cognitive view, and finally, the social view—each with its own approach to writing. Faigley’s preference is clearly the social view because “the focus of a social view of writing is not on how the social situation influences the individual but on how the individual is a

constituent of a culture” (“Competing Theories” 535). Faigley explains the unfortunate consequences for the process theory (a mixture of the expressive and cognitive views),

A social view of writing moves beyond the expressivist contention that the individual discovers the self through language and beyond the cognitivist position that the individual constructs reality through language. In a social view, any effort to write about the self or reality always comes in relation to previous texts.” (“Competing Theories” 536)

And although it may be difficult to claim that any of these reported “abuses” of the process method eventually resulted in what Baines *et al.* claimed was a “breaking of the paradigm” (71), the fact of the matter was that the process method didn’t seem to be improving student writing, a situation that was reported in the 1999 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP): “Results reveal that the overall writing performance of students has stagnated since the inception of the NAEP assessment of writing fourteen years ago” (67).

Ironically, the final break in Hairston’s process paradigm might well be established at precisely the same time (1994) that Sandra Perl took up the banner of process with her “Shining Moment” essay when John Trimbur first introduced the term “post-process” while laying out his case for “the social turn,” which he defines as

a post-process, post-cognitivist theory and pedagogy that represent literacy as an ideological arena and composing as a cultural activity by which writers position and reposition themselves in relation to their own and others’ subjectivities, discourses, practices, and institutions. (“The Social Turn” 109)

As such, there was, he concluded, a “crisis within the process paradigm and a growing dissolution with its limits and pressures” (109). According to Trimbur, “... the distinction

between product and process not only proved conceptually inadequate to what writers do when they are writing, it also made writing instruction appear to be easier than it is” (109).

And although he claims that he wants to praise process not bury it (“I do not want to slight the contributions that composing researchers have made...”), he cannot help but point out that “teachers’ desire to operate outside oppressive institutions and avoid the errors of the past only reinstated the rhetoric of the belletristic tradition...” (110). And to put the final point to his argument, Trimbur concludes, “My point, though, is what appeared to be so clarifying and liberating was inevitably caught in a dense and overdetermined web of textual realities and rhetorical relationships that process pedagogy had failed to theorize” (110).

Unfortunately for the process movement, Trimbur appears to have been only a “warm-up act” for what was to come—not just a criticism of process pedagogy but an all-out attack, and an attack not just on process but on the entire enterprise of first-year composition instruction. With respect to the writing process, by the end of the twentieth century, “the writing process” had become, according to Richard Fulkerson “an aphorism without impact” (“Of Pre- and Post-Process,” 93). Somewhat earlier, in 1997, Joseph Harris remarked that “the proposition that writing is a process strikes me as a claim that is true, banal, and of a real if limited use” (57). And in 1999, Joseph Petraglia adds the point that the term “writing is a process” is “the right answer to a really boring question” (53). But perhaps nobody puts the critique more directly than James L. Kinneavy, who declared that “Process so enthroned and separated from any relation to product can be as meaningless as grammar or vocabulary taught in isolation from the actual act

of writing¹¹²” (“The Process of Writing” 8), for in the catalogue of composition insults, there is probably none worse than being compared to direct grammar instruction.

Broadly speaking, these attacks on process pedagogy arose primarily from the advent of post-modern theory in composition studies, and like other institutions, traditional composition beliefs, theories, and practices began to crumble under the deconstructive pressures imposed by post-modern theorists. For example, the Kinneavy essay leveling the charge of “meaningless” against the process edifice was published in *Composition Theory for the Postmodern Classroom*, edited by Gary A. Olson and Sidney Dobrin, two of the more prominent names in the application of post-modern theory to composition studies. Unfortunately, even though they feature “postmodern” in the title of their book, Olson and Dobrin never provide a definition of what they mean by “postmodern,” which is hardly the most self-explanatory term in the language of the academy. In fact, as James Berlin notes in a 1992 essay, “The uses of postmodern theory in rhetoric and composition studies have been the object of considerable abuse of late. The charges have included willful obscurity, self-indulgence, elitism, pomposity, intellectual impoverishment, and a host of related charges” (“Poststructuralism” 16). Thankfully, a thoroughgoing analysis and detailed definition of postmodernism is not necessary here, only an exploration of one element of postmodern theory that scholars and theorists have used to attack process pedagogy, specifically, the notion of anti-foundationalism and its application to composition studies and in particular its role in a “post process” world.

The genius, or some might call it cunning, of the post-process movement is to ground process pedagogy in foundationalist theory and then proceed to dismantle the premise on which

¹¹² This quote is an unacknowledged reference to what Richard Braddock *et al.* called the “harmful effects” of grammar instruction and NCTE’s negative opinion about “the teaching of grammar in isolation” (see page 100 for both the Braddock and NCTE references).

foundationalism rests. As Stanley Fish, perhaps the most prolific and influential of anti-foundationalist scholars, sets up the situation,

By foundationalism I mean any attempt to ground inquiry and communication in something more firm and stable than mere belief or unexamined practice. The foundationalist strategy is first to identify that ground and then so to order our activities that they become anchored to it and are thereby rendered objective and principled... In short, the successful foundational project will have provided us with a “method,” a recipe with premeasured ingredients which when ordered and combined according to absolutely explicit instructions—and the possibility of explicitness is another foundationalist assumption—will produce, all by itself, the correct result... In the teaching of composition, the result would be the “discovery of rules that are so fundamental as to be universal,” rules that if followed would lead directly to coherence, intelligibility, readability, persuasiveness, etc.¹¹³ (“Anti-Foundationalism” 342-343)

Fish clearly previews the next steps in the anti-foundationalist attempt to dismantle process pedagogy: first, situate process pedagogy as part of foundationalism (“a ‘method’, a recipe with premeasured ingredients”) and second argue that “foundationalist theory fails, lies in ruins” (“Anti-Foundationalism” 344, 345). In other words, if the process theory of writing is part of “foundationalist theory,” then process pedagogy cannot be supported because, as Fish puts it, “foundationalist methodology is based on a false picture of the human situation” as opposed to the anti-foundational view that provides a “picture of men and women whose acts are socially constructed and who are embedded in a world no more stable than the historical and conventional forms of thought that brought it into being” (“Anti-Foundationalism” 346).

¹¹³ Here Fish provides the reference for his quotes: Patricia Bizzell’s “Cognition, Convention, and Certainty: What We Need to Know about Writing,” p. 215.

Other anti-foundationalist scholars, with specific interests in post-process theory, have applied these principles of anti-foundationalism specifically to the teaching of composition. Unfortunately, their conclusions do not portend a favorable future for process pedagogy. In fact, if the process movement is all about pedagogy, post-process might be all about the absence of pedagogy – for most if not all post-process scholars conclude that writing cannot be taught. In short, post-process theory by and large means the dismantling of the traditional FYC classroom. In the words of perhaps the leading post-process scholar, “No formal pedagogy can be constructed to teach the act of writing or critical reading” (Kent “Paralogic Hermeneutics” 36). Kent proceeds to reinforce what might be called his “anti-pedagogical” position:

- “Discourse production and reception cannot be reduced to discrete processes, systems, or methodologies and, as a result, cannot be taught.” (*Paralogic Rhetoric* 157).
- “Neither reading nor writing can be taught as a systematic process” (*Paralogic Rhetoric* 36).
- “We cannot ignore the pedagogical consequences of our position: writing and reading—conceived broadly as processes or bodies of knowledge—cannot be taught because nothing exists to teach” (*Paralogic Rhetoric* 161).

Other post-process scholars reach similar conclusions about the seeming unsuitability of creating a pedagogy for teaching writing and therefore the theoretical demise of FYC:

- “If we are to accept the premise of paralogic hermeneutics, then the current nature of how we envision teaching is obsolete” (Dobrin “Paralogic Hermeneutic Theories” 134).

- “Composition studies has come to a standstill: in its research, in its goals, in its progress... Composition studies marches on as a zombie: animate but empty... Composition studies seems to be waiting for some sort of messianic arrival—an event that liberates composition from its stagnation” (Dobrin, *Postcomposition* 200).¹¹⁴
- “Theoretically, there is no longer any need for such a ‘discipline’ as composition” (Kameem 185).
- “The solution to the ‘crisis’ in composition studies... will mean putting an ‘end’ to composition studies as a distinctive academic discipline” (Smit 13).
- “Our teaching will need to undergo fundamental changes, particularly how we envision our relationship to our students” (Raúl Sánchez, quoted by Dobrin *Constructing Knowledges* 83).

At first, the consequences of anti-foundationalism for composition pedagogy seem clear—either dismantle the FYC classroom as it now exists or ignore or at least postpone any action pending further theoretical developments. This latter course is recommended by Dobrin, perhaps not wishing to recommend unemployment for his FYC colleagues. As he explains his position, “this is one example of a theory that cannot necessarily be ‘translated’ wholesale into pedagogy” (*Constructing Knowledges* 84).

The only problem with Dobrin’s attempt to avoid what he and others call the “pedagogical imperative” (a term coined by Lynn Worsham “requiring every theory of writing to translate into a pedagogical practice or at least some specific advice for teachers” [96]) is that

¹¹⁴ According to Paul Lynch, “Dobrin offers the most extreme rejection of composition’s traditional pedagogical mission” (xiv).

post-process theory does, in fact, translate directly into pedagogical practice. As Kent puts it, “We cannot ignore the pedagogical consequences of our position” (*Paralogic Rhetoric* 161).

While Dobrin claims that post-process theory “does not answer questions of ‘real’ classroom issues,” in point of fact, it does answer such questions and answer them quite forcefully (*Constructing Knowledges* 64). And even though Dobrin cautions against trying to adhere to this “imperative,” fearing that those who “fall into the pedagogical imperative” and “seek to create pedagogies from theories we are just beginning to discuss” will “deny theories their revolutionary potential,” a more accurate conclusion is that there are pedagogies directly attributable to post-process theory, and these pedagogies constitute the very “revolutionary potential” that Dobrin presumably wants to achieve (*Constructing Knowledges* 64).

For example, a close reading of Thomas Kent, who might well be called the father of post-process theory, reveals that post-process theory can indeed have a major impact on pedagogy, just one that composition scholars, instructors, and administrators find utterly unpalatable—namely, that post-process theory might well mark the end of composition instruction, at least the universal course in first year composition as it exists today. As Kent puts it, “Neither reading nor writing can be taught as a systemic process” (*Paralogic Rhetoric*, 36). And if this weren’t clear enough, he makes the claim over and over again:

- We are forced to acknowledge the impossibility of teaching writing and critical reading. (46)
- Discourse production and reception cannot be reduced to discrete processes, systems, or methodologies and as a result, cannot be taught. (157)
- Writing and reading cannot be taught because nothing exists to teach. (161)
- Traditional writing courses would be eliminated. (169)

The potential impact of post-process theory on the first-year composition pedagogy, then, is hardly insignificant—in fact it tends more to the apocalyptic. The “pedagogical imperative” is clear—post-process theory pretty much dispenses with traditional FYC classroom pedagogy. It might be said that post-process demonstrates a will against pedagogy. But nowhere can it be said that post-process theory does not translate directly into pedagogical practice.

Fortunately, the impact may not be quite as disastrous as it first might appear, and for writing centers, post-process theory might actually turn out to be a great benefactor, even a patron saint of sorts. As Lee-Ann M. Kastman Breuch explains, “Kent does not suggest that teaching writing is impossible; he suggests that teaching writing as a *system* is impossible” (123). In other words, the problem is not that post-process theory doesn’t translate well into pedagogical practice. The problem is that the practice into which it does translate isn’t to be found in the traditional composition classroom.

Put simply, the attributes of a post-process classroom, at least according to Kent, Dobrin, and Raúl Sánchez, seems to be completely unattainable in a traditional writing class. As Dobrin explains the problem, “Sánchez’s Kentian pedagogy suggests an emphasis on individualized instruction and a re-evaluation of student-teacher relationships” (84). Kent himself recognizes the pedagogical implications: “traditional writing courses would be eliminated, teachers would work with students on an individual basis, but a shift to this collaborative instructional method would be very costly” (*Paralogic Rhetoric*, 169). In short, the pedagogical consequences of post-process theory may conflict with current practice and even seem insurmountable, but it certainly cannot be said that the consequences are not perfectly clear—there is, in fact, a “pedagogical imperative” to post-process theory. Fortunately, while Dobrin, Kent, and Sánchez may seem to think that they have theorized themselves into a practical pedagogical corner, the view from the

writing center should see just the opposite results. Instead of a fog descending over the world of writing instruction, post-process theory actually reveals “a bright, bright sun-shiny day”¹¹⁵ for teaching writing, at least from the perspective of the writing center. What Kent, Dobrin, and Sánchez are describing is nothing short of a revolutionary way of teaching writing (recall Dobrin’s goal) that focuses on the writing center itself.

For example, what post-process theorists perceive as being cost-prohibitive might well turn into actual cost savings if post-process theory were implemented in the writing center rather than the halls of first year composition. Instead of having to pay for hundreds of tenured faculty, renewable term faculty, adjuncts, graduate teaching assistants, and the staff to administer the lot of them (not to mention all of the attendant benefits such as health care and office space), the only cost increases in the Kent plan, if run through the writing center, would be an increase in the number of writing center consultants, the cost of whom would be more than offset by the decrease in costs of an absent first year composition staff. In fact, the Kent one-on-one plan might actually be far less expensive than the current first year composition program because the structure to accomplish this goal is already set up and running—and it’s called “the writing center.”

But what about Kent’s other roadblocks, specifically his claim that “writing and reading cannot be taught because nothing exists to teach” (*Paralogic Rhetoric*, 161)? As has already been pointed out, Kent’s claim is not an absolute one—it’s not that writing can’t be taught, just that it can’t be taught as a system in the same way in which process pedagogy would have it done. Again, what presents itself as a problem for the composition classroom is “business as usual” for the writing center. In an earlier 1989 essay “Paralogic Hermeneutics and the

¹¹⁵ The reference, of course, is to Johnny Nash’s hit 1972 song “I Can See Clearly Now.”

Possibilities of Rhetoric,” Kent is actually expansive about what he sees as post-process pedagogy:

- The most fundamental activity of discourse production is the hermeneutic act—the interpretive guess we must make about our hearer’s or reader’s code. (26)
- No formal pedagogy can be constructed to teach the act of writing... (36)
- The teacher as collaborator acts as simply another voice in the dialogic interactions inherent in discourse production and analysis, a voice that offers possible choices a student might make in her hermeneutic guessing about how to create effects in the world. (37)

Now writing center consultants may not be all that familiar with the terms “hermeneutic acts” or “dialogic interactions,” but they are certainly aware of their role as interpretive guessers and collaborators who act without a “formal pedagogy” to assist their clients in their struggle for written expression. In brief, what Kent lays out seems to be just a typical day in the writing center.

To expand a bit more on this relationship between the writing center and critical theory, there are other theorists who argue about the difficulty not just of teaching writing but teaching itself, which a closer look reveals is also an endorsement of writing centers. For example, as cited by Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer, Shoshana Felman, “a leading exponent of psychoanalytic literary criticism,” points out that both Socrates and Freud experienced the difficulties of teaching (411). As Felman herself argues, “Socrates... inaugurates his teaching practice by asserting not just his own ignorance, but the radical impossibility of teaching” (“Psychoanalysis and Education” 21). And she quotes Freud as saying, “There are three impossible professions—educating, healing, and governing” (21). The question she asks, then, is quite simple: “If teaching is impossible—as Freud and Socrates both point out—what are we teachers doing?” (22).

To try to reduce a complex essay into a simple summary, her conclusion is much the same as Kent's— that the answer to the difficulties of teaching is a one-to-one relationship between the analysand/student and analyst /teacher, in essence a conflation of teaching and psychoanalysis. "Psychoanalysis as teaching, and teaching as psychoanalysis radically subvert the demarcation line, the clear-cut opposition between the analyst and the analysand, between the teacher and the student" (38) — a description of what goes on in the writing center.

While neither writing center consultants nor their clients would probably ever see themselves in a psychotherapeutic relationship, Felman's theory can still put them in that situation to explain what in many ways transpires in the writing center. It also seems to reflect on what Kent means when he casts the teacher as a "voice in the dialogic interactions, a voice that offers possible choices a student might make in her hermeneutic guessing about how to create effects in the world" ("Paralogic Hermeneutics," 39). Thus, it seems clear that post-process theory is a natural "fit" for writing centers, and vice versa. Writing centers help post-process theory fulfill the "pedagogical imperative" and adhere to the "will to pedagogy."

At first glance, then, one might have expected, at the very least, to see this theory tested — that writing centers can in fact fulfill the goals of first-year composition, that writing can indeed be taught in the writing center, and that it can be taught even better than traditional pedagogy in the FYC classroom. This would truly be a revolutionary development in the history of writing instruction. However, and perhaps not surprisingly, nothing of the sort has transpired, and the institution of first-year composition, what Professor and Director of Rhetorics, Communications, and Information Design at Clemson University Cynthia Haynes calls a "lofty and lucrative industry," continues to dominate the curriculum of almost every college and university in the country (674).

The Past, Part IV: Critical Pedagogy — Prelude to Civic Engagement

And unto Enoch was born Irad,
and Irad begat Mehujael,
and Mehujael begat Methusael,
and Methusael begat Lamech.
Genesis 4:18

At first glance, the history of what has come to be called “critical pedagogy” might not seem to be worth much mention, let alone a long chapter as the term seems to have been marginalized. However, the forces that formed critical pedagogy—the notion that instructors should make their social, political, and cultural positions transparent to their students in the classroom and furthermore lead students to write essays endorsing these positions—are still very much apparent in what I have been calling the pedagogy of “civic (or public) engagement.” In fact, a pedagogy of civic engagement might even be called “critical pedagogy light,” as the basic features of critical pedagogy—both positive and negative—still infuse the entire undertaking of first-year composition.

Indeed, what today we call civic engagement has a history of several hundred years in the university, and for at least the past thirty years,¹¹⁶ the term of art was “student resistance” (or resistant students, the precise terminology and meaning are hard to pin down), which gained widespread circulation in composition studies (Trimbur “Resistance” 5). Rhetoric and composition journals were filled with articles addressing student resistance, and several books in the field were published on the topic in spite of the fact that there don’t seem to be any obvious

¹¹⁶ John Trimbur establishes the 1988 publication of Geoffrey Chase’s “Accommodations, Resistance, and the Politics of Student Writing” as the start of “student resistance” as a specialized topic in composition studies, an opinion reinforced by the publication just a few months later of James Berlin’s “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class” (“Resistance” 8). While it might be argued that Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was the founding document in the field (published in English in 1970), its impact no doubt took a while to be felt. (A study of the circulation of Freire’s work would be an interesting study in the workings of what Stanley Fish calls the “interpretive community.”)

reasons why rhetoric and composition courses should attract resistant students in numbers any greater than other disciplines, or that rhetoric and composition students are somehow inherently more resistant than those in other fields,¹¹⁷ particularly if the meaning of “resistance” is, as Trimbur initially presents it, focused on a broad array of what might be called student “turn-offs” including “school, courses, teachers, classroom practices, text, peers, and parents” (“Resistance” 5-6).

One explanation for the concentration of student resistance in composition, then, must lie not in any unique psychology of composition students but rather the nature of the composition course itself, including its instructors. What seems to be the case is that FYC classes and instructors actually enable, by both design and circumstance, unique – and uniquely plentiful and powerful – forms of student resistance that other disciplines lack almost by their very nature. So in spite of the fact that there is no apparent reason to think students would offer more or different forms of resistance in rhetoric and composition classes, it appears that students in composition courses do present unique examples of student resistance unknown in other disciplines simply because composition classes and instructors actually encourage various forms of it.

What is it, then, that creates and encourages student resistance in composition classes? Indeed, students who are not resistant in other classes can suddenly become resistant even to the point of being disruptive in composition classes. In other words, when the bell rings and the student body travels from math and science and history and foreign language to composition, they seem to become more resistant, and at times even aggressively so. The purpose of this chapter, then, will first be to explore how and why students seem to arrive at the academy almost

¹¹⁷ *Radical History Review* published one of very few sources outside the field of Rhetoric and Composition, an article written by two history professors. However, their essay, “Teaching Eighties Babies Sixties Sensibilities,” was a report on an interdisciplinary rather than a history course (Hickey and Hargis).

“pre-packaged” with both the ability and the desire to resist; then, to determine how and why the field of composition studies uses this apparently built-in student attraction to resistance, leading to an analysis of how and why promoting student resistance in the composition classroom can backfire, often with disastrous consequences; and finally, how and why new pedagogies can be developed to accomplish both goals – promoting the educational benefits of student resistance and reducing the possibility of negative consequences when that resistance does backfire.

Student Resistance: From “Whining Schoolboys” to Violent Revolutionaries

Historically, the term “student resistance” has been relatively stable, well-defined, and not linked in any particular way to composition or rhetoric classrooms. In fact, it has been a term that seems to have pretty well described the inherent nature of student attitudes and behaviors for centuries. In fact, Shakespeare’s examples of resistant students seem to fit nicely into Trimbur’s taxonomy – students appeared to be the same in the 16th and 17th centuries as in the 20th and 21st. In Trimbur’s words, they resist “school, courses, teachers, classroom practices, text, peers, and parents.” And Shakespeare’s students are no different, with “the whining schoolboy, with his satchel/ And shining morning face, creeping like a snail/ Unwillingly to school” (*As You Like It*); and the students who are “Hurrying towards home and sporting place like a school broke up” (*Henry IV Part 2*); and finally there is Romeo, who notes that “Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books,/ But love from love, toward school with heavy looks” (*Romeo and Juliet*). Not only would Shakespeare’s students find themselves at home in Trimbur’s classroom, and vice versa, there is certainly no reason to think that these students have been identifiable in any way by subject matter.

In addition to these negative attitudes and behaviors, both Trimbur’s students and Shakespeare’s also share another common experience, namely the inevitable punishment that has

been historically meted out to such students, for in this model of student resistance, the prescribed cure (usually some form of the adage “Beatings will continue until morale improves”) tends to be administered promptly in an attempt to alleviate the symptoms. This practice endured from at least early in the sixteenth century until well into the twentieth, and still exists today.¹¹⁸ For example, a 1509 Holbein illustration created for Erasmus’s *In Praise of Folly* depicts a teacher mercilessly whipping a student (Forest). Several hundred years later, the system hadn’t changed much when D. H. Lawrence’s “Rat Boy” Williams so infuriates his teacher Ursula Brangwen in *The Rainbow* that she finally resorts to whipping him into submission in precisely the same way that Holbein’s teacher responded to his recalcitrant student in the early 1500s (Lawrence 396 ff).

More benevolent tactics evolved during the second half of the twentieth century. Instead of physical violence, teachers and administrators began to impose the suffering of existential boredom as John Hughes’s *The Breakfast Club* illustrates, featuring miscreant teenagers sentenced to spend their Saturday morning imprisoned in the eponymous detention program at Chicago’s upper-crust north shore suburban New Trier High School. And at the beginning of every episode *The Simpsons*, Bart is engaged in writing on the blackboard Sisyphus-like as punishment for whatever acts of resistance he committed that annoyed Edna Krabappel¹¹⁹ or Principal Skinner. But regardless of the specific punishment, the basic strategy for dealing with resistant students remained much the same as it has been since at least the beginning of the sixteenth century – the beatings, literal or figurative, continue until students stop resisting, which they never seem to do.

¹¹⁸ A recent *Yahoo* news article reported that corporal punishment is still legal in 19 states and that the Kansas legislature is considering a law which would give educators (and caregivers) permission to spank students even harder than currently allowed (Greenfield). And duct tape still makes a regular appearance, particularly in the lower grades as a last resort to deal with overly (in the teacher’s opinion) talkative children who aren’t strong enough to fight back.

¹¹⁹ Rest in peace Marcia Wallace, voice of Bart’s teacher, Edna Krabappel (1942-2013).

But even though student unwillingness to bend to the discipline of teachers, schoolwork, and classroom rules and regulations may be perhaps the most recognizable forms of student resistance, there is another, perhaps equally ancient category of student resistance, one that Trimbur inexplicably fails to mention, that goes far beyond resisting the perceived inadequacies of the educational system and focuses instead on demonstrations against governmental, social, economic, and political misdeeds. Perhaps from an American perspective, student resistance began to evolve into this more aggressive form starting in the 1960s as the civil rights movement and protests against the war in Vietnam began to gain strength on college campuses. However, as Mark Boren points in his book *Student Resistance*, the origins of student participation in violent social and political action date back to at least 1200 CE when “as a collective of students, the University of Paris threatened to withdraw from the city and successfully extorted significant legal and economic concessions” (9).

Almost at the same time, in 1217, students in Bologna, Italy, went on strike “to protest the city’s unfair economic practices and did not return until 1220, when city officials agreed to tax reform” (10). And a hundred years or so later, “a series of violent town-and-gown clashes rocked Cambridge and Oxford in the mid-fourteenth century, resulting in the deaths of a number of students and the universities’ subsequent economic control over both towns” (11). In other words, any belief that the transformation of student resistance into violent student revolt came in response to Vietnam or Donald Trump represents a very parochial and historically limited perspective.

Thus, when students began to rise up in world-wide revolt in the 1960s, Boren positions these events as just the latest development in a long history of student rebellion based not just on resistance to “school, courses, teachers, classroom practices, text, peers, and parents” (recalling

Trimbur once again) but to economic, political, military, and social systems as well. Boren dates modern student revolts from the uprising of South Korean students in 1960 that resulted in the overthrow of President Syngman Rhee (122); moving to Japan in 1967 in protest against “American imperialism in Southeast Asia” (123); and then to India in 1966, protesting “university rights in the face of government oppression” (129). Also cited are student revolts in China, Indonesia, Germany, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Turkey, South Africa, and Latin America (124-146). The list goes on, pausing, of course, to feature the failed 1968 student revolt in France that “pushed the De Gaul regime to the brink of disaster” and gave so much hope to the radical left before eventually leaving them disappointed once again (154).

However, the purpose of this chapter is not to analyze either of these two historic forms of student resistance in depth – only to use them to point out that the historical record shows student resistance to be in no way unique to composition classrooms in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In other words, there’s nothing to suggest that student resistance in any way would become identified with composition – not the discipline, not the students, and not the teachers. Presumably, the students killed at Kent State were not taking part in a Freshman Composition service-learning project. But nonetheless, by the latter part of the twentieth century, both forms of resistance – more narrowly against academic institutions and more broadly against those in the larger world that the academy is charged with reproducing – had indeed become incorporated into composition pedagogy.

It was as if rhetoric and composition – both the discipline and its instructors – had tapped into a deep well of cultural turmoil (often called the “culture wars”) which, once released, became difficult if not impossible to contain, at first with great hopes and expectations of academic, social, political, and economic change, but resulting instead in all too often disastrous

consequences that in many cases were not only counter-productive but actually antithetical to the goals that had been so hopefully set for this new pedagogical movement.

Student Resistance – The Link to Composition Studies

Trimbur identifies what for him marks the beginning of the link between the term “student resistance” and composition studies: “(I)n 1988, the term ‘resistance’... helped compositionists deal with their own frustrations when the unimaginable happened – process teaching reached its limits or outright broke down,” an event for which he provides a brief but telling explanation:

(D)espite our best intentions, removing the oppressive formalism of current-traditional rhetoric was not automatically turning students into willing and fluent composers. Some of the canniest students complied, producing versions of what they correctly understood to be the kind of sincere and authentic voice their teachers valued but without really consenting to the pedagogical assumption that through writing they could discover a true self.¹²⁰ Others balked at the sense of social entitlement and culture self-confidence in the personal essay favored by the process movement, failing to recognize themselves in the class-inflected prose the process teachers had mistakenly identified with writing itself. (8)

In short, according to Trimbur, the process movement failed because of its presumption of and reliance on white, middle class, bourgeois values.¹²¹

¹²⁰ An old joke, variously attributed to Jean Giraudoux, Groucho Marx, George Burns, and others, proposes that “The secret to success is sincerity. Once you learn how to fake that, you’ve got it made.”

¹²¹ Lisa Delpit’s “The Silenced Dialogue” describes how the process movement failed to benefit students of color: “One young man said that his high school English teacher claimed to use a process approach, but what she really did was hide behind fancy words... ‘I didn’t feel she was teaching us anything...’” Delpit herself agrees with and directly quotes E. V. Siddle’s conclusion in his essay “A critical assessment of the natural process approach to teaching writing” that “there is little research data supporting the major tenets of the process approaches over other forms of literacy instruction, and virtually no evidence that such approaches are more efficacious for children of color” (Delpit 287).

But the concept of student resistance did more than “give writing teachers a way to recover their equilibrium when all we had to offer failed to repair the damage we imagined the English teacher’s red pen and the authoritarian prescriptiveness of the five-paragraph theme had done to students” (8). More important, “the term ‘resistance’ brought with it, for left-wing teachers taking the ‘social turn’ in the late 1980s, a powerful persuasive history in radical political movements” (9). In short, there was a highly practical reason why “student resistance” seemed to be a manna-like gift from the writing gods to composition teachers – it provided an alternative to the solipsism of the process movement, giving students something to write about other than themselves while avoiding the horrors of Freire-banned current-traditional pedagogy.

At last, students were able to take advantage of what can only be called, particularly after tracing the history of student resistance from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare to the war in Vietnam to the “Breakfast Club” at New Trier High School, an age-old desire of students to resist *something*. The difference was that unlike previous demonstrations of student resistance and unlike pedagogies practiced by other disciplines, composition teachers could be fully supportive of student dissatisfaction with and resistance to “the system.” Indeed, composition instructors seemed to be just as eager as their students to express their own resistance to what many saw as the repressive politics of the 1980s and 1990s, not to mention their own perceived status as second-class citizens in the English Department whose duty, unlike those who profess literature, was to simply provide students with the skills required of productive workers in a postmodern capitalism economy. Put simply, composition instructors were ready to rebel right along with their students. It was “win-win.”

Put less dramatically, rather than treating student resistance as part of the problem, composition instructors began to see it as part of the solution – employing writing as part of a

“fight for the transformation of an unjust and cruel society where subordinate groups are rejected, insulted, and humiliated” (Freire, quoted in Shor and Pari, 21). And even if such resistance might fall short of achieving Freire’s goal, perhaps an even more important goal was raising students’ awareness – their “consciousness” – of the need for social justice. In other words, what came to be known as “critical pedagogy” involves teaching rhetoric and composition in a way that encourages students to voice their apparently natural (given its centuries-old history) impulse to resist – in this case, against educational, social, cultural, economic, and political systems – and thus, by teaching students how to give voice to their resistance in composition classes, help them make an impact on reforming what had come to be seen, at least by left-leaning composition instructors, as hegemonic educational, social, cultural, and political conditions, and at the very least make them aware of the need to do so.

Put another way, instead of instructors representing the “hegemonic aims” of the academy and themselves the focus of student resistance (as was the case in the 1960s when students revolted against the strictures of what they considered to be an outdated curriculum imposed by the administration and faculty), critical pedagogy gave composition teachers the ability to make student resistance part of the instruction itself, turning students’ historically natural inclination to resist “school, courses, teachers and classroom practices, texts, peers, and even parents” (Trimbur again) into a force for social justice. As Trimbur puts it, “The term ‘resistance’ enables us (instructors) to locate ourselves and our pedagogical projects within and against the curriculum – to clarify the ways that ‘our interests are not the same as the institutions that employ us’” (“Resistance” 7, quoting Greg Meyers).

Near the end of Trimbur’s essay in which he re-defines and re-imagines student resistance, he delivers what can only be described as an elegiac encomium in praise of comp

instructors and students as modern incarnations of romantic revolutionaries. This unique description of the drama of critical pedagogy is apparently designed to position English teachers and their young charges as figures in a potentially tragic tale, imagining them to be in “actual moments of very real dangers – of death, torture, jail” very much like “the heroic tales of working-class uprisings and the European resistance movements – think of how Rossellini represents the captured partisan as a Christ-like figure in *Open City*” (“Tragic Trope” 10).

The purpose of this discussion of Trimbur’s romantic imagination is not to argue for or against it but rather to point out that the “end game” he imagines for his band of resistant student warriors and their brave instructors often does, in fact, turn out to be tragic, but not in the way he believes it will play out:

I believe that this tragic sense of resistance hovers over its uses in composition, education, and cultural studies in ways that have not been fully appreciated... To use the term “resistance” responsibly, we must recognize, I believe, that it is tragic in a double sense, for it names both the experience of disorder and suffering that makes resistance necessary in the first place and the consequences that follow acts of resistance. (13)

The single most negative consequence that Trimbur can imagine for the instructor is another romantic vision of instructors becoming overly fond of their students who are “nonconformists, rebels, bad boys and girls, beautiful losers” (13). But nowhere in his overly active imagination does he ever conceive that his revolutionary students might instead turn into, or perhaps already are reactionaries. But this is exactly what seems to be happening in many classrooms dedicated to what has come to be called critical pedagogy.

“Is there no balm in Gilead?” The Backlash of Student Resistance

For an approach to teaching composition that gained so many adherents, critical pedagogy should have garnered a much better press, particularly among the critical pedagogists

who practiced and wrote about it. But the professional literature is hardly awash in success stories – in fact just the opposite. The difficulty – and in many cases the impossibility – of implementing critical pedagogy is the subject of numerous journal articles, from mainstream composition journals to those specializing in radical pedagogy. The problem, it seems, is that students are resisting the instructors themselves, and through them the critical pedagogy that is the basis for their instruction, rather than following the prescribed plan that calls for students to join with their teachers in protest against the social, cultural, and economic systems deemed unjust and hegemonic by those whom rhetorical economist and historian Deirdre McCloskey calls the “clerisy”¹²² (*Virtues*, 5).

Although critical pedagogy addresses social ills from racism to colonialism to the perceived injustices of capitalism, many of its reported failures seem to occur in feminist and racial studies classrooms, at least based on the substance of many journal articles.¹²³ The following are presented in no particular order:

- ◆ Elizabeth Fay reports that Minnie, “a young Puerto Rican working class woman in her freshman writing class, filed a complaint that the class did not speak to her disenfranchisement and reading Freire did not speak to her desires...,” accusing Fay of “inadequate teaching abilities... I didn’t get the help I needed” (14).

¹²² Deirdre McCloskey, Distinguished Professor of Communications, Economics, English, and History at the University of Illinois at Chicago, is perhaps one of the least recognized authors in the field of rhetoric who should be one of the most recognized, particularly in any discussion that relies as heavily on Marxist and anti-capitalist views as do the progressive theories under the banner of “critical pedagogy.” She has appropriated the term “clerisy” from Samuel Taylor Coleridge to designate “the theoreticians and followers of theoreticians, opinion makers and opinion takers, the readers of the *New York Times* and *Le Monde*... ‘(They) are uncritically anti-capitalists (and) think of business as vulgar, philistine, and morally suspect’ (quoting Michael Novak). They have stopped listening to the other side” (5).

¹²³ The problem with this section was determining when to stop – the literature is so overflowing with examples of critical pedagogy gone awry that a complete literature review would require its own paper.

- ◆ African-American girls in Becky Thompson and Estelle Disch’s class refused to participate in a portrayal of any characters in Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee*. They said they would be interested only if they could choose characters who had been able to escape slavery.

In other words, students who at first glance would seem to fit the model of oppression and be willing and eager participants in critical pedagogies found that the teacher’s strategies were precisely the opposite of what they wanted from the classroom – and resisted, not against outside social or political oppression but against the instructor. Other authors in other journals offer similar examples:

- ◆ In the *Journal of Teaching Writing*, Johanna Atwood “hoped my classes would promote student self-empowerment, social change, and liberation from oppression... However, in the process of attempting to create an emancipatory environment, I did not realize that some students might resist exposure to material that asks them to question their biases and assumptions about the society in which they live. Many students championed – or were at least invested in – a society I considered oppressive, and when I challenged their beliefs, they coded me as an ‘enemy’” (126).
- ◆ Laura Mumford reports in the *Journal of Thought* that the feminist theory class she team-taught at the University of Iowa (note that it’s not a freshman comp course) achieved “fairly depressing results” even though the students were “almost all women and self-identified as feminists” (88, 90). Resistance in this instance came in the form of “passivity and unresponsiveness” (91).
- ◆ Also in the *Journal of Thought*, Paula Rothenberg offers the following as the conclusion to an article about her experiences with a class on “Teaching about Racism

- and Sexism: A Case History”: “If the course is even moderately successful, it provokes feelings of anger, frustration, rage, and even despair on the part of students” (133).
- ◆ Dale Bauer seems to pick up on Rothenberg’s rubric by pointing out in *College English* that many of her students complained about the class being “dominating and overpowered by feminist doctrines.” Bauer tries to mitigate this problem by admitting that “I would do well to be aware of the rhetorical situation of the classroom – of the necessity for a mastery that is not oppressive, of an authoritative voice that is not the only authority” (395). The reader is left to wonder whether Bauer will actually follow through, or if she will continue to “dominate and overpower” her classroom, even knowing she would “do well” if she didn’t.
 - ◆ Finally (and as noted above, only for the reason that this seemed to be as good as place as any to stop. cit.ing examples), Janice Wolff didn’t have any more luck than her colleagues in the second semester Freshman Composition course she taught at Northern Illinois University designed to “sensitize students” and provide them with “ideological consciousness raising.” In her article in *College Composition and Communication*, she reports that her students responded to the readings and her instruction with “outbursts, invective, and brickbats” (484). “The students called the essays and the writers ‘very offensive,’ a ‘bunch of baloney,’ ‘sarcastic,’ ‘totally ignorant,’ and ‘absurd and annoying’” (485).

What’s consistent about all of these reports is that at the end of all these classes, students did not seem to have learned any of the lessons that critical pedagogy was designed to teach them. And while many of these articles go back as far as the 1980s, nothing seems to indicate that

instructors are having any more success with critical pedagogy today than they did almost forty years ago, and in some cases, particularly the one that follows, even worse – much worse.

Critical Pedagogy and Student Resistance at Their Worst — The Case of Shannon Gibney

While all of the previous articles report problems with implementing critical pedagogy, neither are they unmitigated disasters, if by “disaster” is meant a classroom pedagogy that not merely fails to achieve its stated goals but also manages to accomplish the exact opposite – now that is a failure worth noticing, which is what occurred in Shannon Gibney’s “Introduction to Mass Communication” class in the fall of 2013. The purpose of this account, then, is to show how students in a critical pedagogy class subverted the very goals that critical pedagogy champions. And if the teachers in the preceding articles thought that their classroom experiences were less than satisfactory, they should count themselves lucky they weren’t teaching Shannon Gibney’s class at Minneapolis Community and Technical College (hereafter MCTC).

The facts of the case are straightforward and apparently uncontested. Gibney, a 38-year-old full-time female African-American adjunct instructor of English was reprimanded by the MCTC administration in November 2013 as the result of an incident in her classroom that involved the topic of structural racism (Flaherty). The following details were reported by a variety of news sources without any hint of contradiction by anyone involved in the incident. In fact, Gibney herself provided the following narrative, which has never been challenged factually:

A white male student interrupted (Gibney’s) lesson to ask, “Why do we have to talk about (structural racism) in every class?” Another white male in the class then chimed in, saying he didn’t understand either. “It’s like people are trying to say that white men are always the villains, the bad guys. Why do we have to say this?” the student asked.

(Kinkade, quotes based on a video interview with Gibney herself)

As reported by *Minneapolis Public Radio* citing the news video shot by the MCTC college newspaper *City College News*, Gibney was “shocked” by the comments of these two white males, and she replied to their questions by suggesting, “You know if you’re really upset, feel free to go down to legal affairs and file a racial harassment discrimination complaint” (Friedrich). They took her up on her suggestion, and the reprimand was the result.

It’s probably not surprising that many of the reactions to the incident focused on race and racism. *Huff Post College* reports that Gibney is filing a complaint with the U. S. Equal Opportunity Commission alleging workplace discrimination (Kingkade). On-line African-American publications such as *Madame Noire* contend that the incident was caused by the “disgust and discomfort” of white males resulting from “a black female professor discussing race” (Uwumarogie). *Afro* provides a similar interpretation in its headline, “Black Instructor Reprimanded for Discussing Racism in English Class” (Adams *Afro*). And *Slate* contends that if teachers “want to teach students about structural racism,” they should “prepare for a formal reprimand” (Cotton).

At the same time, a conservative student publication added to the discussion by featuring some of the specifics of the reprimand itself, a document that, perhaps unsurprisingly, puts the onus of racial discrimination on the instructor: “Your (Gibney’s) actions in [targeting] select students based on their race and gender caused them embarrassment and created a hostile learning environment” (Timpf, quoting the letter from MCTC’s vice president of academic affairs). This article was also one of the few news sources that mentioned what they called Gibney’s history of “racial harassment,” as she was also reprimanded in 2009 “after allegedly singling out white male students on the school newspaper staff” (Timpf).¹²⁴

¹²⁴ There appears to be some lack of agreement about the situation in this 2009 case. Specifically, it’s unclear whether or for what Gibney was reprimanded, as the complaint against her may have involved

Clearly, this was not the result that Gibney expected or desired from her class on systemic racism. The question at this point – after recording incident after incident of critical pedagogy gone awry – is what to do about it. Can critical pedagogy and student resistance be restored to their initial promise – or, for that matter, should they?

The Problematic Future of Critical Pedagogy and Student Resistance

At first glance, then, it appears that supporters of critical pedagogy may have overestimated its productive potential as much as they underestimated its negative impact. In fact, many instructors actively avoid addressing in their classrooms the social, political, and economic issues that are at the heart of critical pedagogy. In other words, instead of giving teachers a powerful way to engage students in economic, social, and political issues, critical pedagogy instead seems to be preventing it.

For example, many instructors I have spoken with at the University of Oklahoma, even tenured faculty members, offer strong anecdotal evidence that they and their colleagues tend to avoid so-called “hot button topics” such as racism, gay marriage, abortion, and gun control for fear of provoking classroom upheavals. What’s more, although the OU instructors I have spoken with haven’t themselves raised this possibility, the MCTC incident clearly suggests that instructors may also be worried about disruptive administrators as much as disruptive students, as they present a far more serious problem. Students may ruin a class, but an administrators have the power to destroy a career.

It’s no wonder, then, that untenured instructors, particularly adjuncts and graduate teaching assistants, don’t want to touch hot button issues. What might start out as a well-

making a student’s emails public rather than the actual contents of her remarks at a meeting with the MCTC school newspaper, in which Gibney claimed that the paper “has largely been staffed and run by white men” and “every single student of color left the organization, feeling used and taken advantage of” (Rupar).

intentioned lesson plan – following Gibney’s plan to teach students about structural racism, for example – can suddenly and unexpectedly turn into a blot on your résumé. Just the thought of going into a brutally tight job market with a report from an employer stating that you “created a hostile learning environment” (the language used by MCTC in its reprimand of Gibney) can be more than enough to keep instructors away from controversial topics.

And although avoiding these issues (and therefore abandoning critical pedagogy) may be less stressful for the instructor, this scenario is also unsatisfactory. As Friedrich points out in his report for *Minnesota Public Radio*, “The two students (who filed the complaint) may have been most in need of learning about this subject.” In other words, avoiding hot button topics may make the classroom more manageable but at the same time deprive students of educational opportunities. The irony here is palpable. As Gerald Graff puts the problem,

If, on the one hand, the radical educator pursues his or her agenda aggressively in the class, students who aren’t already disposed to that agenda are indeed likely to feel coerced or silenced. If, on the other hand, the instructor backs away from his or her agenda in order to avoid such coercion and silencing (*or disruptive reactions*), the class loses its claim to be particularly radical or oppositional. Politically committed pedagogy, then, either tends to be coercive (*and provoke disruptions*) or it ceases to be politically committed (*and become ineffective and inconsequential*). (“Teaching Politically” 26, my additions to and comments on Graff’s text are italicized).

What’s needed, then, is a way to avoid or at least minimize the risks of critical pedagogy while maintaining the focus on student resistance to social, economic, and political problems, both within the academy and outside in the larger world.

There are no easy answers to this question. Suggested solutions range from instructors employing ideological cunning and camouflage to implementing more effective progressive classroom pedagogies (such as collaborative learning practices) to creating service learning and independent research projects. But even book-length plans such as Shor's ideas for empowering students (*When Students Have Power*) turn out to be seriously deficient in their ability to advance concrete ways to deal with the issue of students who resist critical pedagogy. It will be beneficial to examine some of the more interesting examples:

◆ Ideological “Cunning and Camouflage”

Even teachers as committed to critical pedagogy as Karen Kopelson admit that it has its problems, as she begins her essay in praise of “cunning” with just such an admission:

This essay begins with the premise that composition's “critical pedagogies” fail to meet the challenges posed by today's specific formations of student resistance...

(O)vertly “critical” pedagogical approaches may be especially ineffective, and even counter-productive, for the teacher-subject who is immediately read by students as belonging to any of the marginalized constituencies listed above¹²⁵ (119).

Curiously, her solution appears to be an ideological version of instructors hiding their beliefs in the closet, waiting for a propitious moment to “come out” – sort of a “pedagogy that dare not speak its name.”

While such a strategy may have helped Gibney avoid her problems with both students and administrators, it's questionable how effective it is as a true enactment of critical pedagogy – to quote Graff again (with my italicized comments), “Politically committed pedagogy, then, either tends to be coercive (*and provoke disruptions*) or it ceases to be

¹²⁵ Feminists, racial minorities, gays, and lesbians are the listed categories.

politically committed (*and become ineffective and inconsequential*)” (“Teaching Politically” 26). If Kopelson’s “sneaky” solution to the problem of “exacerbating student resistance” isn’t a living example of Graff’s analysis, it has to be pretty close. In other words, if teachers intend to enact critical pedagogy (at least as it is currently conceived), then in Harry Truman’s words, they have to be ready to “stand the heat” – apparently a great deal of heat, at least as evidenced by Shannon Gibney’s experience.

◆ Practical Problems with Freirean Models

For decades, the models put forth by the successors of Paulo Freire (George Hillocks, Ira Shor, Kenneth Bruffee, bell hooks, and Henry Giroux all come immediately to mind) have been the very paragons of “best practice,” at least as determined by those who determine such things. For example, newly-minted University of Oklahoma composition instructors who completed David Mair’s final ENGL 5113 class (Fall 2012) for new teaching assistants exited the class imbued with progressive pedagogies based on student collaboration and teacher facilitation as advanced in the course by texts like George Hillocks’ *Teaching Writing as a Reflexive Practice* and *Ways of Thinking, Ways of Teaching*, in addition to other authors who extol the virtues of the collaborative classroom where the instructor is the facilitator rather than the voice of authority (“the guide on the side rather than the sage on the stage”).

Not surprisingly, University of Oklahoma PhD Karen Jobe follows in this tradition with paeans to Freire and his successors, reminding her readers¹²⁶ at the beginning of her

¹²⁶ It seems odd that Jobe would feel the need to admonish her dissertation committee, all of them English instructors, to follow in the footsteps of Freire *et al* since they are no doubt the very ones who presumably introduced her to those pedagogical practices in the first place, or at the least reinforced her commitment to them. Her language exudes the odd sense that she’s trying to demonstrate her faith in these pedagogies, or to bolster her own belief in them, or to convince her readers that we should join her in worshipping her pedagogical gods – all of which ring more than a little condescending.

dissertation that “a liberatory educator would share power with students” (8), and exhorting them at the end to recognize that

we have a unique opportunity to influence a critical citizenry in a brief, yet crucial way. This can be done only if, as we reach into a 21st century activist, critical consciousness, we remember to reach back to a Freirean sense of sharing, praxis, and love. (173)

Except that quite often, it doesn't exactly work out the way that Jobe admonishes us that it should, with “critical and activist consciousnesses ignited in students and sharpened in teachers through trust and partnership because issues are discussed and questioned, and students find that they have a stake in their own education” (8-9). For example, according to Richard Ohmann

(M)any assumed that canceling the normal, dominative relations of pedagogy would release authentic motives for learning along with liberatory politics... Rarely do I see that assumption at work in the present volume. Rather, many of its contributors assume or argue that there is something deeply wrong (328).

Richard Boyd experienced similar disappointments with Freirean pedagogy:

Walking into the classroom in those days meant for me following in the footsteps of Paulo Freire, and I was convinced that I could and would be the ally of my students in our mutual struggle for liberation from the structures of oppression. Not surprisingly, my individual encounters with student resistance in the time since those early days have paralleled those of the profession at large, and Shor's call to a “radically egalitarian” classroom seems only a very distant memory. (590)

In fact, not only were Shor's liberatory Freirean practices ineffective in his disciples' classrooms, but they were also equally disappointing in his own, at least as evidenced in his book *When Students Have Power, Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy*.

Rather than leading his students in a "fight for the transformation of an unjust and cruel society where subordinate groups are rejected, insulted, and humiliated" (Freire, quoted in Shor and Pari, 21), Shor's strategy for granting power to his students focused on administrative rather than political or academic power. In fact, not quite half-way through the book, the biggest problem Shor faces in his critical pedagogy classroom is the extent to which students will have control over issues such as classroom rules, configuration of desks (circle versus rows), attendance requirements, and grading policies. In other words, a teacher who can risk "losing control of the class" to a fearsome media studies major like Angela, as Shor did with the class that is the subject of his book, may well constitute a significant example of sharing power with students, but it hardly amounts to a demonstration of critical pedagogy as a means to achieve its goals of economic, political, and social transformation (4).

◆ Theoretical Problems with Freirean Models

With all of the practical difficulties implementing Freirean critical pedagogy, it would seem that there would be more articles addressing the theoretical reasons for these problems, if not an outright attack on the model itself. Whether out of conviction that the Freirean model is correct or fear of generating "abnormal discourse" directed against such an icon of composition orthodoxy (Bruffee 647), few scholars have followed this path. One exception is Paul Heilker¹²⁷, who, in a little recognized essay (with only one subsequent citation) uses

¹²⁷ Two other Freirean "nay-sayers" are Richard Boyd, mentioned earlier, and Gerald Graff, to be discussed later.

Foucault to profoundly question those critical pedagogical practices that had heretofore used Foucault in support of these methods¹²⁸:

For me, the most radical and attractive part of moving from teacher-centered to student-centered pedagogies through the use of collaborative learning, peer evaluation, and the like was how these things combined in the notion of empowering students. I loved the idea that I might use this new paradigm to change the normal state of things and events in the university. However, I have been forced (unhappily and reluctantly) to consider to what extent I/we have had it all absolutely backwards. A Foucauldian analysis indicates that the “paradigm shift” has in no way operated to empower students, but rather functioned primarily to make our students more visible to us, to *increase* our power over them. (“Discipline and Punish” 4, emphasis Heilker)

In other words, rather than rebelling against sexism, racism, or capitalism, students may simply be fighting off another iteration of Foucault’s Panopticon. As Heilker concludes:

In light of this analysis, it seems that we should acknowledge that – despite the democratizing and liberatory spirit that infused our field – we are no better than any other teachers in the academy (and composition studies no better than any other discipline) when it comes to empowering our students. I don’t think that we have been hypocrites or con artists, but rather simply ignorant or perhaps overly wishful thinkers.

Or in Pogo’s immortal words, “We have met the enemy, and he is us.”

Re-engaging resistant students, Re-forming critical pedagogy – Part I: Pessimism

Clearly, the impact of critical pedagogy on resistant students has been problematic at best, with reports of negative classroom experiences continuing to make news, with the “Vitae”

¹²⁸ Heilker, unlike Boyd and Graff, does not attack Freire directly.

section of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* asking, “How Race-Studies Scholars Can Respond to Their Haters” (Patton). This question would certainly not come as a surprise to Shannon Gibney, nor would it shock Elizabeth Fay, Becky Thompson, Estelle Disch, Johanna Atwood, Laura Mumford, Paula Rothenberg, and Dale Bauer (all referenced above as having difficulties with resistant students in their critical pedagogy classrooms), and they may all be eager for different, less stressful strategies.

Although not presented specifically as alternatives to critical pedagogy, there have been two decidedly different pedagogical approaches to engaging resistant students in the composition classroom – specifically what Linda Flower calls “community literacy” (7) and now-retired UIC First Year Writing Director Ann Feldman terms “situated writing” (xxi).¹²⁹ What is remarkable about both these pedagogical enterprises, particularly when compared with the problems encountered by teachers espousing critical pedagogy, is the apparent absence of any form of student resistance against either the instructor or the curriculum.

Therefore, even if they weren’t long-term, tenured, and highly respected faculty members, the chance of Linda Flower or Ann Feldman being reprimanded is probably less than zero. In fact, it seems that even the most vulnerable graduate teaching assistants could take either of these two models and implement them without any fear of student backlash like the instructors (even males with long-term tenure) who were the subject of Patton’s report in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. There don’t seem to be any “snide questions, nasty comments, and occasional name-calling” from students in situated writing or community literacy classrooms (Patton).

So is there now a solution for positively engaging students’ natural inclination for resistance into the work of critical pedagogy? Might it be simply a matter of allowing students to

¹²⁹ These two pedagogies are certainly not meant as the only two as there may well be other approaches that attempt to engage students’ natural inclination to resist with the goals of the composition classroom.

engage in specific projects that interest them, such as Flower's students who are helping minority residents of Pittsburgh such as Andre?

Andre is an urban teenager, trying to come to grips with being stopped and searched because (the police tell him) "his hair" (an ordinary short Afro) apparently makes him "look like someone in a picture"... by using writing to initiate a community problem-solving dialogue to raise and name a problem, to assert and demonstrate the expertise their marginalized perspectives can bring to the analysis of public policy, and to engage that public, as its best self, in a dialogue defined by inquiry. (Flower 174-175)

Surely this fits the model of "critical pedagogy," engaging students, as Flower puts it, in "the work of a powerful rhetoric of resistance that begins in a profound critique of forces that oppress and dehumanize..." but without creating the kind of toxic environment that other approaches to critical pedagogy seem to produce (1).

Or, it may be a UIC student in one of Feldman's "situated writing" classes, a class designed, according to Feldman, as a "way of acting in the world; (to) use writing to do things; to create, sustain, understand, and change their worlds" (xxi). This certainly sounds consistent with the goals of critical pedagogy, and what's more, not one of Feldman's examples contains any indication of the kind of classroom antagonism as reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, or in any of the other examples in this chapter.

So what's not to like, particularly if a university can establish a relationship with a community organization such as Flower and Carnegie-Mellon did with Pittsburgh's Community Literacy Center? And if not a university-sponsored association with a community literacy project, then students can become involved in their own projects such as UIC student Oliver Codd did with his association with and support of Chicago's Sheffield Landmark District.

The answer to that question – put simply and directly – is that students in both of these situations lose agency with the issues at hand. While Andre’s plight is no doubt a real example of cultural, economic, racial, and social injustice, it has little if anything to do with the Carnegie-Mellon students (“mentors”) who “supported” Andre and his peers in the development of a “community problem-solving dialogue” (175). This is Andre’s struggle, not Flower’s comp students, who too often come across as modern-day examples of “the great white hope.” Nor does UIC’s Codd have what President Obama calls “skin in the game”¹³⁰ in his so-called “argumentative essay” about the Sheffield Landmark District. In fact, I’m at a loss as to how he or UIC first year composition faculty or the editors of *Situated Writing* can even categorize his essay as “argumentative” in that his conclusion (“Therefore, it is reasonable to propose that additional meetings be held so that community members can make an informed decision”) can hardly be categorized as the peroration of an argument (33-A). A resounding call for “more meetings” seems to fall well short of a conclusion to a strong argument.¹³¹

In other words, while the benefit of these two approaches may be the apparent elimination of the kind of student engagement that produces conflict in the classroom, it comes at a steep price – the disconnection of the students from the problems that they address. In other words, the great strength of community literacy programs and “situated writing” is at once their major weakness.

Who could possibly deny the value of providing Andre with an opportunity to speak directly to the

¹³⁰ According to Urban Dictionary, the phrase “skin in the game” was actually coined by Warren Buffett.

¹³¹ It would be unfair to criticize UIC’s *Situated Writing* program if Codd’s essay were somehow unique. However, other “argumentative” essays include such politically, culturally, socially, and economically innocuous pieces as Meghan Fleming’s call for major league baseball to “get tough on steroids” advocating that “professional baseball players should set an example for students” (19-A); and Joel Ebert’s proposal that the City of Chicago divert almost a million dollars of public funds to his idea for increasing voter turnout in elections, apparently not bothering to consider that Chicago is so “Blue” that the electorate may have figured out that voting in Chicago may not really matter (11-A). It’s worth noting that all of these student essays are “UIC Award-Winning” (1-A).

director of police training, a city councilman, a state representative, the media, and community residents¹³²? And who could argue with Codd’s call for more meetings to create a better-informed citizenry? As worthwhile as these projects are, they hardly involve students in the kind of critical pedagogy that Freire and his colleagues seem to have in mind and certainly not the sort that would motivate Trimbur to produce an essay with such a dramatic title as “Resistance as a Tragic Trope.”

So are we back, then, to Graff’s pessimistic conclusion about critical pedagogy – “Politically committed pedagogy, then, either tends to be coercive (*and provoke disruptions*) or it ceases to be politically committed” (“Teaching Politically” 26, again my italicized comment).

Re-engaging resistant students, Re-forming critical pedagogy – Part II: Optimism (Sort of)

Not surprisingly, Graff provides a solution for the problem that he identifies – a pedagogy that he calls “teaching the conflicts.”

We need to rethink what it means to “teach politically.” More specifically, we need a different model of political pedagogy than the advocacy pedagogy that emerged from the 1960s and that has been most influentially advanced by Paulo Freire... and subsequently by Henry Giroux, bell hooks, and others. (“Teaching Politically” 26)

Graff’s “different model of political pedagogy” would still include “exposing students to radical political ideas,” but Graff argues that “for these radical ideas to be meaningful, students need exposure to the broader political conversation that gives such ideas meaning” (27). As he further explains,

To me, then, a truly democratic curriculum would, first, bring the political debates that now lie buried and muffled in the curriculum out into the open. Second, it would expose

¹³² Part of Andre’s literacy project was a skit that he and his friends presented at the Community House dramatizing his argument before the individuals noted above.

students to these debates in a way that would not try to predetermine the outcome, giving them space to make up their own minds where they stand. (“Teaching Politically” 27)

The benefit of this re-forming of critical pedagogical practice is that it allows for both sides of the argument in the classroom.

Therefore, the comments by Gibney’s students, or those by any of the other students who resist feminist or anti-racist or anti-capitalist forms of “critical pedagogy” (“Why do we have to talk about [racism] in every class?” or “It’s like people are trying to say that white men are always the villains, the bad guys. Why do we have to say this?” or “Why do we have to read all this [feminist] stuff?”) would be incorporated into the class discussion as valid forms of criticism instead of threats to the instructor, as obviously happened to Gibney; and even today, the instructors in the *Chronicle* article see those who would argue with them as “haters” instead of positive participants in the classroom. Using Graff’s reformulated version of critical pedagogy, then, the instructor would welcome these students to the debate instead of casting them off as “haters,” incarnations of the sexists, racists, classists, and homophobes that the instructor is trying so hard to fight against – or, less vitriolically, as simply passive and unproductive.

This outcome may be easy to describe, but difficult to accomplish – if, indeed, instructors devoted to Freirean critical pedagogy would even want to accomplish it because it flies in face of the very foundation of the Freirean model (as Graff says, his is a “different model”). In fact, Graff’s essay proceeds to challenge the Freirean model, claiming that his “model of counter-advocacy is more democratic in principle than Freire’s celebrated model of classroom dialogue” (“Teaching Politically” 27). As Graff points out

(N)o matter how open and dialogical the liberatory classroom tries to be, the political deck is inevitably stacked in favor of the teacher’s political perspective... However much

Freire insists on “problem-posing” rather than “banking” education, the goal of teaching... is to move the student toward what Freire calls “a critical perception of the world,” and there seems little question that for Freire only Marxism or some version of Leftist radicalism counts as genuine “critical perception.” (“Teaching Politically” 28)

For someone as dedicated as Graff is to the value of argument, his criticism of Freire is hardly surprising.

According to Graff, “(T)he outcome of the Freirean pedagogical ‘dialogue’ is already predetermined with the oppressed being free to arrive only at Freire’s own conclusions” (28). This is not the kind of “argument culture” that Graff imagines in *Clueless in Academe* in which he asserts that “argument literacy, the ability to listen, summarize, and respond, is rightly viewed as *central to being educated*” (3, italic emphasis mine). For Graff, then, liberation comes through the ability to argue, so if conclusions are pre-determined, it doesn’t say much for the value of argument. Although he himself doesn’t go this far, it seems unavoidable to ignore that his analysis produces the conclusion that Freirean “critical pedagogy” is inimical to “being educated.” Or as he puts it somewhat less aggressively,

A phrase like “the pedagogy of the oppressed” leaves no rhetorical room for the many Americans who, rightly or wrongly, need to have the pervasiveness of oppression demonstrated, not assumed as a given”; it follows, then, that any resistance students put up to the pedagogy of the oppressed needs to be taken seriously by teachers only as a symptom of false consciousness, not as a defensible intellectual position that the teacher might help the student to defend more effectively. (“Teaching Politically” 28)

Regardless of how the problem is phrased, Graff’s conclusion is clear, “In short, bringing students into the culture’s political conversation should take priority over liberating them”

(“Teaching Politically” 30). And it would seem beneficial to add that bringing instructors into the culture’s political conversation should also take priority, as the instructors are often as far removed from the conversation as their students.

In fact, Graff recognizes the necessity of instructors providing more than just one perspective in order for students to have some basis on which to form an argument. In one essay, he calls for a “counter-authority” in the classroom – what he recommends is another teacher because “what my classroom needs is someone who can stand up to me, something few of my students are yet able to do” (“Counter-authority” 185). In *Beyond the Culture Wars*, he recommends what amounts to an interdisciplinary curriculum.

If several teachers in the same or different departments agreed to assign a common text in a particular semester, they could then organize a transcourse symposium in order to compare different approaches, clarify disputed issues, and give students a more dramatic sense of the wider debate on the issues than a single course can provide. (189)

And in his most recent work *Clueless in Academe*, Graff envisions a “learning community... in which the same cohort of students takes several courses that are linked by a common theme, the instructors of which meet regularly with the students and each other”¹³³ (78).

However, regardless of the format, the goal is the same – to avoid what he calls the “mixed-message curriculum” in which teachers are “given a license to dogmatize without fear of being contradicted”; so even though “teachers often brag that they urge their students to disagree vigorously with them”¹³⁴, they unwittingly send students the opposite message when they are

¹³³ Graff also mentions the possibility of Writing Centers and WAC/WID (Writing Across the Curriculum/ Writing In the Disciplines) programs as possible ways to engage students in interdisciplinary arguments.

¹³⁴ The examples of critical pedagogy classrooms in this paper (such as Gibney’s encounter with her students) seem to discredit Graff’s claim – teachers who practice critical pedagogy do not, in fact, appear to welcome debate from their students.

content to stay sheltered from those colleagues across the hall or the quad who would be in the best position to disagree with them” (76). All these ideas seem very useful and probably should be encouraged. However, what’s notable about them all is that none of them seem to have produced the desired result, particularly if recent reports on the problems that teachers who employ critical pedagogy seem to be having in their classrooms (again, see the examples in this chapter).

What Graff has strangely avoided is a strategy that could be implemented almost immediately and without any of the institutional or administrative or financial constraints that no doubt act to impede his recommendations that call for adding an instructor in the classroom or creating a symposium or establishing a learning community or even expanding WAC/WID/ Writing Center programs¹³⁵ – and what’s more, this strategy is available to every faculty member without any additional financial cost (although it would require substantial intellectual and emotional investment). The answer quite simply is academic research, a practice that every faculty member, even junior teaching assistants, should be capable of and which belies Graff’s contention that “no amount of classroom agility on the part of an individual teacher can satisfactorily resolve this problem (of providing a counter-authority)” (“Counterauthority” 185).

Quite frankly, if instructors can’t provide this counter-authority on their own, then it seems relevant to ask what they’re good for. In fact, if Graff is to be believed, this is precisely what academics get paid to do – argue. And in order to launch an argument, any academic worth their salt needs to be able to identify and summarize the position against which they’re arguing and why it’s important for them need to make a contribution to the discussion. And if they need a

¹³⁵ Although these programs seem to be moving along much more rapidly than his other suggestions, they also have much less direct relevance to his overall goal of providing students with the ability to form academic arguments.

refresher course in how to get this done, they need only pick up the Graff and Birkenstein textbook *They Say/ I Say* in which they show how to launch and sustain an argument with “the most important thing of all – a point. A writer needs to indicate clearly not only what his or her thesis is, but also what the larger conversation that the thesis is responding to” (20).

In other words, it seems redundant for one instructor to call for the services of another instructor or for a symposium or for a learning community in order to provide their students with a “counter-authority” – just go to the library and start looking through the stacks or log onto JSTOR and browse the archives of *English Journal* or *College English* or *College Composition and Communications* or *Journal of Advanced Composition*.

Re-engaging resistant students, Re-forming critical pedagogy – Part III: The Challenge

Underlying the entire project of critical pedagogy is the ideology of the political left and their distrust (to put it as mildly as possible) of capitalism. In fact, a recent publication by Walter Benn-Michaels goes so far as dismiss the relevance of what has come to be called “identity politics” and the demands for cultural diversity that accompany it and focus instead on class and the inequality of income and wealth. As he puts the cultural equation, “A world where some of us are black and some of us are white – or biracial or Native American or transgendered – is a world where the differences between us present a *solution*: appreciating our diversity. A world where some of us don’t have enough money is a world where the differences between us present a *problem*: the need to get rid of inequality or to justify it” (6, italicized emphasis mine).

This approach seems to have been vindicated at least in terms of press coverage, first by the emergence of the Occupy Wall Street movement, followed by the metaphor of the 99%, and more recently by the intellectual support from French economist Thomas Piketty, not to mention the rhetoric of President Obama. Benn-Michaels, then, is in some ways quite wrong to label “the belief that the humanities departments of our universities are hotbeds of leftism” as a “mistake”

because “the more kinds of differences they can come up with to appreciate (not just many races but mixed races, not just gay and lesbian but gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered), the more invisible the difference that a truly left politics would want to eliminate: class difference” (200). In the twenty-plus years since the book was published, the world – or certainly the academic world – is a lot more left than Benn-Michaels seems to have imaged it in 2006. Today, the discussion seems to be dominated by race, class, gender, and income inequality.¹³⁶

However, if this topic were to be introduced in the composition classroom by an instructor committed to Freirean critical pedagogy, the probability is strong about where it would lead – no doubt to that disruptive scene imagined by the faculty who fear hot-button topics. If classroom discussion can get out of control talking about gun control, abortion, feminism, racism, gay marriage, and the other assorted hot button topics on Benn-Michaels’ diversity list, just wait until students – particularly those who “decide that liberation for them means becoming free-market conservatives” or “getting a job with IBM, making lots of money, and moving to the suburbs” – get into a heated discussion with true-blue, left-wing liberals (Graff “Counterauthority” 183 and “Teaching Politically” 28). It would not be a pretty sight.

In other words, what’s required to bring the discussion under control is to avoid, on the one hand, the disruptive confrontations that often accompany discussion of “hot button” topics and, on the other, the “coercive advocacy” or “bullying our students with our political convictions” that Graff attributes to instructors using Freirean critical pedagogy (“Teaching

¹³⁶ According to *The New Yorker*, “Given that inequality is a worldwide phenomenon, Piketty aptly has a worldwide solution for it: a global tax on wealth combined with higher rates of tax on the largest incomes. How much higher? Piketty reports, ‘According to our estimates, the optimal top tax rate in the developed countries is probably above eighty per cent.’ Such a rate applied to incomes greater than five hundred thousand or a million dollars a year ‘not only would not reduce the growth of the US economy but would in fact distribute the fruits of growth more widely while imposing reasonable limits on economically useless (or even harmful) behavior’” (Cassidy).

Politically” 27). And, as I have argued, the most efficient way to do that is for the students (and teachers) to go to the library to find a Graffian “counter-authority” to Benn-Michaels and Piketty¹³⁷. Unfortunately, such an authority will be beyond the ken of most if not all composition instructors as they have been taught almost entirely under the aegis of Marxist economics.

This is precisely the problem that confronts Graff – he really doesn’t know the conservative position. The best that he can do (apparently he realizes that none of his recommended options for providing a “counter-authority” – another instructor or a transcourse symposium or a learning community linked by a common theme – are available and that the task of giving his English 160¹³⁸ students this vital component of “teaching the conflicts” is entirely up to him) is to offer the incredible (as in not being “credible”) solution of being a “Leninist one day and a Milton Friedmanite the next” (“Teaching Politically” 26). My guess, however, is that Graff – not to mention the vast majority of English instructors – is far more familiar with Lenin’s position than he is with Friedman’s (and many would argue that Friedman has ceased to be a relevant spokesman for the conservative position).

Therefore, most instructors whose familiarity with conservative positions is based only on what they have absorbed through the popular media must rely on such insubstantial support as that provided by an occasional essay such as that by Donald Lazere, who attempts to offer newcomers to economic debate with what amounts to a little primer. Unfortunately, it appears totally incapable of achieving its stated objective, “to broaden the ideological scope of students’ critical thinking, reading, and writing capacities so as to empower them to make their own

¹³⁷ Perhaps the best candidate for the job is Deirdre McCloskey, who had this less than glowing comment about Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, “Hélas, I will show that Piketty is gravely mistaken in his science and in his social ethics” (“Measured...” 75).

¹³⁸ English 160 is the UIC (University of Illinois at Chicago) course identification for the first semester of freshman composition.

autonomous judgments on opposing ideological positions in general and on specific issues” (Lazere 195).

Although more extensive than Graff’s “one day Lenin, the next day Friedman” formula, Lazere’s brief discussion of topics such as “Political Semantics,” “Psychological Blocks to Perceiving Bias,” “Modes of Biased and Deceptive Rhetoric,” and “Locating and Evaluating Partisan Sources” isn’t going to provide the intellectual firepower necessary to provide a “counter-authority” that students can use to engage productively with the likes of Benn-Michaels and Piketty, let alone the host of Marxist scholars to whom they refer both directly and indirectly (197, 199, 200, 202).

Furthermore, Lazere’s lists of media commentators, book publishers, research institutes and foundations, and general periodicals, along with guides to biases in rhetorical language, political terms and positions, and patterns of political rhetoric that he offers as appendices for further study (204-213) aren’t going to provide what’s necessary to “teach the conflicts,” particularly when the conflicts involve such a profound and profoundly complex issue as institutional racism, income inequality, and redistribution of wealth that is dominating the discussion today. Therefore, asking students to use Lazere’s little primer to provide a “counter-authority” to the likes of bell hooks, Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, George Hillocks, and other Freirean/Marxist theorists who dominate composition studies hardly seems fair.

Re-engaging resistant students, Re-forming critical pedagogy – Part IV: An Opportunity

If there is an ideal “counter-authority,” particularly with respect to what Benn-Michaels sees as capitalism as the cause of income inequality (which according to him is the single most important issue, far greater than those posed by “identity” politics), it would have to be Deirdre

McCloskey ¹³⁹, of whom *The Spectator* asks, “Has Thomas Piketty met his match?” (Davis *The Spectator*). A BBC interview with her begins with the host attributing to her what seem to be two completely contradictory statements: first, “All I care about are the poor of the world”; and second, “We shouldn’t worry about inequality” (Davis *BBC Interview*). How can these possibly be reconciled, particularly in light of Benn-Michaels and Piketty? It’s clear that Graff and Lazere are not going to be much help here!

The obvious way to reconcile these two comments is to interpret the nature of capitalism far differently from the typical view of the left. In fact, McCloskey’s basic argument is that capitalism doesn’t create the problems of inequality; it solves them (Davis *Spectator*). According to McCloskey, “the most important thing to understand about the world is that once people were very poor, and now they are very rich” (“Why does 1% of history have 99% of the wealth?”). And the reason for the “remarkable transformation” that catapulted the earnings of the average person from \$3/day in 1800 to more than \$130/day is capitalism – not the redistribution of wealth (“1% / 99%”). Therefore, according to McCloskey, the best way to “care about the poor of the world” is to be a capitalist. (And she really doesn’t like the word “capital,” at least the way it is most commonly defined because capital, according to her, is not the cause of the remarkable transformation of the poor into the relatively wealthy – it’s innovation, but that’s getting too deep into the argument).

Furthermore, McCloskey takes on the other arguments of the liberal left regarding the evils of capitalism, particularly the idea that somehow capitalists are a greedy, unethical, self-serving lot whose only goal is making money, money, and more money at the expense of the

¹³⁹ McCloskey describes herself on her website as a “literary, quantitative, postmodern, free-market, progressive Episcopalian, Midwestern woman from Boston who was once a man. Not ‘conservative’! I’m a Christian libertarian” (“Informal Biographical Remarks”).

human values – “Greed is good,” says Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street*. Not so, says McCloskey. “I say that the market supports the virtues” (*Bourgeois Virtues* 4). And after reading her works, it’s impossible not to understand her argument that capitalism does much more than *support* all seven virtues, it actually creates them. As McCloskey puts it, “Capitalism has not corrupted our souls. It has improved them” (*Virtues* 23). To summarize:

Since 1848, the critic of capitalism has made three counterclaims, all of them I am sorry to say mistaken. As a practical project, the critic says, capitalism works poorly, subjecting us to chronic collapse. Such a claim... is mistaken. And capitalism, the critic also says, generates inequality. A class of poor people, at home or abroad¹⁴⁰, is supposed to be necessary for bourgeois prosperity. That, too, is mistaken. And, the critic says, capitalism has debased values, making people greedy, vulgar, alienated, and depraved. Mistaken again. The claim on the left, in short, is that regardless of the individual capitalist’s virtues or vices, the system of capitalism leads to evil. The claim is mistaken. (*Virtues* 31-32)

Gerald Graff, and other instructors who see the need for a counter-authority, you have found at least one such authority!

The purpose of introducing McCloskey at this stage of the paper is not to reproduce her argument in full or to attempt to show how effective her argument can be at countering the predominant leftist assumptions made by academics in the critical pedagogy classroom. The only point is to demonstrate that there are, indeed, highly respected counter-authorities that can be found and used as a way to achieve the kind of argument culture so valued by Graff in the composition classroom. Unlike Graff’s suggestions, however, this strategy requires that

¹⁴⁰ And here, by inference, McCloskey takes on the project of the anti-capitalist colonialist branch of literary and cultural theory.

instructors and their students actually go and do some research, which in many cases will involve encountering ideas and theories that they have never before considered because critical pedagogy instruction is so closely tied to the politics of the left as exemplified by Paulo Freire and his followers.

Re-engaging resistant students, Re-forming critical pedagogy – Part V: Facing Reality

So is it now time for my “peroration” – some concluding remarks announcing that I have found a way to re-engage students in what Graff calls argument literacy, which he sees as “central to being educated”; a way to reduce if not eliminate the antagonism that students bring to classrooms in which teachers use critical pedagogy; and, for that matter, a way to re-form critical pedagogy itself by adding that extra ingredient of a “counter-authority” that matches the spirit of Graff’s concept if not the form?

The answer quite simply is no; it is not time for such a rhetorical move. And the reason, quite simply, is that there is a stark reality that makes re-forming critical pedagogy and re-engaging resistant students much more difficult than I have presented here, and that reality is the nature of what Graff and others call the “culture wars.” He has spent the better part of twenty years and no doubt much longer attempting to move “beyond the culture wars,” but with little if any success other than the fact that what he says makes sense – not that his work has done much if anything to mitigate these “wars.” And since this chapter in many ways attempts to extend his work, the prospects for success bode equally poorly. In other words, if Graff’s “teaching the conflicts” doesn’t promote the peace, then my exploring ways to teach them even better probably won’t do much more to silence the guns.

Graff notes the reason early on in his *Radical Teacher* essay, that employing a counter-authority must admit to the possibility that the opposition might be right, that it “risks losing some of the debates” (“Teaching Politically” 27). He continues with the implications of such a

fate: “I’ve heard Left educators argue that we should not give legitimacy to patriarchy and racism by engaging critics of women’s or black studies programs in those programs” (27). He obviously didn’t realize not just his prescience but also his understatement regarding the willingness of the Left to engage in debate, a state of affairs that has been extant perhaps as long as leftist politics itself.

For example, in an “Afterword” to the fiftieth anniversary edition of C. Wright Mills’ *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, University of California Los Angeles professor of history Russell Jacoby reports the following statement by Clarence Ayers, one of Mills’ “radical” professors at the University of Texas who had a “well-developed scorn for unregulated capitalism and academic namby-pambys”: “He did not have ‘patience’ with the ‘notion that the business of teachers (and, I presume writers) is to ‘present both sides’ of any matter that is in dispute, leaving it to their students (or readers) to ‘decide for themselves’” (366). Ayers, and by implication Mills, would certainly be no fan of Graff’s. In fact, he seems to be very much the anti-Graff and even anticipates much of the left’s reaction to any intrusion of “counter-authority.”

The most recent examples of how the left reacts to “counter-authority” can be seen by how such “counter-authorities” are received as speakers on various college campuses. At the end of the 2014 academic year, for example, Christine Lagarde, chief of the International Monetary Fund, withdrew from speaking at Smith College’s commencement, “citing protests against her and the fund” (Pérez-Peña, “After Protests”); Condoleezza Rice also withdrew from her scheduled commencement address at Rutgers “amid growing opposition among the school’s students and faculty” (Heyboer); Robert Birgeneau, former chancellor at the University of California-Berkeley and presumed accomplice in the police use of batons to break up an Occupy

protest in 2011 joined a growing list of schools to lose commencement speakers to protests from the left (Pérez-Peña, “In Season of Protest”); and in the “face of growing criticism, Brandeis University said Tuesday that it had reversed course and would not award an honorary degree to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a campaigner for women’s rights and a fierce critic of Islam, who has called the religion ‘a destructive, nihilistic cult of death’” (Pérez-Peña and Vega).

One reaction might be that representatives of positions that the left finds objectionable might be just a little bit too sensitive. After all, isn’t protesting against those with whom we disagree part and parcel of public life, and public life, after all, is the chosen work of those against whom the left launched their protests? Put bluntly, what else did they expect? Perhaps the reluctance to proceed with the presence of these public figures at graduation – either by their own choice or that of the administration – was heavily influenced by an event at Brown University a few years ago at which students did a lot more than simply protest the presence of former New York City police chief Raymond W. Kelly; they booed him off the stage (Lanney and Cong). Even public figures who are used to dissent would have difficulty enduring a commencement ceremony under these conditions.

However, if these protests against counter-authorities were limited to public figures making public addresses, even under conditions of duress such as experienced by Kelly, the situation would be much different. As it is, the left appears unable to tolerate dissent even from within the academy itself as evidenced by the firing, in the spring of 2012, of blogger Naomi Schaefer Riley by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for a column she wrote describing a series of Ph.D. dissertations featured in an earlier *Chronicle* issue as a “collection of left-wing victimization claptrap. The best that can be said of these topics is that they’re so irrelevant that

no one will ever look at them” (Riley). She went on to analyze the content of these dissertations and use them as an argument for the elimination of black studies as a discipline.

Taken on their own, these events might be easily categorized as just isolated incidents. However, in the context of exploring ways to “re-engage resistant students” in composition classrooms taught by critical pedagogists, there is much to prompt unease at the future of such a project, particularly if it involves employing the academic work of intellectuals such as Deirdre McCloskey. While she, of course, is free to pursue her own academic life apparently without any form of protest, the concern is how she would be received in a classroom devoted to critical pedagogy – and whether a left-leaning instructor would even be willing to use her work to teach the “counter-authority” position to their students. My guess is that McCloskey isn’t on the syllabus of instructors such as Ira Shor, Henry Giroux, or bell hooks let alone their less renowned disciples.

The problem, however, is not whether “critical pedagogy” can incorporate Graff’s “argument culture” and admit to entertaining “counter-authorities. The problem, to return to my earlier discussion of “civic engagement,” which evolved from critical pedagogy, is that FYC pedagogy as it is currently constituted does nothing to teach students how to create new knowledge and learn how to live rhetorical instead of contentious lives. Critical pedagogy is just another example of how FYC has entertained a pedagogy that limits rather than enhances the possibility, to quote Richard Bernstein again, of experiencing “a perennial impulse of wonder.” Developing a pedagogy to achieve that goal remains the purpose of this dissertation.

The Past, Part V: The Exploratory Essay, A Failed Alternative to Agonism

Eventually, all things merge into one,
and a river runs through it.
Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It and
Other Stories*

During the 2012 presidential election campaign, Barack Obama caused a bit of a stir when he observed, “If you’ve got a business, you didn’t build that.” If the press had done some digging, they would have found that this idea was, in fact, hardly original and in some circles quite unremarkable. Ever since 2009, for example, Steven Johnson has been selling the idea that ideas are not the products of individual inventors or creators but rather the result of what he calls “the network”: “a new idea is a network of cells exploring the adjacent possible of connections that they can make in your mind” (45).

Essentially, Johnson argues that when people start dreaming up new ideas, they frequently come up with similar ideas because they share with their co-creators the same network for their thoughts. In fact, Johnson could have (and probably should have) cited an earlier (2008) article in *The New Yorker* in which Malcolm Gladwell argues that “big ideas aren’t rare,” citing the fact that Elisha Gray filed a patent for his telephone on the very same day as Alexander Bell, and according to Gladwell, Gray’s phone was actually the better product (“In the Air”). Another version of this story has Steve Jobs accusing Bill Gates of stealing the graphical user interface (GUI) from Apple, whereupon Gates turned the tables by wryly observing (accurately) that Jobs had stolen it from Xerox.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ “GUI was pioneered by computer engineers at the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (aka PARC)... Unfortunately, late 70s Xerox wasn’t forward-thinking. The top brass’s inertia created a huge game-opening for other Silicon Valley upstarts. Apple struck first... The story is legendary and is often simplified to this: in 1979, Jobs offered Xerox 100,000 shares of Apple to get a comprehensive tour of PARC for Apple engineers and himself. There he discovered the magical secret of GUI. Xerox engineers didn’t realize the new technologies would be game changers” (Sirk).

Apparently, academics can be subject to the same “you didn’t build that” charge (or, in this case, “you didn’t think that”). For example, Deborah Tannen’s 1998 book *The Argument Culture: Stopping America’s War of Words* devotes the entire last chapter to “agonism” or “ritualized opposition” in academic writing. As she explains,

The standard way of writing an academic paper is to position your work in opposition to someone else’s, which you prove wrong. This creates a *need* to make others wrong . . .

Students are taught that they must disprove others’ arguments in order to be original, make a contribution, and demonstrate their intellectual ability. (268-269, emphasis Tannen)

But wouldn’t you know it? As Gladwell and Johnson could have predicted, this idea of academic agonism wasn’t new at all.

Perhaps because Sally Miller Gearhart expressed her feelings so strongly (“any intent to persuade is an act of violence” - 195) or perhaps because she limited her remarks to the then still emerging and yet to be firmly established field of rhetoric, Gearhart’s comments about academic writing and more particularly rhetorical writing don’t seem to have received anywhere the recognition afforded Tannen. In fact, Tannen doesn’t even recognize Gearhart’s contribution. But Gearhart’s comments must be taken, I think, as foundational because they inform so much of this issue about what it means to write in the academy, particularly about gender as the source of what she sees as “violence” and Tannen as “agonism.”

Quite simply, both women assign the cause of violent agonistic writing to male-dominated Western culture. However, other factors should also be explored, particularly the nature of academic work itself, which is so different from other pursuits. It’s not so much that academics live in a protected “ivory tower,” but the fact that life in that tower is lived so much differently from what the rest of the world sees as “normal.” For example, even though

academics may share basic human needs with their fellows, the way that they meet those needs may be a clue as to why, to quote what's come to be known as Sayre's Law, "Academic politics is the most vicious . . . because the stakes are so low." In other words, academics really are different from other people.

For example, I don't think it's unreasonable to claim that, with very few exceptions, everyone wants to make a difference, to know that their lives are – and have been – worth living. It's human nature to want to prove Marc Antony wrong – that it will be the good, not the evil, that lives after us, and that it will be the evil, not the good, that will be interred with our bones (*Julius Caesar*, Act 3, Scene 2). Strategies for achieving that goal abound. Doctors and scientists through their research, surgery, and diagnostic skills; lawyers through cases won, criminals convicted, innocents exonerated; soldiers through victory and bravery in battle, comrades rescued, missions accomplished¹⁴²; business leaders through deals made, products and services sold and serviced, satisfied customers and productive employees; politicians through laws passed, public works projects completed, constituents' lives improved; and schoolteachers through their students, most profoundly when they return to shower their accolades, dispensing praise upon their teachers as the reason for their own wonderful lives. What connects all the "normal" people is that they are typically judged based on their actions, not their thoughts.

Success in the academy, however, seems to depend not so much on what we do but rather on what we think and on how our colleagues' respond to our books, journal articles, and conference presentations. In other words, whereas the value that others find in their lives is based on the results of their actions, for us academics, on the other hand, our success depends on our

¹⁴² It's unfortunate that the term "mission accomplished" has been politicized, and there is no intent here to imply any political connotations. Soldiers do, in fact, accomplish their missions, with or without ceremonial acknowledgements by Presidents on board aircraft carriers with huge banners announcing the fact.

ideas, and specifically how they stack up against the ideas of other academics, which can result in a situation where, like Jesus and John the Baptist, it might seem that for one academic to increase, another must decrease (*John 3:30*). And while an academic on the losing end of a colleague's journal essay rhetorically demanding their¹⁴³ ideological head may not find it delivered one morning by the departmental Salome on the chair's metaphorical promotional platter, the experience can't be very satisfying.

At first I thought that this analysis might be a little "over the top," but any reading of Gearhart and Tannen ultimately leads to the conclusion that academic life, at least in their world, is not for the timid or faint of heart. Rather, it seems to require the equivalent of intellectual battle armor supported by fully-automatic arguments equipped with large-clip rhetorical magazines filled with thesis-piercing analytical ammunition. In short, there are those who would argue that if we want our academic lives to matter, we'd better come prepared to fight for our ideas, to risk going down Bonnie-and-Clyde style in a hail of agonistic full-metal-jacket arguments.

Those who aren't well-prepared might flee in terror, particularly women, as Tannen sees academic agonism favoring men as more naturally or at least better suited culturally and emotionally for combat. She illustrates this situation with a quote from a young female art history student who described her first and last year as a Ph.D. student before moving on to what she thought would be a more peaceful existence as an art curator: "Into the den of wolves I go,

¹⁴³ Another grammatical apology: while the third person plural pronoun must traditionally reference a plural noun, this "rule" has been eclipsed by the notion that a generic third-person singular pronoun may be used to refer to a person whose gender is unknown or irrelevant to the context, thus allowing writers to omit gendered pronouns from a sentence such as the one here (See "The Source: Updates from the MLA Style Center" - <https://style.mla.org/using-singular-they/>).

like a lamb to the slaughter” (“Roots” 545). Tannen sees this “atmosphere of unrelenting contention” as an institutional problem:

Many aspects of our academic lives can be described as agonistic. For example, in our scholarly papers, most of us follow a conventional framework that requires us to position our work in opposition to someone else’s, which we prove wrong... Academic rewards typically go to students and scholars who learn to tear down others’ work, not to those who learn to build on the work of their colleagues” (“Agonism in the Academy,” B7).

Although Tannen explores in depth what she sees as the social and cultural causes of this “agonism” (Western male-dominated cultural, social, and political history are her prime suspects), she only hints at what might be the rhetorical cause of the problem – the fact that a “*conventional framework* is what requires us to position our work in opposition” (my emphasis).

What Tannen seems to be suggesting is that agonism is created by the structure of academic work. In other words, agonism (or “violence”) may not be an essential part of academic work at all. Seen in this light, if the structure (or grammar) of academic work can be changed, then perhaps its “violent, agonistic” culture can be changed as well.

The obvious implication is that if another framework could be found that does not require such violent agonism, then it might mitigate much of the contentiousness that Tannen and Gearhart find in academic life and writing. So while this “conventional framework” might well be inexorably implicated in her overall cultural criticism, it has the distinct benefit of being much more manageable in terms of creating alternative frameworks than would be the goal of creating entirely new societies and cultures. However, before we go looking for another framework, it would be helpful to better understand the one that seems, at least to many academics, to be most prevalent in academic writing – the so-called “thesis/support” or argument model.

At first glance, the thesis/support model appears to be the standard for composing academic essays. As Haynes puts it, “(T)here seems to be no question that teaching argument is necessary” (710). Or put another way, “(A)rgument remains the cornerstone of composition pedagogy” (710). Indeed, at first glance, this model does seem to provide an ideal form for academic discourse. First and foremost, it requires the writer to express an opinion – the thesis – along with an argument to support it, in addition to the context in which the argument is framed. In fact, this model is at the heart of many a graduate seminar, the training ground for professional academics. For example, I think it would fair to say that at the University of Oklahoma, Professor Ronald Schleifer’s students would be shocked if the first few minutes of each class were not dedicated to a search to find and evaluate the thesis in their classmates’ weekly papers. And Schleifer’s students might think that the following email sent to a graduate class in global literacy issues at Northeastern Illinois University might have come from Schleifer himself:

Keep in mind that *demonstrating your thesis is the sole purpose and objective of the essay*. Also, as you develop your thesis, you should identify the question or controversy which you aim to answer or address and which occasions your essay, situating your reader as to how the question or controversy has arisen or what the terms of the debate or conversation are in which you are taking part. (Libretti, emphasis mine)

My guess is that similar instructions are delivered daily to hundreds of thousands of students by tens of thousands of teachers in each and every college and university in the country.

University of Illinois at Chicago professors Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein help advance this idea at much greater length and detail in their best-selling book *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* in which they provide a variety of templates designed to

help students generate the thesis/support essay – templates for “introducing ‘They say’”; templates for “making what they say something you say”; and templates for “introducing an ongoing debate.” There are even templates to “introduce meta-commentary” into an essay. However, what Graff and Birkenstein call the “uber-template” remains – the “They say/I say” template, a form they describe as representing the “deep, underlying structure, the internal DNA as it were, of all effective argument” (xiv).

They recount a tale to support this claim, reminiscent of the scene in *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles* in which Steve Martin (as the uptight ad exec Neal Page) berates John Candy (as Del Griffin, the long-suffering shower curtain ring salesman) for telling boring, pointless anecdotes: “And by the way, when you’re telling these little stories, here’s a good idea – have a point. It makes it so much more interesting for the listener!” In the Graff and Birkenstein academic version of this scene, “Dr. X,” playing the role of Del Griffin, gives a boring talk at an academic convention, a talk that was boring because it was apparently pointless. According to Graff and Birkenstein (in the role of Neal Page/Steve Martin), “This little story illustrates an important lesson: that to give writing the most important thing of all – namely, a point” (“*It makes it so much more interesting for the listener!*”) – a writer needs to indicate clearly not only his or her thesis, but also to what larger conversation that thesis is responding to” (*They Say/I Say* 8, with added italicized text from *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*).

The thesis/support essay is the essence of what Graff calls “arguespeak,” and it is at the heart of much of Graff’s writing as he attempts to reveal the “secrets” of academic writing (*Clueless* 22). The first “secret” is that all academics, regardless of discipline, “play a version of the same game of *persuasive argument*”; and the second is like unto it, “persuasive argument is not only the ur-discourse of academia, but an extension of the more familiar forms of persuasion

that drive the public discourse” (*Clueless* 22-23, emphasis Graff). The point for Graff is that arguments are the stuff of discourse, outside the university as well as within it, and educating students in one will educate them in the other, and thereby (presumably) “lessen the gap between academic and non-academic culture, thus making schooling less remote and irrelevant to students” (*Clueless*, 133).

Indeed, this argument model is assumed to be so essential to the way humans think that behavioral researchers Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber actually argue that “the function of reasoning is argumentative”; in other words, it’s human nature to be agonistic: “People turn out to be skilled arguers. Skilled arguers, however, *are not after the truth* but after arguments supporting their views”¹⁴⁴ (57, emphasis mine). Tannen and Gearhart should get a copy of this article before their next contribution to the fray. Indeed, as Graff points out, in what seems to be for him almost a fun little game of “academic gotcha,” Tannen enacts exactly what she criticizes:

But perhaps the most telling refutation of Tannen’s thesis in *The Argument Culture* is the confrontational quality of the book itself. She traps herself in a performative contradiction in which what she *says* is undermined by what she *does*. In the act of warning readers against the adversarial, agonistic, and oppositional stance, Tannen cannot help but becoming adversarial, agonistic, and oppositional. Tannen enacts the behavior she objects to. (*Clueless* 89, emphasis Graff)

And Tannen is not the only one on the receiving end of charges that anything other than the thesis/support model (or agonism) is inadequate to the job of producing academic writing.

¹⁴⁴ This is simply a restatement of philosophers’ charge against the Sophists, that in Plato’s words, rhetoric is mere “cookery.” “And though he does not often state the charge in just these terms, Plato’s treatment of Sophists, whether in the sharply etched portrait of Protagoras or the schematic logic of the Sophist, seems designed to display this aspect of their activity” (Sesonske, 217).

Susan Jarratt, for example, while sympathetic to Gearhart's description of the violence problem as "real and global," notes that avoiding conflict "leaves those who adopt (this position) ill-prepared to negotiate the oppressive discourses of racism, sexism, and classism surfacing in the composition classroom" (106, 107). To continue, then, with the theme of "violence," Jarratt seems to be presenting the same argument that Jim Malone/Sean Connery made famous in the 1986 movie *The Untouchables*, warning Elliot Ness/Kevin Costner that it would be a bad idea to "bring a knife to a gunfight."¹⁴⁵ To employ yet another cliché, in the Graff/Birkenstein/Jarratt world, academics need to be able to fight intense rhetorical fire with rhetorical fire that is even more intense.

However, the thesis/support argument model may not be quite the engine of academic output that Graff and others imagine it to be. Indeed, the thesis/support model may not even accomplish the very goals that scholarship demands of it – namely, the ability to "*achieve* rather than *demonstrate* understanding" (Heilker xx, emphasis mine). Or stated another way, the thesis/support argument model is designed more for the demonstration of knowledge than its discovery. In fact, there is a small but vocal group of academics who challenge this approach to academic writing, favoring a distinctly different form, one that what might be called a more heuristic or exploratory approach. According to composition theorist Paul Heilker, "The thesis/support god is not all-powerful, not all-fulfilling. *It is, rather, inadequate from developmental, epistemological, ideological, and feminist rhetorical perspectives.* (2, emphasis mine). It's important to summarize his concerns about each of these areas:

¹⁴⁵ Barack Obama made this line even more famous with a modified version in remarks during the 2008 Presidential campaign at a Philadelphia fundraiser, commenting about the Democrat response to Republican attacks: "If They Bring a Knife to the Fight, We Bring a Gun" (*The Wall Street Journal*, June 14, 2008).

- First, according to Heilker, “the thesis/support model works to actually thwart students’ development” by “closing, rather than opening their minds, requiring them to repeatedly narrow and focus their topics (2-3). Citing William Zeiger’s essay “The Exploratory Essay: Enfranchising the Spirit of Inquiry in College Composition,” Heilker reinforces Zeiger’s claim that this model of essay writing works to “stop inquiry rather than to start it by creating a logically exclusive, linear progression to a predetermined end which serves to move the reader to one and only one conclusion” (Zeigler, 456).
- Next, Heilker deals with the epistemological problems of the thesis/support model, arguing that it is “inadequate because it embodies an overly simplistic, positivistic epistemology, one at odds with the assumptions of social constructivist thought” (4). Citing rhetoric and composition theorist James Berlin, Heilker believes that the problem with the thesis/support model is that it puts “truth prior to language” where it is “clearly and distinctly available to the person who views it in the proper spirit and is ultimately communicable in clear and distinct terms” (Berlin, 11). According to Heilker, then, the thesis/support form recalls Libretti’s advice that “demonstrating your thesis is the sole purpose and objective of the essay” (*op. cit.*). Heilker argues that such a form “attempts to fix truth in certainty and to declare a definite and singular reality, one that is knowable from a single, immobile point-of-view” (5). His conclusion about the lack of epistemological usefulness of the thesis support model is anything but measured in its finality:

Seen from the complexities of the social epistemic perspective, the thesis support model seems woefully simplistic and inadequate. While the world is a complex

and problematic web of perplexities, the thesis/support form keeps offering our students the same simple, straightforward, and insufficient answers. (6)

- Heilker is equally unforgiving of the penultimate problem with the thesis/support model, finding it “ideologically misleading” (6). This is not to say that the thesis/support essay cannot or does not take ideological positions; only that it masks them in a “claim of objectivity”; the very discursive nature of rhetoric, again quoting Berlin, “favors one version of economic, social, and political arrangements over others” (6).
- And finally, Heilker implicates the thesis/support model as transgressing feminist forms of rhetoric with its “mandated use of rational, linear, agonistic, masculine rhetoric” as opposed to “intuitive, associative, holistic, rhetoric” (8).

Heilker draws on an impressive array of academic support – Lukács’s “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” calling for more “exploratory, modest, and inconclusive writing” (Heilker 38); Adorno’s “The Essay as Form” arguing for writing that “challenges reductive, scientific nominalism and positivism thinking and shies away from the violence of dogma” (44); and Bakhtin in various essays positing language as either the impugned “centripetal” model with the text as a “battleground with positions to be attacked and defended,” or the preferred “centrifugal” form, where the text serves as “dialogic, allowing for dissonant perspectives” (55).

Other writers within the academy take up the support for The Essay form. Rutgers Writing Center Director and Professor of English Kurt Spellmeyer finds The Essay as “the genre that acknowledges most openly the tentative, recursive, and conversational nature of discourse” (265). William Zeiger extols the virtues of what he calls the “exploratory essay” as a means to “enfranchise the spirit of inquiry” (454). The problem he finds with the alternative Thesis/Support model (although he doesn’t call it that) is that “the implicit message is that proving is

more important than finding out . . . For when the aim of an essay is to prove or ‘win’ a point, the projected audience becomes not co-inquirers, or even neutral attendants, but critical opponents” (458). And William Covino in *The Art of Wondering* advises that “what writers must maintain is a thoughtful uncertainty, the attitude that necessarily informs full exploration and motivates wonder” (130). Put another way, the art of wondering is incompatible with statements of certainty, and certainty is the hallmark of the Thesis/Support model.

There are also writers outside the academy who join Heilker in taking exception to the thesis/support model of the academic essay. In his on-line work “The Age of the Essay,” Paul Graham asserts, “In a real essay, you don’t take a position and defend it. You notice a door that’s ajar, and you open it and walk in to see what’s inside.” In addition to his “door” metaphor, he also develops a comparison of what he calls a “real essay” to a “meandering river.” The thesis/support model is based on the fact that “You already know where you’re going, and you want to go straight there”; a “real essay,” on the other hand, meanders like his metaphorical river. Cynthia Ozik’s “Portrait of the Essay as a Warm Body” pursues a similar tact, picking up on Heilker’s criticism of a thesis/support essay as ideologically intrusive. Instead of forcing ideological agreement (reminiscent of Gearhart’s persuasive violence), Ozik’s ideal essay is decidedly feminine and non-aggressive in its persuasive methods – “she (the feminized essay) co-opts agreement; courts agreement; seduces agreement; and finally asserts her independence: Above all, she is not a hidden principle or a thesis or a construct: she is there, a living voice. She takes us in.”

So what’s not to like? Here’s an essay format that from “developmental, epistemological, ideological, and feminist rhetorical perspectives” (Heilker) is “more adequate” than the thesis/support model; in fact, it would seem to be a vast improvement over a format that “stop(s)

inquiry rather than start(s) it.” At first glance, then, academics across the land should want to throw off the shackles of the thesis/support argument model and join Martin Luther King as he unlocks himself from the chains of agonism and shouts out “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, I’m free at last!” But if The Essay form is superior to the Thesis/Support model, why are crowds still lined up to buy *They Say/I Say*, the now canonical work of Thesis/Support preachers Graff and Birkenstein, while the voice of “The Essay” is curiously silent in the land of academe?

Apparently the problem is that even with all of this academic (and non-academic) support, the considered opinion of composition scholars is that The Essay form does not or cannot achieve the goals of academic writing, which seems to be joined at the hip to the idea of making a point, that is of supporting a thesis. For example, all of the essayists, both within and outside the academy, who come to the support of The Essay form, still rely on the Graff/Birkenstein argument templates to get the job done. The example of Tannen using the very agonistic form that she disdains has already been noted. And Heilker at least has the honesty to recognize the irony in the fact that his entire book on “The Essay” exemplifies the thesis/support model. His “apology (of sorts)” is worth repeating:

What follows is not an essay. Indeed, what follows can be considered an arch example of writing in the thesis/support form, even though this is exactly the form I will soon be sharply criticizing. In fact, ironically, *I will be using the thesis/support form to attack the thesis support form.* (xix, emphasis mine)

Fortunately, Heilker realizes that this is an anomaly that needs some explanation. But it’s both curious and ironic that his explanation relies on using the late Jim W. Corder as his interlocutor who persuades him to use the thesis/support form to attack the thesis/support form.

Corder was a professor and scholar of rhetoric at Texas Christian University at the time that Heilker received his Ph.D. there in 1992 and was obviously still a significant influence on Heilker at the time he wrote this book, no doubt deserving far more than the cryptic “Acknowledgement” he receives for providing an “enthusiastic endorsement and cogent critiques of this work” (ix). What’s curious is that Corder’s career exemplified the life of a proponent of The Essay form. According to Wikipedia, “he crafted scholarly arguments for academic audiences, but he articulated them through stylistic and structural moves that resist typical conventions of academic writing.” Furthermore, “Corder generates momentum by creating the impression of thinking aloud, which allows him to subvert standard academic discourse by creating a sense of puzzling over a problem with a reader instead of handing her solutions” (Wikipedia).

In other words, unlike Tannen or Heilker, Corder actually tried to write the kind of essays that both Heilker and Tannen extol in their books – essentially the academic equivalent of shower curtain ring salesman Del Griffin/John Candy in a world of hard charging ad execs like Neal Page/Steve Martin. But just like in the movie, Corder was apparently the academic equivalent of Griffin/Candy’s loveable loser – according to Wikipedia, “Corder’s contribution to the body of knowledge within rhetoric and composition has not been fully realized by others in the field.”

So when Corder advises Heilker that “the forcefully argued thesis/support form is the established, traditional genre for scholarly texts,” it is not without some of the same, sad irony that informs Del Griffin’s life – in order to get ahead, you have to be Neal Page, and Heilker follows his unsung mentor’s advice. “In short, I wanted this text to be taken seriously, so I put it in a ‘serious’ form” (xix). In other words, if Heilker had written the book using the form that he

believes is superior to the thesis/support form he actually uses, it would have been “perceived to be less rigorous, less scholarly, less serious, less important, less intellectually demanding to compose, and less worthy of respect and interest” (xix). Therefore, just as Tannen makes the strategic error of performing precisely what she criticizes, so too does Heilker.

What’s left then is a strange paradox – praise for The Essay as an academic form but without any examples. The writers whom Heilker cites as avatars of The Essay form are all personal essayists in the tradition of Montaigne, the originator of the form – Aldous Huxley, Joan Didion, Charles Simic, Alice Walker, Scott Russell Sanders, Gretel Ehrlich, and Joseph Epstein are all acclaimed as first-class essayists, but their essays aren’t material for academic journals. Even the essays written by Heilker’s students – “Fetal Tissue and the Face in the Sonogram” and “Should You Kiss Your Aspartame Goodbye” – are far more personal than academic.

Nor does Heilker provide much in the way of pedagogical advice in spite of the promise of pedagogy in the title. What’s even more troubling is the fact that the book never really directly addresses the problem that Tannen and Gearhart find in the “argument culture” of Gerald Graff and Andrea Lunsford – if everything is, indeed, an argument, then the thesis/ support model still dominates, and the so-called violence continues. There is some hope offered by Graff himself, that literature and specifically poetry, in addition to being “works of art,” also ““assert something about the human situation, something which invites application to contexts of experience outside the poem” (*Poetic Statement* 29). In other words, poems and plays and novels also make arguments. But this line of reasoning doesn’t solve the problem – what’s called for is a way to create academic arguments using The Essay form rather than find arguments in existing essays

and other genres. David Sedaris isn't going to be a featured author any time soon in the *Journal of Advanced Composition*.

There are a couple of ways to address this problem, both using the tools of Aristotelian rhetorical analysis. First is to consider alternative interpretations of Aristotle's definition of rhetoric, often criticized, initially by feminists and later by post-process theorists, as the epitome of Western, male, positivist linear logic. At first glance, defining rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" may seem to fit Gearhart's charge precisely, namely, that "any intent to persuade is an act of violence" (195). But note (and it's entirely possible that the original Greek may not produce the reading I'm giving it here) that Aristotle is *not* saying that rhetoric is persuading *regardless* of the means; rather, rhetoric is finding the means "in any particular case," which suggests that Aristotle might be more contextual, more situational, and even more post-modern than he is usually considered to be – if he is ever thought of like this at all.

What this more post-modern view of Aristotle allows, then, is the possibility that multiple arguments might be presented in a single essay – that the "means of persuasion" depend on the specifics of each "case." Therefore, both Gearhart's point about the "violence of persuasion" and Jarratt's dissent (what Tannen might call her "agonistic" dissent) might well both be "true" depending, as Jarratt herself points out, on the "communications context" (107). But if academic writers are given only the thesis/support argument model, it becomes exceptionally difficult to take the "well, it depends" position.

As Tannen points out in her "Agonism in the Academy" essay, it's the "framework that requires us to position our work in opposition to someone else's" (B7). The problem with the thesis/support format, then, is not so much that it's agonistic but that the form itself demands that

it can't be anything else other than agonistic. The problem, then, isn't that an essay has to have a point; the problem is that can have only one point. In other words, the thesis/support format becomes agonistic not because of the fact that it must have thesis, but because it can't allow for any alternative thesis – this is the cause of the agonism, of the “violence.”

This analysis leads back to the viability of The Essay format that not only allows the writer to consider multiple points; it practically requires it. So the question becomes, then, why has The Essay format not achieved greater acceptance as an academic format? To return to the beginning theme of this chapter, perhaps it's because demonstrating the superiority of one's ideas is the only way that academics feel they can achieve some sort of validation for their work, both now and in the virtual JSTOR hereafter. Rather than the most toys, academic winners will be judged on the basis of those with the most citations. Nobody wants to wind up like Heilker's dissertation advisor, who “has not been given extensive attention, consideration, or legitimacy among others in English studies” (Wikipedia).

However, just because the primary exponents of The Essay haven't demonstrated how the form can work to achieve academic goals doesn't mean that such a feat isn't possible. For example, my students have used The Essay form twice in my own freshman composition and high school Advanced Placement Language/Composition classes to generate excellent examples of academic work without the assistance of the thesis support model.

Perhaps most successful was an essay on gun control in which the primary requirement was that students *not* express their personal opinion. The result was a set of essays that explored the relative strength of each position based on the three Aristotelian means of persuasion – in other words, the argument was not which position was “right,” but rather which was more rhetorically persuasive. In Gearhart's terms, the point was not to be “violently persuasive” but

rather to analyze which form of “violence” would be more effective. Put in more prosaic terms, the role of the student was not to be “the man in the arena” fighting an opponent but to act as one of the ring-side judges. The curious result of this essay was that many pro-gun students found themselves arguing that the anti-gun side was the more persuasive based on the overwhelming strength of the appeals to pathos (what I call the “dead baby” argument). My thinking is that similar results would have occurred with other “hot-button” issues – students on the religious right, for example, might have come to the conclusion that the pro-gay side is more persuasive, as indeed it seems to be, or at least is in the process of becoming.

Such an approach afforded by The Essay can also be seen both as more persuasive and less violent than the standard thesis-support model, particularly if the goal isn’t “total victory” but rather incremental understanding. In fact, The Essay form even helps overcome the problems that many academics see with Peter Elbow’s “believing game” in that his game requires, at least according to his critics, a kind of willing suspension of disbelief that can result in precisely the kind of “violence” that Gearhart assigns to what Elbow would call the “doubting game” (270-272). In other words, both “games” require that the reader become subject, at least temporarily, to the arguments of the writer; it’s just that the “believing game” requires willing subjection, which is precisely what both Jarratt and Min-Zhan Lu find so objectionable about Elbow.

According to Jarratt, for example, Elbow’s “believing game” “puts a woman in a dangerous stance” (117), while Lu argues that the believing game “can work to provide a seemingly ‘nice or sociable’ or ‘easier and more natural’ means for hegemonic power to control differences through writing and teaching” (70, quoting Elbow 176 and 187). The Essay form, on the other hand, requires a sustained critical stance with respect to all sides of an argument – in other words, be a doubter not just of one side of an argument but all of them. Put more simply, if

the same critical sauce is applied to both the goose and the gander, neither goose nor gander can claim to have been wronged in the analytical process that The Essay allows for (and, in fact requires).

What's been left out of this discussion so far is a definition of The Essay form. In other words, how does a writer know what's required to actually create a form that follows this genre? If the proposition is that academics write in The Essay form instead of the Thesis/Support form, then there must be some sort of idea of what this form looks like. And that, ultimately, is the problem with Heilker's book. He thinks that he has achieved a "clear consensus" of what The Essay form is, but I would object that he has done no such thing. Heilker's culminating definition of The Essay as "an action symbolic of intellectual freedom, an image of unhindered, unregulated, untrammelled mental mobility that crosses ideological boundaries and borders" (180) may be satisfactory to some, but I would hate to offer it to first-year composition students when I'm trying to introduce The Essay as an alternate if not a preferred form of writing.

Metaphors seem to work better as they can at least be visualized a lot better than, for example, Spellmeyer's impossibly convoluted concept that The Essay "transgresses the propriety of discrete communities" (268). In fact, I tried Graham's "meandering river" conceit, advising students to put their canoes into the river and see what argumentative islands they run into along the way, get out and explore the island, and then continue the process. At least they were able to figure out how to accomplish that task with the written word. Unfortunately, the islands-in-the-meandering-river metaphor compromises the need for continuity – The Essay may not have to follow the same strict structure as the Thesis/Support form, but in order to be an academic essay, "summarizing and making arguments is the name of the game" (Graff *Clueless* 3). In other words, not only must an academic essay make a point, it must also be connected to other points,

both within and outside the essay. Floating down the river Huck Finn style doesn't do much to accomplish that goal.

One metaphor that does seem to work better is Ariadne's thread. According to the Medieval Studies Department of Georgetown University, "Ariadne, daughter of King Minos of Crete, fell in love with Theseus and gave him a thread which he let unwind through the Labyrinth so that he was able to kill the Minotaur and find his way back out again." This myth has become the source for an approach to logical analysis that seems to allow for a much more precise definition of what it means to write in The Essay form. According to Wikipedia (the best source I could find for a definition), "Ariadne's thread is the term used to describe the solving of a problem with multiple means of proceeding – such as a physical maze, a logical puzzle, or an ethical dilemma (*and, I would add, academic issues such as developing ways to write an argumentative essay*) – through an exhaustive application of logic (*and, I would add, Aristotle's other means of rhetorical persuasion*) to all available routes.

The process is simple: "At any given moment that there is a choice to be made. Make one arbitrarily from those not marked as failures and follow it logically (*and, I would add, emotionally and ethically – pathos and ethos*) as far as possible." Wikipedia makes it clear that Ariadne's thread is not a trial-and-error approach:

Trial-and-error approaches are rarely concerned with how many solutions may exist to a problem and indeed assume that only one correct solution exists. Ariadne's thread makes no such assumption and is capable of locating all possible solutions to a purely logical problem (*and, I would add emotional and ethical problems as well, again pathos and ethos*). In short, trial-and-error approaches a desired solution;

Ariadne's thread blindly exhausts the search space entirely, finding any and all solutions. (Wikipedia)

This metaphor works a lot better than the meandering river conceit because it requires the essayist to “connect the dots,” a metaphor that seems to work well here because it speaks directly to a major concern with the typical Thesis/Support form of the essay – namely, that it focuses on simply one solution that the essayist argues is best, if not the one and only solution. Indeed, a closer look reveals that the Thesis/Support model is totally inconsistent with Ariadne's thread as a method of analysis and that The Essay form fits it almost like a glove (another metaphor that unfortunately fell out of favor after the O. J. Simpson trial).

So powerful is this new way of looking at essay writing that it may even rise to the poetic, providing some solace to Robert Frost who knows that “ages and ages hence,” he would tell “with a sigh” of the time when he had to decide between two roads, at first fooling himself into thinking that he could keep “the first for another day” but eventually realizing “how way leads on to way” and “doubted if I should ever come back.” Fortunately, essayists who write in the form of The Essay may never have to worry about “the thread not taken” because if they follow Ariadne's thread, it will lead back to the point where those two roads first diverged in a yellow wood and permit the essayist to indeed be “one traveler” and travel both roads – or even many roads!

However, regardless of the benefits that the exploratory essay may promise, this form, along with other possible alternatives to the thesis/support argument model, is for the most part now all a part of composition history. Not one of them is seriously considered as a suitable replacement—not the paralogic post-process model, not process pedagogy, not critical pedagogy, not grammar or current-traditional pedagogy, and not oratory. Only the argument model—what Deborah Tannen, Sally Gearhart, and other feminist scholars call “agonism”—prevails.

Chapter 3: The Future, Preview: Is There Room for New FYC Pedagogies?

It don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing.
Duke Ellington

If someone says 'yes', you say "no."
If someone says "no," you say "yes."
Apocryphal advice to University of Chicago students.

When you're telling these little stories,
here's a good idea – have a point.
It makes it so much more interesting for the listener!
Planes, Trains, and Automobiles

The question at this point is not whether there are alternatives to the agonistic argument thesis-support civic engagement model but whether it is possible to advance any other form of instruction, given the fact that the two most recent contenders (post-process and exploratory) have not made much if any headway in the classroom. Both post-process pedagogy, which maintains the difficulty if not the impossibility of teaching writing altogether, and the exploratory essay, which avoids the idea of argumentation almost as a matter of principle, have failed to respond to the challenge of the “pedagogical imperative” that requires a theoretical model of composition instruction to have a correspondingly effective pedagogical presence in the classroom, leaving the argument model, to call upon the title of a recently cancelled TV sitcom, as “the last man standing.” As Laura Aull and Valerie Ross explain the situation,

A glance at high school and college composition today will tell you “everything’s an argument,” both in the symbolic sense evoked by Andrea Lunsford and John J. Ruskiewicz’s composition textbook as well as in the literal sense of student writing assignments. For secondary students, the Common Core Standards’ “writing applications” tend to foreground argument, and standardized assessments like the Scholastic Aptitude test (SAT) have students read and write argumentative essays. And college students must write argumentative essays to (1) demonstrate secondary learning,

English fluency and writing proficiency; (2) determine placement in college composition courses; and (3) show writing development in those courses. (21)

While neither Aull nor Ross particularly like this state of affairs, they both agree about its ubiquitous and pervasive use in the American educational system where “students learn the basic strategies and structures of argumentation: proposition, reasons, evidence, counterargument, refutation” (25).

Indeed, there seems to be a certain teleological certainty about the current state of the argument model as the bedrock of composition pedagogy, a solidified situation that inspires Anne Ruggles Gere to compare the situation to a famous pop culture character:

When the editors of this *Yearbook* asked me to write a chapter on current models of composition pedagogy, an image immediately came to mind. I would portray the dominant model as King Kong standing on the Empire State Building... (T)his model remains impervious¹⁴⁶ to the challenges of other approaches, dispatching them with the brutish power born of preeminence. (30)

Although certainly not taken by Gere’s pop culture references, Cynthia Haynes also describes the current argument model of composition pedagogy in hegemonic terms, specifically as a “pedagogical apparatus” (671), an apparent although unacknowledged reference to Louis Althusser’s concept of an “ideological state apparatus,” a term that posits two different forms of a state apparatus, one a “repressive” form that “functions by violence” and another (such as FYC pedagogy) that “functions by ideology” (1342).¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Perhaps unwittingly, Gere ignores the end of the movie (the 1933 version) when Kong gently places Fay Wray on a ledge of the Empire State Building before succumbing to machine gun fire from the planes that Gere seems to believe Kong simply “swats away as if they were flies” (30).

¹⁴⁷ Haynes’s “pedagogical apparatus” also suggests another oblique reference, this time to Walter Ong’s term “the pedagogical juggernaut” (167).

This characterization of the apparent impervious state of composition pedagogy is in contrast to how susceptible the field has previously been to changing pedagogies. As Ann E. Berthoff describes the situation,

Those who try to keep up with theory and practice as they are set forth in our journals might have another criticism: there is a great deal of pendulum swinging... An idea which one year is everywhere hailed and celebrated vanishes the next without a trace. In its place appears another which may or may not be consonant, may or may not be antithetical... Thus we have, for instance, some thoughtful and substantial discussion of “personal knowledge” for a time, but all of that suddenly sinks out of sight: “The social construction of knowledge” has arrived! (279-280)

As I have tried to demonstrate in earlier chapters, Berthoff’s observation seems to be entirely accurate: in fact, the field has historically seen nothing but pedagogical change—*oratorical pedagogy* giving way to *current-traditional instruction*, which in turn was supplanted by the *process method*, which was then subsequently dismantled by the *anti-foundationalism of post-process theory*, although not by any incarnations of *post-process pedagogy* itself.

In this latest iteration of the “pendulum swing,” instead of dispensing with the classroom and adopting what Peter Elbow might call the “writing without teachers” method called for by post-process theorists, composition pedagogy was overtaken by various forms of the argument model, first by *critical pedagogy* that suffered from what many believed was the *political indoctrination of first-year college students* (see the chapter “Critical Pedagogy—Prelude to Civic Engagement”), and then by the current focus on *civic engagement*, which calls for students to present arguments focused on current social, cultural, and political issues (the “social construction of knowledge” movement)—pedagogical developments that I have attempted to thoroughly

document. However, rather than accept the continuation of constant pedagogical changes, it is at this point that the field seems to have decided to plant the flag. It's almost as if the gods who rule the composition universe have decided to appropriate the line in *Job* when God describes His power over the oceans, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther..." (*Job* 38:11).

Perhaps the current intransigence can best be understood through an interchange between Gerald Graff and Deborah Tannen in the pages of Graff's book *Clueless in Academe*, with Tannen arguing against the debilitating effects of what she calls "agonism," while Graff holding forth in favor of his beloved argument model and in the process eviscerating Tannen's position as an inherently hypocritical example of the very "agonism" of which she complains:

But perhaps the most telling refutation of Tannen's thesis in *The Argument Culture* is the confrontational quality of the book itself. At those moments when Tannen questions the legitimacy of oppositional debate, she traps herself in a performative contradiction in which what she *says* is undermined by what she *does*. In the acts of warning readers against the adversarial, agonistic, and oppositional, Tannen cannot help becoming adversarial, agonistic, and oppositional... Tannen enacts the behavior that she objects to... (Her) pages often border on "frontal assault," with their hard-edged, disputatious style (which I take to be a virtue) that seems closer to the abrasive rationalism she opposes than to the soft-focus New Age mentality with which she identifies ideologically. (89-90)

To use the language of tennis, it seems like it's "game, set, and match" to Graff, who, in response to Tannen's complaint "that college students are advised to look for someone to attack in order to generate a paper topic," replies, "I can only say, 'Would that it were so!'" (*Clueless* 91), apparently reaffirming his belief in the "virtue" of "hard-edged disputatious style."

A survey of the FYC publishing landscape seems to support Graff's victory for it would certainly seem that Graff's wish has been fulfilled, while Tannen's desire for a less agonistic world has, to appropriate a now clichéd term first used to describe the fate of British hunters who fall from their horses, "come a cropper." According to Doris Dorrough, Senior Sales Representative at W. W. Norton & Company, whose imprint *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* is the textbook designed to be the pedagogical realization of Graff's dedication to the agonistic argument essay, "is used by over two million students at over 1,300 schools." And while I have not been able to extract comparable data from publishers of other national argument textbooks,¹⁴⁸ there is no doubt that what Deborah Tannen derides (and Gerald Graff extols) as "the argument culture" has achieved a dominant position in FYC classrooms all across the country. There are just no texts similar to the vast selection available that promote the "argument culture" (that is, there are no textbooks dedicated to "post-process" or "exploratory" pedagogies). So while Tannen and other scholars (many of them feminists) may want to go about "Stopping America's War of Words" (the subtitle of Tannen's book *The Argument Culture*), Graff and what appears to be the overwhelming majority of composition textbook authors and publishers seem to believe the exact opposite, that encouraging the "war of words" is precisely what's needed in the FYC classroom.

But even though the market for "anti-agonism" seems limited at best, this does not mean that there is no value in that approach or that many composition scholars have given up on their

¹⁴⁸ Titles include *Everything's an Argument* (Bedford/St. Martin's), *The Aims of Argument* (McGraw-Hill Education), *Inventing Arguments* (Wadsworth/ Cengage), *Discovering Arguments* (Pearson Prentice Hall), *The Language of Argument* (Houghton Mifflin), *Mirror Images: Reading and Writing Arguments*, *Writing Arguments: A Rhetoric with Readings*, and *Good Reasons: Research and Writing Effective Arguments* (all three Pearson Longman imprints), and a relatively recent entry (2019) from Oxford University Press *Good Writing: An Argument Rhetoric*.

own “war of words” against the argument model.¹⁴⁹ The problem is that while the agonistic argument model seems to be winning the sales and marketing wars, the “argument culture” itself still has not been able to adequately address the misgivings that Tannen and her compatriots have brought to bear against the “pedagogical apparatus” constructed by the proponents of the argument culture. In short, the advent of a popular pedagogy that is at least different from, although perhaps not entirely opposed to, the dominant argument model, must at least recognize that the “anti-agonists” may have a valid point. And in fact, the proponents of argument pedagogy may have seriously underestimated the extent of how dissatisfied, at least in terms of intensity, many scholars are with that form.

For example, one of the fiercest opponents of the argument model is the aforementioned Cynthia Haynes, who readily proclaims that she is “dissatisfied with teaching writing that is primarily argumentative writing” (669). Haynes’s complaint is that “argumentation has reached its breaking point” (674). But her call to “break up the lofty and lucrative industry of argumentative writing pedagogy” will, she believes, be met with “the most stern rebukes and further entrenchment of argument upon argument” (674). In short, coming up with a new FYC pedagogy, let alone advocating for one that supplants or even modestly competes with the argument model, is not an easy task.

The problem seems to be that while the “anti-agonists” present strong, even passionate arguments, they have not been able to develop a pedagogy that can deliver their beliefs about writing in the classroom. For example, what Deirdre McCloskey calls “sweet talk” in her white

¹⁴⁹ As Cynthia Haynes puts it, “Show me a mainstream composition textbook that teaches Greg Ulmer’s *Heuretics*... Find me a Braddock award-winning article that reports on classroom practices based on Geoff Sirc’s ‘Writing Classroom as A&P Parking Lot’... Supply me with a syllabus that is fashioned on Lynn Worsham’s view of ‘writing as a strategy whose progress yields unlearning...’ Tell me a “*mystory*” of composition theory that decants Victor Vitanza’s ‘paralogic pedagogy’...” (707).

paper on “Humanomics” certainly avoids the imposing power (some might say the violence) of the agonistic argument thesis/support structure while creating a more subtle and according to McCloskey more persuasive appeal. In fact, for McCloskey, persuasion is the very definition of sweet talk—sweet talk is persuasive; agonism is its antithesis. But none of the anti-agonists seem to have been able to overcome Sidney Dobrin’s and Lynn Worsham’s call for a “pedagogical imperative”—the need to create an effective pedagogy to accompany a theoretical model.

So as appealing as “sweet talk” can be (with its promise of pleasant persuasion) and as dreary as agonistic argumentation frequently is (with its often-condescending claims of unerring virtue and certitude), it is the pedagogy of agonistic argument that dominates the classroom. The point here is not to debate the relative merits of these two approaches, but rather to explore how a new pedagogy might incorporate the benefits of both and the drawbacks of neither. For unless some way is found to synthesize the various approaches to FYC pedagogy, what students are faced with is Hayne’s hegemonic designation of the argument model as the unquestioned “pedagogical apparatus.”

One way to avoid that “apparatus,” which is consistent with the non-agonistic approach but is much more prevalent in philosophical discussions rather than conversations about composition pedagogy, is the concept of hermeneutics and heuristics. However, as we have seen, just because there are no direct links between these two philosophical concepts and the “pedagogical imperative” doesn’t mean that they cannot be useful in the development of a new approach to FYC pedagogy. Indeed, as Ann Berthoff puts the proposition, “The task, as I see it, is to reconceive of rhetoric as a hermeneutical enterprise, or, rather, to reclaim it as such: insofar as rhetoric is concerned with meaning (*or metaphysics*), that has always been its character” (281, my addition italicized).

Perhaps one reason why hermeneutics and heuristics have not been featured in discussions of FYC pedagogy is that the emphasis, indeed the premise, of hermeneutics and heuristics is based on the interpretation of text rather than its production, and production of text has become the primary focus of FYC and as previously noted, more specifically, the production of arguments, and even more specifically, the production of civic engagement texts with a structure predicated on thesis statements, which must in turn be defended, supported, and proven, at least to the point of convincing the desired audience of their rectitude. Hermeneutics and heuristics, on the other hand, consist of “reasoning not regarded as final and strict but as provisional and plausible only...” (Lauer “Heuristics and Composition” 396), which is a definition not unlike, in fact similar to the point of equivalence, that of rhetoric itself.

Indeed, as the discussion becomes oriented to the values of hermeneutics and heuristics, rhetoric begins to assume quite a different aspect than it has when the focus is on Graff’s argument culture and civic engagement. In fact, Nicholas Rescher, author of *Interpreting Philosophy: The Elements of Philosophical Hermeneutics*, presents rhetoric not just as being different from argumentation but actually opposed to it: “The term ‘rhetoric’ will be used in a rather special sense... It will function as a contrast term to *argumentation*...” (89).

This viewpoint is affirmed, reinforced, and even expanded upon by other scholars who emphasize the conditional, contextual, contingent, probable, provisional, and situational nature of rhetoric rather than its ontological overtones, evidenced in the nature of argumentative essays (which Meyer calls the “propositional model”) where “rhetoric is reduced to propaganda” (Meyer 1) and founded on “antagonism, hostility, strife, competitiveness, indeed all those objectionably male-oriented qualities” (Sloan 3). According to Meyer, such an essay is “closed upon itself in which discussion exists in the form of a vehicle for pre-constituted truths. Thus, no

question will be asked without our already having the answer... or the means of making it spring forth from other answers which are already at one's disposal" (2). It is from this analysis that Meyer concludes, "Ontology opposes itself to rhetoric" (1). Furthermore, "Ontology can only be circular"; therefore, "with the advent of ontology, questioning and, consequently, non-propositional rhetoric are dead. We always already know what we are looking for" (4). Or put another way, ontologically-based essays such as the ones produced by the "argument culture," "civic engagement," and "thesis/ support" models, set out to prove that which is already assumed to be true.

As widespread and apparently heartfelt as these pleas may be for a less agonistic and argumentative approach and for more provisional and contextual content, there does not appear to be much if any movement in this direction in the FYC classroom. While scholars may extol the theoretical virtues of heuristics and hermeneutics, what they haven't been able to accomplish is a pedagogy to achieve their goals. In short, they have fallen short of what might be called the bugaboo of composition scholarship—the pedagogical imperative, which calls for a way to make theory work in the classroom, a hurdle that agonistic argument has mastered and even strengthened over many years. In fact, what seems to make the agonistic civic engagement argument culture so dominant is not so much the theory as the pedagogy, the forms of argument that generate argument content. If the argument format is the sum and substance of all FYC pedagogy, it becomes extremely difficult to produce something different let alone antithetical.

And it is this argument form that replaced what had been the prior pedagogical instrument for invention and content production, namely, the free-writing (or pre-writing) process that was popularized by Peter Elbow and was (and in some classrooms still is) essentially a process but without a form. According to Elbow, "simply force yourself to write

without stopping... If you get stuck in the middle of a sentence, just repeat the last word or phrase till something comes along..." (13). As popular as Elbow became in the writing community, and he is still a major figure, his commitment to free-writing without form or constraints, which presumably "helps you think of topics to write about" (15), turned out to be ironically just short of disastrous for Elbow's career. He was "totally blocked and unable to write for a couple of years," this from the presumed master of overcoming writer's block (122). His belief that all a writer needs to do is "just keep writing, ... and you will get to ideas, experiences, feelings, or people that are just asking to be written about" is clearly not a universal formula for success, perhaps because it isn't a formula at all.

I have previously discussed the significance that Lisa Delpit places on the value of forms to produce good writing and even students' future success: "The students I have spoken to seem to be saying that the teacher has denied them access to herself as the source of knowledge necessary *to learn the forms* they need to succeed" (288, emphasis mine). Furthermore, a Black student related to Delpit how a friend of his "was in a Black teacher's class. And that lady was very good. She went through and explained each part of the *structure*," a far cry from the "process" approach that Delpit's student had experienced with a white teacher, a "procedure that infuriated this student" (287, emphasis mine). And recall that this process approach, which Delpit's student so disliked, was, in fact, a much more formula-driven method than Elbow's free-writing system, so much so that post-process scholars criticized it for being "foundationalist."

This evolution from a formless free-writing process to the current highly structured argument form suggests that perhaps the future might lie in the development of forms that can enable the production of more heuristic, hermeneutic, indeed rhetorical essays that exemplify the conditional, contextual, contingent, probable, provisional, and situational nature of rhetoric. But

before attempting to develop a form – that is, a pedagogy – for an anti-agonistic alternative to the argument essay, there must first be a discussion of the issue of forms and formulas. How can a method so roundly criticized as being an anathema to authentic written expression become an effective aid to invention and the creation of meaning?

The Future, Part I: The Formulaic Turn – How to Do Things with Formulas

Drill students in the forms that enable meaning...

What students must learn are the forms;
the content will follow.

Stanley Fish, “Opinionator”

“That’s great in practice, but will it work in theory?”

University of Chicago T-shirt

The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

William Camden, *Remains Concerning Britain*

One reason why the argument model has been so dominant may well be that it has decades of supporting pedagogy behind it, starting with the five-paragraph essay featuring the aforementioned neglect of invention and abandonment of memory. When the writer’s primary job is to state and then support a thesis, to “prove that which is assumed to be true” (with an emphasis on the rhetorical canons of style and organization), there isn’t much doubt about where to focus instruction. Furthermore, instruction in the argument form has been at the forefront of the writing classroom since early in the students’ high school career, a tradition dating back several decades. According to Dennis Baron, professor of English and linguistics at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, “The SAT hasn’t changed dramatically since I took it forty-five years ago... stressing the importance of a simple four or five-paragraph essay structure.”

Even if the argument form did not have a surfeit of pedagogical support at the high school and even middle school levels,¹⁵⁰ it appears to be even more dominant in the college classroom with every major publishing house offering at least one entry in the field. It’s not

¹⁵⁰ Dedication to the teaching the argument form in middle and high school appears to be growing. In 2011, Heinemann issued *Teaching Argument Writing, Grades 6-12*, the 1997 winner of the NCTE David H. Russell award for Distinguished Research in the Teaching of English. In addition, Routledge recently published (2015) *Teaching and Learning Argumentative Writing in High School English Language Arts Classrooms*, and W. W. Norton is planning a high school version of *They Say/I Say*. The K-12 market for argument pedagogy is growing rapidly, the market for anti-agonism pedagogy apparently non-existent.

surprising, then, to find that, at the start of the fall semester of first-year college composition classes, it is rare to encounter a student who is not familiar with the five-paragraph argument form, and if they are not, soon will be. Put another way, if the weakness of alternative forms of writing such as “sweet talk” or exploratory writing or a heuristic/hermeneutic essay is their lack of a “pedagogical imperative,” teaching the argument form boasts a long and well-established tradition based precisely upon meeting the demands of just that imperative. Attempts to develop any other pedagogical models may, at first glance then, seem to be a quixotic quest—pedagogical imperative, thy name is the argument model.

However, a closer look at the argument form reveals that the source of its pedagogical power may not be so much its focus on “argument” as its reliance on “form.” In other words, what’s being taught are the forms that produce arguments as much as the arguments themselves. So, for example, writing formulas such as those offered by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein (henceforth G/B) in their market-dominating *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (henceforth *TS/IS*) are valuable both for their ability to generate content as well as the content itself. So rather than being antithetical to the goal of developing a pedagogy that can take into account the concerns of anti-agonists and pro-heuristics, the G/B templates, in addition to being the embodiment of agonistic argumentative writing itself, are also a demonstration of the generative power of linguistic forms, which become, then, the basis on which to build a new pedagogy rather than a deterrent against it. Seen in this light, the task at hand becomes the development of a form that can generate not just binary arguments (that is, stating what “I say” in opposition to what “They say”) but a full array of rhetorical inventions that can fulfill Aristotle’s vision of “the ability to discover in each particular case all available means of persuasion.”

What makes this approach so appealing is that linguistic forms have demonstrated the pedagogical power to generate content time and time again, starting with the man who is no doubt the author of the very first composition textbook (or certainly the most popular composition textbook, the Graff/Birkenstein and Lunsford/Ruszkiewicz of his day) and at the same time creator of the first rhetorical formula, Aristotle himself. His *On Rhetoric* is a virtual recipe (a term that calls to mind Plato's description of rhetoric in *The Phaedrus* as "cookery," perhaps the very first criticism of writing formulas), a step-by-step formula that is still used in composition textbooks today.

First, Aristotle presents the forms that generative content: the types of proof (artistic and inartistic); next are the means of persuasion (ethos, pathos, logos); third is the famed "rhetorical triangle," specifically, "a speaker and a subject on which he speaks, and someone addressed, and the objective (or *telos*) of the speech that relates to the last (I mean the hearer)" (47). Fourth are the three branches (or "genera") of rhetoric (deliberative or legislative, judicial or forensic, and demonstrative or epideictic or ceremonial) along with the time frames of each (the future, past, and present respectively) as well as the purpose of each (the advantageous and harmful, just and unjust, and honorable and shameful respectively). And finally, Aristotle sets forth the two primary sections of the essay (or speech), the form that determines both the organization of the content and the content itself:

There are two parts to a speech; for it is necessary [first] to state the subject with which it is concerned and [then] to demonstrate the argument... Of these parts, the first is the statement [prosthesis], the other the proof [pistis], just as if one made the distinction that one part is the problem, the other the demonstration. (*On Rhetoric* 230)

Aristotle then proceeds to flesh out his thesis support model by proposing an arrangement (that is not far removed from the five-paragraph essay) – first, the *Prooimion* or Introduction; next, ways of meeting a prejudicial attack or *diabolē*; third, the *diēgēsis* or narration, a “leading through of the facts”; fourth, the *pistis* or proof; fifth, the *erōtēsis* or interrogation; and finally the *epilogos* or conclusion, “the claim that one has performed what one has promised” (231-250). It would be difficult to imagine a current textbook that did not focus on these Aristotelian ingredients, the form and content that must be evident in an argument paper.

This is not to say that there have not been modifications, adjustments, and additions to the Aristotelian formula, many of which are also reflected in many of today’s textbooks on how to write an argument essay. Two are particularly noteworthy in terms of their reliance on formulas to achieve their pedagogical purposes.

- **The Toulmin Model.** Stephen Toulmin expanded on a formula for making and supporting claims with his 6-part system consisting of the following:
 - ✓ First, making the claim or “the position or claim being argued for”;
 - ✓ Second, establishing the “grounds or reasons and supporting evidence that bolster the claim”;
 - ✓ Third, creating the “warrant or the principle, provision or chain of reasoning that connects the grounds/reason to the claim”;
 - ✓ Fourth, developing the “backing or support, justification, and reasons to back up the warrant”;
 - ✓ Fifth, exploring any “rebuttal or reservation, that is exceptions to the claim along with a description and rebuttal of counter-examples and counter-arguments”; and finally,

- ✓ Sixth, setting forth the “qualifications or specification of limits to the claim, warrant and backing” (San Diego State University).

The “pedagogical imperative” of the Toulmin system of logical argument, then, is clear: students write successful argument essays by following the prescribed formula.

- **The Rogerian “Nonconfrontational” Model.** “In simple terms, psychologist Carl Rogers argued that people involved in disputes should not respond to each other until they could fully, fairly, and even sympathetically state the other person’s position” (*Everything’s an Argument* 126). His formula emphasizes achieving mutual agreement based on the following:

- ✓ First, on an Introduction that shows “you fully understand and respect any alternative positions”;¹⁵¹
- ✓ Second, on the “Contexts in which alternative positions may be valid”;
- ✓ Third, on the “Writer’s Position” or a “statement of your position including the contexts in which that opinion would be valid”; and finally
- ✓ Fourth, on the “Benefits to opponent or an explanation of how they would benefit from adopting your position.” (*Everything’s an Argument* 126)

Again, the Rogerian method offers the promise of a successful essay, that is one creating grounds for agreement, by following the steps of the formula.

The purpose of the above outline of various writing formulas from Aristotle to Rogers is not to promote them as necessarily recommended FYC pedagogies but only to establish that many

¹⁵¹ Roger’s method of “fully understanding and accepting alternative positions” seems to be another way of constructing Peter Elbow’s “believing game,” a strategy for “overcoming dissonance” produced by what he considers to be the more prevalent strategy in academic writing, namely the “doubting game” (162 ff.).

believe successful pedagogies are, in fact, based on teaching writing formulas, and furthermore that these formulas are in direct support of the argument model of essay writing.

Based on this evidence, it's not surprising that other formulas for writing argument essays have gained some popularity. In particular, the longevity of the frequently vilified Five Paragraph Essay becomes more understandable in spite of the decades-long attacks against it. Indeed, the fact that it still exists after such long-lasting and vehement attacks indicates that perhaps there may actually be something worthwhile about this formula even though just about every article that attempts to discredit the five-paragraph essay makes many of the same points:

- Adherence to the form results in writing that is “perfunctory,” while “the intense drilling and emphasis on correctness stunts both the quality of writing and student interest in it” (Tremmel 32).
- The form produces “neurotic activity” (Emig 99); and/or an “army camp” approach to teaching composition (Strenski 139); and/or a “cookie-cutter” product (Tremmel 33); and/or a “jug to fill up” (shades of Freire’s “banking model”) (Naff and Schnauffer 103); and/or a “procrustean formula” (Anderson 302); and/or a “paint-by-number” approach that limits creativity (Nelson 58).
- The form results in essays that are like “a cucumber raised in the confines of a square container that takes on an unnatural shape. It’s still a cucumber, but its potential has been robbed by the constraint of abnormal cultivation” (Nunnally 69).
- “The rigidity of the five-paragraph theme dissuades students from practicing the rhetorical analysis necessary for them to become critical thinkers” (Wesley 58).
- “It is a spirit killer” (Warner).

More examples of five-paragraph-essay-bashing would probably be superfluous. But the overall complaint is clear: what George Hillocks, Jr. calls an “obsession with form” is detrimental to student writing (“Focus on Form” 238).¹⁵² More specifically, “knowledge of form does not translate into the strategies and skills necessary to wrest from the subject matter the ideas that make up a piece of writing” (“Focus” 238). In short, form is antithetical to content, or in the words of Hillocks’s essay title, the issue is one of “form *versus* content” (my emphasis).

A closer look, however, reveals that form may actually enable content rather than repress it. For example, Stanley Fish frames the issue entirely differently from the critics of writing formulas. According to Fish, what composition teachers need to do is to “drill students in the forms that enable meaning... What students must learn are the forms; the content will follow” (“What Should Colleges Teach? Part 2”). Or put another way, what students must learn is how the form produces the content. So, for example, in the case of the five-paragraph essay, if the focus is entirely on the form rather than the content produced by the form, an instructor can be confronted by a student who, when faced with an assignment requiring a seven to nine-page comparative analysis of two novels, implores “How can I fit seven pages into five paragraphs?” (Wesley 57).

In fact, this seems to be the underlying problem with the five-paragraph essay—its apparent unyielding demand that restricts the paper to five paragraphs (the form) instead of what the five-paragraph form is supposed to produce—namely, the content, that is a thesis, followed by support for the thesis, and a conclusion, which might be noted, taken as a whole, is the essence of the Aristotelian form and the basic structure of the argument essay. In short, many

¹⁵² In many ways it is ironic that Hillocks criticizes writing formulas when he himself promotes them, specifically his “Environmental Mode” featuring “clear and specific objectives, materials and problems.” (“What Works” 144, 145). Hillocks claims that this structured approach “is over three times more effective than the process mode” (160).

complaints about the five-paragraph essay seem to be readily resolved by simply renaming the form as the “five-*section* essay” instead of the “five-*paragraph*” essay.¹⁵³

What seems apparent is that following the form will yield at least a semblance of the desired content. In other words, if the form prescribes that the content of the first paragraph/section is to be a thesis statement, then the fact that the form calls for five, seven, ten or more paragraphs/sections will not affect the outcome—a form that calls for a thesis statement is much more likely to produce such content than, say, a form (for example, the process model) that calls for free-writing exercises or a narrative description such as the daily themes required by Harvard’s English A in which the students had to write about “Things that they have lately seen in and about Cambridge, glimpses of the college life here and there, little episodes of their everyday life—these are what they must try to reproduce in one-page sketches...” (Copeland and Rideout 7).

It should, then, come as no surprise that simply a change in perspective can dramatically influence whether forms are seen as a positive or negative influence on writing content. We have already seen in the chapter on grammar how grammatical forms can, to quote Fish “enable meaning” and act as a means of invention rather than an impediment to it. And a little digging reveals even more evidence of how the power of forms can create meaning, particularly highly conventional forms such as those explored by J. L. Austin in *How to Do Things With Words* in which Austin develops the concept of a “performative” sentence and its ability to enact the very thing it is describing: “the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action” such as the pronouncement of marriage, the naming of a ship, or the establishment of a will (5).¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Many textbooks actually teach the six-paragraph (or six-section) essay, which adds a paragraph/section on a rebuttal or refutation before moving on to the conclusion.

¹⁵⁴ It quickly becomes clear that Austin is referring not just to individual words but rather to sentences, phrases, and clauses so the title of his book should really be, *How to Do Things with Formulas*.

At first glance, then, the language involved in these ceremonies noted by Austin consists simply of declarative sentences (“I now pronounce you...; “I hereby christen you...”; “Being of sound mind, I willfully and voluntarily make this declaration...”), but a closer look reveals that the reality of these events occurs only when the prescribed form is uttered by the prescribed person in the prescribed context, resulting in “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (6). Before the utterance, there is no marriage, the ship is nameless, and there is no beneficiary. After the utterance, the couple is legally married, the ship has a name, and the beneficiary has the property. Or to put the case more formally, “There must be an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, the procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances” (26).¹⁵⁵ So, for example, “I now pronounce you husband and wife” is the formula that creates the existence of something called “marriage”; without the form, there is no marriage. Similarly, in the case of writing formulas, the phrase “My claim is that ...” is the linguistic form that creates an argument (the “I say” response to “They say” call, to put the process in terms of a traditional “call and response” African-American worship service). In short, without the argument form, there is no argument content.

This discussion of the power of form to create content constitutes the basis for what is probably the most explicit and detailed writing formula textbook yet designed for teaching first-year composition and more specifically the writing of argument essays—*They Say/I Say: The*

¹⁵⁵ Note that the prescribed utterance must also be issued by a prescribed source (a licensed minister, ship’s captain, etc.) in a prescribed context (two people who have stated their intent to be married) Similar requirements exist for other performance formulas such as ship christenings, baptisms, and wills. In certain circumstances, the smallest deviation from the formula will negate its performative power. A recent example is a Roman Catholic priest who uttered the wrong formula for baptisms—instead of “I baptize you...,” the priest used the phrase “We baptize you...” As a result of this error, every baptism performed by that the priest had to be redone because only the phrase “I baptize you...” can produce a Christian. One article pointed out that “The mistake goes beyond baptism. Because baptism is a sacrament that opens the door to others, an individual improperly baptized may need to repeat some or all of the other sacraments such as marriage, confirmation, and even priestly ordination” (Salcedo).

Moves that Matter in Academic Writing (TS/IS) by the husband/wife team of Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein (G/B), now in its fifth edition (2021) after making its first appearance in 2008. Perhaps not surprisingly, *TS/IS* came under almost immediate attack for the same reasons formulas have always been criticized. As G/B themselves summarize the “they say” side of the anti-formula argument:

One of the least-examined assumptions among academics today is that being “formulaic” — using established formulas to structure thought — is always a bad thing. In the field of rhetoric and composition, to say that a mode of writing instruction is formulaic is to charge it with having a “cookie cutter” quality: the student writer presumably inserts raw material into a mold, and the product automatically comes out, no thought required. (“In Teaching Composition” 18)

Following their own formula, G/B then proceed to rebut to their critics with their “I say” response, which is in fact another way of stating Kenneth Burke’s iconic metaphor that imagines academic argument as taking place in a parlor where “others are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about” (the “They say”); however, “once you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar” (the “I say”) (*Philosophy* 110-111). As G/B explain the value of the “parlor” metaphor (as opposed to an unprovoked claim),

The downside of this thesis/evidence formula, however, is that it has the student perform those important maneuvers in an isolation booth, without engaging other people. Thus, it bypasses one of the most important rhetorical requirements: that we enter the social fray, presenting what others have said not as an afterthought or as mere support for our own

argument, but as our argument's motivating source, its very reason for being. ("In Teaching Composition" 19)

Finally, continuing to adhere to their own formulaic model, G/B introduce an interlocutor whom they call a "naysayer" (*TS/IS* 78), in this case one Mark Wiley who (according to G/B) argues that formulas "force premature closure on complicated issues and stifle ongoing exploration ("In Teaching Composition" 21)."¹⁵⁶ Again following their formula ("Answer Objections" *TS/IS* 87), they promptly challenge Wiley's "complication" argument by "offering formulas to complicate the argument ("Of course, the problem is far more complicated than...") as the most effective way to help students complicate in the ways Wiley and most of us want" ("In Teaching Composition" 21). To make their conclusion specific, G/B use formulas to generate an essay, the content of which is an argument for those very formulas.

Clearly, the G/B formulas as laid out in *TS/IS* represent a powerful means to generate the content required in an argument essay as G/B demonstrate in their own writing. However, this is as far as their formulas go, ignoring the concerns of the anti-agonistic scholars, a position that G/B seem to have no interest in addressing. As Jasper Neel puts it, in the "argument culture" of G/B and *TS/IS*, "somebody has to win, somebody has to be right. And the winners are not gentle with the losers" (*RSQ* 89), as evidenced in Graff's own response to Tannen: "(Her) pages often border on 'frontal assault', with their hard-edged, disputatious style" (*Clueless* 89-90), a characteristic that Graff takes to be a virtue.

¹⁵⁶ Wiley responded to G/B's attempt to place him on their list of those who suffer from "formulaphobia" by stating, quite accurately, that G/B quote him entirely out of context ("Mixing"). In fact, he agrees with G/B that along with good formulas there are bad ones that "produce arguments that are disengaged and decontextualized, severed from any social mission or context" (*Style* 19). In his essay, he makes this distinction by calling out the "Jane Schaffer Method" as an example of a "bad formula" ("Popularity" 61).

This approach, according to Neel, is troubling, declaring that argument culture proponents like G/B “would, in my opinion, do well to learn to hear in a register where the trouble is audible” (*RSQ* 90), a response that G/B find not just unnecessary but actually detrimental to academic writing. To reprise an earlier Graff response to Tannen’s complaint “that college students are advised to look for someone to attack in order to generate a paper topic,” he replies, “I can only say, ‘Would that it were so!’” (*Clueless* 91). It’s clear that if writing formulas are to generate the kind of content that Tannen, Neel, and other anti-agonists, heuristicsians, and hermeneuticians are looking for, the ones proposed by G/B in *TS/IS* must be revised and even overhauled. But in order to accomplish those changes, it will be helpful to determine exactly what the outcome of that move should be.

To quote the old cliché, the best place to begin is usually at the beginning, and that is precisely where the G/B *TS/IS* model begins to show its weaknesses—at the very beginning. Specifically, their claim that “presenting what others have said, not as an afterthought or as mere support for our own argument, but as our argument’s motivating source, its very reason for being” is adequate only in terms of providing a formula for an argument. In other words, the formula that G/B present (what they call the “Ur-formula”) as something of a revelation is actually a mere truism—it’s impossible to have an argument without having something to argue about and somebody to argue with. And that is the only thing that G/B’s formula provides—a claim (and claimants) they don’t agree with.

The question that they don’t consider, perhaps because their formulas do not generate it, is why anyone should care about the argument that the formula launches. In other words, while the formula may create the content of the argument (what “I say” as opposed to what “They say”), nowhere does it generate, or even attempt to generate, a reason for engaging in the

argument itself. In short, it fails the “so what, who cares?” test. Just because G/B claim that the formula generates the “motivating source” for their argument—“its very reason for being”—doesn’t mean that it actually does.

In fact, what’s generally considered to be the “motivating source” for an argument is the development of the “rhetorical situation,” a term that G/B avoid or at least never consider. Nonetheless, they implicitly endorse what seems to have become almost the standard definition provided by Lloyd Bitzer in his classic essay, “The Rhetorical Situation.” Bitzer equates the rhetorical situation to scientific inquiry, “the characteristics of situations that inspire scientific thought” and even to poetry, “the context in which poetry comes into existence,” a phrasing (“existence”) that brings to mind “exigency,” another term for the rhetorical situation (1).

For Bitzer, exigency (or the rhetorical situation) is “the situation that calls discourse into existence,” and if a situation calls discourse into existence, it follows, according to Bitzer, that “the presence of rhetorical discourse obviously indicates the presence of a rhetorical situation” (2). In short, “rhetoric is situational” (3). This is clearly the G/B position (even though they never explicitly acknowledge it): the “They say” claim is the “situation” that brings into existence the “I say” response and establishes discourse. Broadly speaking, the Graff-Birkenstein-Bitzer position is the same as Burke’s metaphorical parlor: visitors to the parlor are motivated to respond to the discourse that they hear there.

Unfortunately for Graff-Birkenstein-Bitzer-Burke, they ignore an obvious problem: who says (other than the person claiming the existence of a rhetorical situation, an exigency) that one actually exists? We have only Graff-Birkenstein-Bitzer-Burke’s claims (or whoever is advancing an argument using the G/B formula) that the situation they are reacting to (“They say”) is important enough to require a response (“I say”). In short, they seem to “regard meaning as

intrinsic to the thing that has it... Meaning emanates, so to speak, from the thing” (Blumer 3-4). This stance, however, presents an “anomaly,” or in philosophical terms an *aporia*, or “an irresolvable internal contradiction or logical disjunction in a text, argument, or theory” (*Oxford On-Line Language Dictionary*) because what Graff-Birkenstein-Bitzer assume is “an ethical imperative supposedly independent of its observers” (Vatz 156) may actually be anything but.

According to Richard Vatz, Bitzer’s self-appointed interlocutor and nay-sayer, there is no support for this assumption of independence but in fact just the opposite. According to Vatz, “meaning is not discovered in situations but created by rhetors” (157), and Graff-Birkenstein-Bitzer-Burke, along with others who make up the “the lofty and lucrative industry of argumentative writing pedagogy” (Haynes 674) do not seem to recognize this fact, namely, that “the rhetor is responsible for what he (*sic*) chooses to make salient” (Vatz 158). Vatz explains the *aporia*/anomaly as follows:

I would not say “rhetoric is situational” (Bitzer 3), but situations are rhetorical; not that “...exigence strongly invites utterance” (Bitzer 5), but utterance strongly invites exigence; not “the situation controls the rhetorical response... (Bitzer 6), but rhetoric controls the situational response; not “rhetorical discourse obtains its character-as-rhetorical from the situation which generates it” (Bitzer 3), but situations obtain their character from the rhetoric which surrounds them or creates them. (Vatz 159)

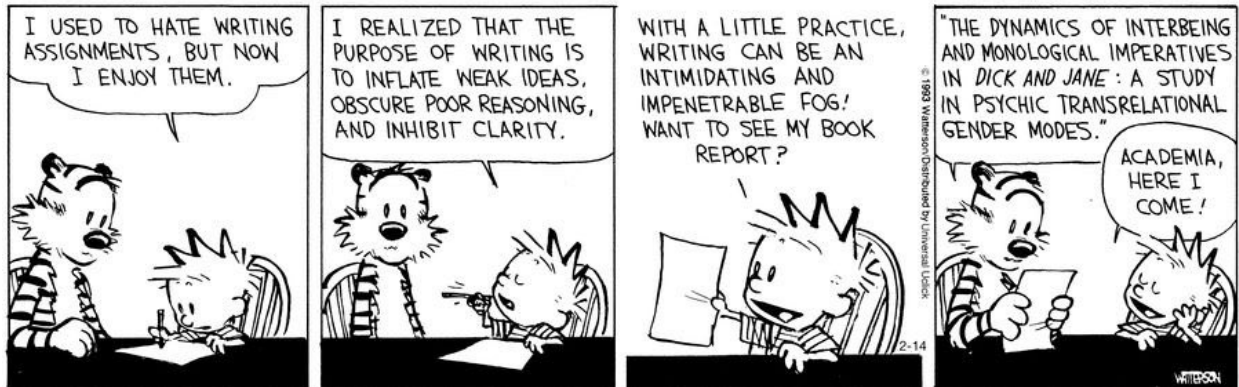
As an example, Vatz presents the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, comparing the “exigence” of this crisis to the calm that greeted the establishment of a Russian nuclear submarine base in the Cuban port city of Cienfuegos eighteen years later. The difference? Kennedy’s creation of a “rhetorical situation” in 1963, whereas Nixon could find no such “exigence” in 1970. In short, there is no “exigence” inherent in Russian missiles located just a few miles from Miami.

In summary, then, what G/B must do is recognize that the situation presented by “They say” does not “control the rhetorical response” (“I say”), but that the rhetorical response (“I say”) controls the situation. To restate Vatz’s argument, “meaning is not discovered in situations but created by rhetors.” What’s needed, then, is a form (or formula) that can generate this kind of academic writing rather than rely on the restrictive forms of the argument essay.

The Future, Part II: Academic Writing, A New Formula for FYC Pedagogy

And after the fire a still small voice.
1 Kings 19:11-12

“First glance/Closer look” makes writing –
and reading - so much better.
Jonathan D. Rash, OU FYC Student



“An intimidating and impenetrable fog.”
Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*

If there are differences of opinion between academics and the general public (including the popular press) regarding the value of rhetoric as a desirable human endeavor (the former with a generally positive view, the latter a mostly negative one—see the discussion above, “Foreword: Ethos – An Example of a Lived Rhetorical Life”), the two sides seem to have joined forces to form an apparent consensus about the state of “academic writing,” with all sides expressing general disdain, condemnation, and even contempt.

For example, a well-known critic of academic writing was himself a renowned academic, the late Brown University English language and literature scholar Robert Scholes who, in an MIT lecture, asked whether academic writing is a “euphemism or an oxymoron.” As he explains the situation, “The expression ‘academic writing’ sounds like it might be a gentle way of pointing to bad writing—writing that is not ‘real’ but something less than real, standing to real writing as Pidgin English might stand to real English, as a sort of dialect for communicating with the natives of Academe, who are incapable of using the standard version of the tongue” (MIT Lecture).

Scholes' low opinion of academic writing is reflected in the views of the non-academic citizenry where the prevailing reputation of academic writing is captured by Bill Watterson's wildly popular *Calvin and Hobbes*, which in its heyday boasted 3,160 published strips in more than 2,400 newspapers selling more than 30 million copies of the strip's collected works (Solomon). In the strip entitled "An intimidating and impenetrable fog," Calvin exults in his new-found ability to "inflate weak ideas, obscure poor reasoning, and inhibit clarity," which inspires him to proclaim, "Academia, here I come!"

Such criticism of academic writing seems to have attracted a long list of adherents, including professional journalists who have been quick to note what one writer for *The Atlantic* calls "habitual offenders of opaque writing" (Clayton). *The New York Times* has also taken up the cudgel featuring highly respected academics such as Patricia Nelson Limerick — University of Colorado history professor, MacArthur Fellow, and member of the National Council on the Humanities — who makes the rather categorical observation that there is "Trouble with Academic Prose," claiming that

While we waste our time fighting over ideological conformity in the scholarly world, horrible writing remains a far more important problem. For all their differences, most right-wing scholars and most left-wing scholars share a common allegiance to a cult of obscurity. Left, right, and center all hide behind the idea that unintelligible prose indicates a sophisticated mind... University presses have certainly filled their quota every year, in dreary monographs, tangled paragraphs, and impenetrable sentences.¹⁵⁷

In addition to Limerick, even a scholar of Martha Nussbaum's stature deigns to take a shot at her colleague Judith Butler, whom she appears to have placed as a target in what seems to be the

¹⁵⁷ Ironically, the Calvin and Hobbes cartoon makes almost exactly the same point, but much more strongly and with far fewer words.

“bad academic writer’s barrel.” Setting forth her concerns in a February 1999 article in *The New Republic*, Nussbaum opines, “It is difficult to come to grips with Butler’s ideas because it is difficult to figure out what they are... Her written style is ponderous and obscure.”¹⁵⁸

Nussbaum was not alone, for 1999 was a banner year for Butler-bashing within public forums like *The New Republic* as well as academic journals like *Philosophy and Literature*. At first glance a seemingly obscure little academic publication (print circulation 158 according to its website), when *Philosophy and Literature* announced the winners of its fourth annual “Bad Writing Contest” in its January 1999 issue (Judith Butler as the grand prize winner and Homi K. Bhabha the runner-up), it unleashed what turned out to be a publishing tsunami of almost unimaginable magnitude, generating wave after wave of intense interest from both academic and general interest publications stretching from the United States to the whole of the British empire, engulfing Ireland and even New Zealand (home to *Philosophy and Literature*’s editor), all eager to report on the embarrassing and therefore newsworthy prospect of academics whose prose apparently could not withstand the high school teacher’s red-pen test.

The contest produced a virtual tidal wave of essays including a collection edited by Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb, one of which calls attention to the numerous articles about the contest that “have graced the pages of the *New Republic*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and the *London Review of Books*” (1): *The New Republic*’s contribution of Nussbaum’s attack on Judith Butler has already been noted; *The Wall Street Journal* recruited *Philosophy and Literature*’s editor Denis Dutton, who weighed in with an article entitled “Language Crimes: A Lesson in

¹⁵⁸ The controversy surrounding Butler’s prose eventually reached such a fever pitch that Butler had apparently finally had enough and wrote a response in *The New York Times*, “A ‘Bad Writer’ Bites Back,” from all accounts a well-written piece.

How Not to Write, Courtesy of the Professoriate”; while the *London Review of Books* entry is somehow inaccessible.

Even the *New York Times* decided to catch the wave generated by what might be called “the little magazine that could,” leading with a headline announcing that “ideas get lost in bad writing,” even extracting a nasty little quote from Edward Said, who, in spite of his presidency of the Modern Language Association and identification of Bhabha as an “admired and gifted friend,” admitted that there might be “something unfinished” about Bhabha’s ideas (Dinitia Smith). *The Chicago Tribune* could not be seen as ignoring this rising tide of what had become an important news development in the land of academe, so they added a bit of editorializing claiming that “Bhabha’s writing can be evocative of the kind of term paper that has long inspired teachers to grab a red pen and fill the margins with scrawled comments such as ‘Can’t you just say this in plain English?’” (Grossman), an image clearly not designed to enhance Bhabha’s reputation.

Even newspapers in the British empire couldn’t resist the flood of articles issuing from the press in the former colonies, with the *Irish Times* reporting the incident as a case of “Bad Blood Over Bad Writing”; *The Guardian*, which calls itself the “UK’s most trusted news publisher,” announcing that the contest was an example of what they called “The world’s worst writing... celebrating the most stylistically lamentable passages found in scholarly books and articles”; *The National Post of Canada* deciding that the contest represented “The Best of Bad Writing” (Paula Simons); and the Canadian on-line magazine *The Walrus, Canada’s Conversation* agonizing over the fact, as they reported it, that the contest was an example of “What Academics Revel in—Bad Writing” (Sweet).

Not to be outdone, and probably not a surprise given that “Bad Academic Writing” is in fact a “local” story occurring, as authors of British police procedurals would say, on its “own patch,” the academic press, led by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, discovered that “bad academic writing” was a topic requiring its on-going attention. The *Chronicle’s* coverage of *Philosophy and Literature’s* momentous contest began with a January 1999 news story reporting the fact that “Two Noted Literary Scholars Win Annual Bad Writing Contest” and finished their coverage in October with an opinion piece “In Praise of ‘Bad’ Academic Writing” (Mieszkowski).

Several years later, they revived the topic, first in 2005 with an apparently instructional piece on “Becoming a Stylish Writer” that quoted a former president of the American Historical Association warning about “writing that keeps readers out rather than inviting them in, making the discipline accessible to only a small group” (Toor); then again in 2016, the article “Coming Down from the Clouds: On Academic Writing” reported on the following “now standard critique of academic writing” by Naomi Wolf and Sacha Kopp who commented, “The transmission of our ideas is routinely hampered... by a great deal of peer-oriented jargon” (Neem); and yet again in 2017-2018 with a three-part series dedicated to determining why “Ph.D.’s Are Still Writing Poorly”—answer: “They have been trained to write in the ways that had tormented them as graduate students, writing dense and impenetrable sentences” (Toor).

The crown jewel (or “the crest,” to avoid mixing metaphors) of the *Chronicle’s* coverage, however, has to be Steven Pinker’s 2014 entry “Why Academic Writing Stinks” in which he asks why academic writers “turn out prose that is turgid, soggy, wooden, bloated, clumsy, obscure, unpleasant to read, and (*apparently running out of synonyms in his thesaurus*) impossible to understand.” He offers three possible answers: first is a “cynical” one, which he ascribes to

critics outside the academy, namely that bad writing is a “deliberate choice,” serving to “dress up the trivial and obvious with the trappings of scientific sophistication, hoping to bamboozle their audiences with highfalutin gobbledygook”¹⁵⁹; second is one he calls “self-serving” preferred by those inside the academy, specifically that “difficult writing is unavoidable because of the abstractness and complexity of the subject matter”; and the third possibility is one that “shifts the blame to entrenched authority, the gatekeepers of journals and university presses who insist on ponderous language” forcing apparently powerless academics into a position where they “have no choice but to write badly.” Unfortunately, the bubble that Pinker decides to mark among his three multiple-choice options seems to be a fourth, previously unlisted choice, the ever-popular “none of the above,” finally settling on the tenuous and poorly supported conclusion: “Based on classical economics and Skinnerian psychology (neither of which he bothers to explain), there are few incentives for writing well.” In short, turning out good writing is hard work, and professional academics “may not bother with this costly self-improvement if their profession doesn’t reward it. And by and large, academe does not.”

Apparently sensing that “bad academic writing” has the power of a popular topic that cannot be stopped, other academic journals and imprints yielded to this irresistible torrent. *Linga Franca*, for example, unleashed political science professor James Miller, director of liberal studies at the New School’s Graduate Faculty, to ask the question, “Is Bad Writing Necessary?” in which he creates two sides of the issue which he then pits against each another. One side is represented by such “academic luminaries as Judith Butler, Jonathan Arac, Michel Foucault, and

¹⁵⁹ This quote appears to be a veiled yet obvious reference to the so-called “Sokal Hoax” that occurred when New York University Professor of Physics Alan D. Sokal wrote an article “Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity” that was published as part of a special “Science Wars” issue in the cultural studies journal *Social Text*. As it turned out, the article was a hoax perpetrated by Sokal to “expose the sloppiness, absurd relativism, and intellectual arrogance of ‘certain precincts of the academic humanities’” (Ruark).

Theodor Adorno,” who “distrust linguistic transparency” because it “cripples one’s ability to think about the world more radically.” As Adorno elaborates, “lucidity, objectivity, and concise precision are merely ideologies that have been invented by editors and then writers for their own accommodation.” The other side—with Russell Jacoby, Katha Pollitt, Alan Sokal, and “patron saint George Orwell” in the lineup—is “intolerant of bewildering jargon and cannot see how deliberately difficult prose can possibly help change the world.”

Another academic journal that addressed the bad academic writing issue is *LIT*: *Literature Interpretation Theory* (publishing, according to its website, “forceful interpretations of a wide range of literary texts, covering psychoanalytic theory, structuralism, post-structuralism, gender theory and more”) with an article by Robert Con Davis-Undiano reporting on a “possible turning point in academic life” (and perhaps a compromise) citing Michael Bérubé’s call for “academics to present their work so that a general audience could read it” along with “pleas” by Jane Tompkins and Nancy K Miller “for a simpler kind of writing” (359). He concludes by citing a call from John B. Thompson (sociology professor at the University of Cambridge and a fellow of Jesus College) for a “willingness to move beyond the field of academic publishing and publish different kinds of books for different kinds of markets” (370), essentially asking academics to become more like “public intellectuals” who can “write in a quasi-magazine style” and “make academic writing understandable, and safe, for nonspecialists by eliminating insider jargon and convoluted sentence construction (361).” Unfortunately, Con Davis’s plan may be an example of what Stanley Fish believes is just one more reason “Why We Can’t All Just Get Along”—the two sides are irrevocably locked in opposing positions.

Other contributions by the academic press include an entry in *Theory’s Empire: An Anthology of Dissent* by D. G. Myers, professor of English at Texas A&M University, who takes

up the side of James Miller's "anti-jargon" team of Jacoby, Pollitt, Sokal, and "patron saint George Orwell" with another round of Butler-bashing.¹⁶⁰ Referring to what he calls Judith Butler's "simultaneous contempt for her readers and an absolute dependence on their good opinion," Myers claims that "academic writing wasn't supposed to be this way. Even at its most stylistically absurd, it was supposed to seek truth. Instead, what we have in academic writing nowadays is the circulation of authority..." (356). "The problem, finally," Myers concludes, "is not that academic writing is 'ugly' and 'stylistically awful'. It's rather that bad academic writing conceals the political reality of contemporary universities..." (358).

Clearly, the decades beginning just before the millennium were a high-water mark for the debate over the quality of academic writing. But while 1999 and the beginning of the twenty-first century may have marked the crest of criticism of academic writing, it was certainly not the first time that academic writing has been submerged under critical¹⁶¹ scrutiny. So while at first glance, the timeline of these articles from both within and outside the university focusing on this "Sturm und Drang" of bad academic writing might lead to a conclusion that the topic is a relatively recent one, prompted as some authors believe by the opposing political leanings of the two sides (according to the "bad writers" [Butler *et al.*], the accusations seem to originate from those on the right targeting those with left-leaning political ideologies). However, such a conclusion might not be entirely accurate or at least not complete. As Dinitia Smith points out in her *New York Times* article, "making fun of academic writing is part of a long tradition." Indeed,

¹⁶⁰ One writing scholar has come to the defense of Butler's "rhetorical adeptness" (Birkenstein 273). According to Birkenstein, "far from breaking from recognized standards of intelligibility, Butler's writing conforms to those standards in ways that are missed by both her detractors and most of her defenders... (I)t would not have had the wide impact it has had were it not for its ability to consistently make recognizable arguments that readers can identify, summarize, and debate" (273).

¹⁶¹ A break in the "fourth wall": I wonder just how long I can keep up this aquatic metaphor!

the list of articles about bad academic writing stretch back far earlier than the articles culled from recent journals and the university press.

For example, in 1911, Columbia University English professor Brander Matthews complained about academics who jump from “the quagmire of belleslettristic trifling into the abyss of pedantry”; and, in language reminiscent of Nussbaum’s criticism of Butler, he observes that these wayward academics produce writing that consists of “... facts (that) are in there somewhere, if we can only find them, but they are likely to be commingled with other facts and other ideas, with endless quotations and endless citations and endless references” (424).

One of Lord Chesterfield’s “Letters to His Son” (number XXX) is an even earlier example (1748), warning his progeny about “pedants who adorn their conversation by happy quotations of Greek and Latin..., which they improperly and impertinently retail in all companies in hopes of passing for scholars.” And still much earlier, in 423 BCE, Aristophanes ridiculed the philosophers of his day, depicting them as “lost in airy, arcane pursuits that had no bearing on the needs, aspirations, and lives of most citizens” (Neem). And in *The Clouds*, “Aristophanes mocks Socrates for his technical language” (Smith, *New York Times*). Therefore, given this history, no one can say that complaints about “bad academic writing” are a recent phenomenon. No, this skepticism about the quality of academic writing appears to have been in development for many years, in fact for centuries and even eons, by the “best and brightest” minds representing both the civilian citizenry and denizens of the academy.

Gerald Graff provides yet another opposing opinion that the current kerfuffle over bad academic writing is a relatively recent phenomenon:

“Today one hears the complaint that theorists (hide) behind smoke screens of esoteric terminology, turning their backs on outsiders, including most students, and carry on

endless private conversations with other theorists... However, the sins for which theorists are blamed today are the same ones for which ‘traditional literary study’ was attacked when *it* was thought to be an assault on tradition.” (*Criticism* 62, emphasis Graff)

It seems that the history of perceived bad academic writing, then, is yet another example of the famous “words of the Preacher (King James version, or “the Teacher,” New Revised Standard version): ‘There is nothing new under the sun’” (*Ecclesiastes* 1:9).

But what of the impact of this long-term criticism? Is it just a curious phenomenon of interest only to those with ties to the academy, or are there more serious consequences that may not at first glance be immediately evident? Certainly, there don’t seem to be many articles in either the general or academic press reporting on any large-scale conversion by academics to more reader-friendly prose in response to the apparent consensus that such a conversion would be a welcome event. However, perhaps a more consequential but not at all obvious effect of this general lack respect for both academic writing and, perforce, academic writers, is the fact that instruction in academic writing seems to have suffered from neglect particularly in the first-year composition classroom, perhaps reflecting general agreement by the composition community with one of Patricia Limerick’s students who made the complaint (possibly apocryphal), “You are telling us not to write long, dull sentences, but most of our assigned reading is full of long, dull sentences.”

In other words, an obvious solution to the problem of bad academic writing is to avoid teaching academic writing altogether, at least in the first-year composition classroom, thereby eliminating the replication of the professoriate’s bad habits in the writing of their students, not to mention the disappearance of student complaints about the hypocrisy of their writing instructors. Such a conclusion seems to have infiltrated the entire field of first-year composition pedagogy,

which has become fixated, as noted above, on teaching argumentative prose rather than academic writing with its attendant risks of poor prose. In short, the goal of FYC is to produce “student citizens” not “student scholars.”

Given this general assault on academic writing from so many fronts over such an extended period of time and with such sustained and determined intensity, it might seem that to suggest, let alone to advocate that FYC reorder itself as the champion of academic writing might seem to be an entirely quixotic, even misguided quest. Fortunately, however, the inherent value of academic writing has not, it seems, been entirely washed away by the waves of popular and professional disdain and dissent. Indeed, the value of academic writing as the focus of first-year composition can be heard in some of the “still, small voices” of a few scholars of rhetoric and composition who recognize that teaching academic writing, however arcane it might initially appear, represents the most effective way to introduce students not only to the specialized world of the academy where they will spend their next four years, but also to what some see as the more practical, less intellectually oriented world outside the academy that most of them will inhabit for the rest of their lives after graduation. In fact, I would argue that the writing skills they need to excel in one are precisely the same as those required to be successful in the other, for as will be seen, the issues of the academy and the so-called “real world” are, in fact, very much one in the same.

This opinion that academic writing might actually be something of value worth teaching to college students first emerged in the aftermath of the “expressivist” movement, beginning in the early days of first-year composition at Harvard (“Who I Am, and Why I Came to Harvard?” [Copeland and Rideout, 4]), then reinforced at the 1966 Dartmouth Conference (“They learn about the fascination of living things...; the sense of loss; and inevitably about themselves” [Dixon 33]); and finally culminating in the late 1970s and early 1980s as represented by the work

of Peter Elbow, who might be seen as the “high priest” of expressivism (“Give your feelings and instincts their head” [*Writing without Teachers* 28]).

The publication of James Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality* might be as good an indicator as any to mark this transition, the movement away from the expressivist rhetoric of Elbow and Dartmouth and towards what he called “epistemic rhetoric,” the idea that (quoting Michael Leff’s “In Search of Ariadne’s Thread”) “rhetoric is a serious philosophical subject that involves not only the transmission but also the generation of knowledge,” a quote that might serve as a definition of “academic writing” (165). In short, “rhetoric is epistemic because knowledge itself is a rhetorical construct... Meaning emerges not from objective, disinterested, empirical investigation but from individuals engaging in rhetorical discourse... Knowledge, then, is a matter of mutual agreement...” (165-166). It seems almost natural, then, that these differences in rhetorical outlook would produce differences in pedagogies designed to teach them, and this conflict in pedagogical approaches came to be exemplified by the so-called on-going “debate” between Peter Elbow, the pro-expressivist champion of free-writing, and David Bartholomae, pro-academic/epistemic advocate and author of “inventing the university.”

In a broader sense, their debate centers on the differences between what Berlin calls “subjective rhetoric” where “truth is always discovered within, through an internal glimpse, an examination of the private inner world” (*Reality* 145) as opposed to “transactional,” or more specifically “epistemic rhetoric,” where “all knowledge is a linguistic construct” (165). To put this in a more pedagogical perspective, the challenge to writing teachers working in the “subjective school” is to help expressivist writers discover their “authentic”¹⁶² selves, achieved

¹⁶² As previously noted, a cynical view of “authentic” language is expressed by the quip, “(The) secret to success is sincerity. Once you learn how to fake that, you’ve got it made,” variously attributed to Jean Giraudoux, Groucho Marx, George Burns, and others. In short, “authentic writing,” like all forms of meaning, is a rhetorical invention.

through the “writing process” where the rhetorical function of invention depends almost exclusively on the practice of “free-writing.” In fact, according to Peter Elbow, there may not be a lot for writing teachers to do in a subjective school, as this approach features a “teacherless writing class where there is learning but no teaching” (*Writing without Teachers*, vii)—or more typically (actual schools that do not have teachers in the writing classroom regardless of its pedagogical persuasion are probably nonexistent), a class where the teacher is a “guide on the side,” where students are “at the center of the process, actively participating in thinking and discussing ideas while making meaning for themselves,” instead of a “sage on the stage” where “the professor is the central figure, the one who has the knowledge and transmits that knowledge to the students, who simply memorize the information and later reproduce it on an exam”¹⁶³ (King 30).

As thoroughly as the “guide on the side” mantra has permeated teacher colleges and FYC pedagogy, it has not been able to prevent the decline of expressivism, along with the presence of Peter Elbow, as a pedagogical force in the FYC classroom. But on the other hand, neither has Bartholomae and his call for students to “invent the university” been established as a dominant pedagogical force in its stead. There is no doubt that Elbow’s free-writing expressivism is no longer the preferred pedagogy in first-year composition classrooms. However, it seems that Bartholomae’s academic approach to writing (using “the language of university discourse” [“Inventing” 627]) has not fared much better, perhaps because he never really undertook a

¹⁶³ This explanation of the so-called “constructivist” form of pedagogy is a direct descendant (although unacknowledged in this citation) of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in which he sets forth his now iconic “banking model” where “education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories, and the teacher is the depositor... Libertarian education, on the other hand, reconciles the teacher-student contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students” (72). Another metaphor similar to Freire’s banking model is the “conduit theory” of communication positing that language consists of transmitting objective information from encoder to decoder—hence, the “conduit.” (Reddy 286-287).

project that attempted to develop precisely how students were expected to “invent the university,” how they could “appropriate, or be appropriated by a specialized discourse,” or what he meant when he said that students must “learn to speak our language... or dare to speak it or to carry off the bluff...” (624). For example, he presents part of a student composition (the “Clay Model” paper) as an example of a student who has “entered the discourse without successfully approximating it,” but nowhere does he indicate how the student might have been successful and avoid “being not so much trapped in a private language as he is shut out from one of the privileged languages...” (627-628).

It’s not that Bartholomae hasn’t diagnosed the “central problem of academic writing” as a matter of language, style, and form; he just isn’t able to provide an answer to the aforementioned pedagogical imperative (629), although he does provide some solace for both student writers and their teachers—“Leading students to believe that they are responsible for something new or original... is a dangerous and counterproductive practice” (632). But he doesn’t meet his own requirements for helping them solve this central problem, namely “to determine just what the community’s conventions are so that those conventions could be written out, ‘demystified’¹⁶⁴ and taught in our classrooms” (635).

He does, however, begin to develop what could have become a pedagogical strategy, specifically by suggesting that essays should be “framed and completed by a commonplace,” an “argument that complicates a ‘naïve’ assumption,” a move that “makes scholarly work possible” (640). He tries to explain this idea in a bit more detail: “the writer works against a conventional point of view represented by conventional phrases that the writer must then work against,” and

¹⁶⁴ This need to “demystify” academic writing is addressed at length by Gerald Graff in several of his books and essays, particularly the Preface to *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, “Demystifying Academic Conversation” (xvi). Graff’s contribution will be discussed later in this chapter.

even proceeds to produce what will become one of Graff and Birkenstein's templates, indeed their "uber template": "While most readers of _____ have said _____, a close and careful reading shows that _____"¹⁶⁵ to show how to accomplish that goal. However, at this point, having identified the problem and even begun to offer a solution, he abandons the project, reverting to prior generalized pronouncements about "the ability to imagine privilege" (641), the necessity of realizing that "something different is required when one writes for an academic classroom" (644-645), and the need to "establish authority and define rhetorically or stylistically a position from which one may speak" (645).

Perhaps recognizing the need for a more pedagogically grounded effort, Bartholomae and his colleague Anthony Petrosky (B/P) set out to write a book that "offers materials from a course that we have been teaching for several years (with) abundant examples of (their students') work..." (Preface pages unnumbered). This work, however, suffers from the same inadequate generalities that plague "Inventing the University."

They begin with what appears to be a straightforward personal narrative assignment: "Recall an experience from the last two years or so that strikes you as particularly significant, one that has changed the way you are or the way you think about things. Then, explain why this experience was significant. That is, explain how and why it affected you as it did" (32). As might be expected in a book devoted to teaching writing, B/P select an essay from a student who does not measure up to their expectations. He writes about his experience with his wrestling coach, concluding with the sentence, "If you work hard and follow the rules, things will get better and better" (33). According to B/P, this was a failing essay because its structure "does not

¹⁶⁵ Bartholomae does not claim ownership of this phrase, ascribing its invention to Fred Maine, a former graduate school professor, who presented it as a "machine" that his students could use when they were stuck for something to say (641). Unfortunately, Graff and Birkenstein don't acknowledge the prior appearance of their "uber template" in either Bartholomae's work or that of his former teacher.

represent an act of inquiry as inquiry is defined by the conventions of classroom discourse. The subject is consumed by the conventional *Boy's Life* narrative of struggle and success" (33).¹⁶⁶

Bartholomae and Petrosky can hardly contain their derision of this sentence that "is inappropriate for our purposes" (33). Again, they fall back on their unexplained advice to "try on other forms of authority, to speak with intellectual rather than moral authority" (34). It's obvious that the authors dislike and even disdain "single sentence aphorisms or Lessons on Life" that apparently appear frequently in their students' papers, but they provide no solutions. In fact, to the student who failed this writing assignment, the best that the authors can offer is the following response: "To the student who wrote the paper, we can say only, 'No, that's not it.'" (*Facts* 34).

Unfortunately, they don't report the student's reaction, but one can only suspect how the student might respond to such a brief, unreasoned, and some might even say rude dismissal of his work. After calming down, the student might well ask first, why "speaking with moral rather than intellectual authority" is unacceptable; second, why the essay's structure "does not represent an act of inquiry as inquiry is defined by the conventions of classroom discourse?"; and third, why is it such an inquiry is "inappropriate for our purposes" (34)? In fact, B/P's criticism of the paper can be subjected to their own assessment: they speak with a "moral rather than an intellectual authority"—the paper fails simply because B/P say that it does.

This incident is particularly bothersome because it seems to fly in the face of one of Bartholomae's own pronouncements – that the problem with student writing is their lack of "access to strategies for elaborating, commenting, connecting or drawing conclusions from what they read" (22). It seems that B/P fail to give students the very methods that they could use to at least start to avoid the errors that they find so disconcerting. In other words, students' "lack of

¹⁶⁶ The authors never provide a definition of what, precisely, represents an "act of inquiry as inquiry is defined by the conventions of classroom discourse."

access to strategies” requires a two-step response—first, to supply the strategies and then the access. Having access doesn’t matter if there are no strategies, and B/P fail to provide the strategies. Simply implying that the student lacks “a muscularity of mind” is hardly helpful (“Inventing” 34). It’s interesting to consider that these questions might not have been necessary, and the fate of this flummoxed student turned into a success story (or at least less of a failure story), had B/P suggested using their “machine” (which will become Graff and Birkenstein’s template) for breaking writer’s block, instead of relying on their weak and even pathetic response, “No, that’s not it; it’s inappropriate for our purposes” (34).

As disappointing as Bartholomae’s (and Petrosky’s) efforts might be in meeting the “pedagogical imperative” required to teach the kind of academic writing that they envision for their students (thus preventing a humiliating statement of surrender—“No, that’s not it”—in the face of prose that they find unacceptable), “Inventing the University” still represents a major development in the quest for a positive presentation of academic writing that can replace the negative view of academic writers as producers of prose so dense and esoteric that lesser mortals cannot begin to understand it, a style that features “unintelligible prose” that has become the subject of scorn and derision in both main-stream and academic media.

To fill in that gap between the principle of “inventing the university” and the praxis of actually teaching it, there should have been a stream of books, journal articles, and monograph titles commenting and expanding on Bartholomae’s article, including some attempts at a developing a pedagogy that seeks to implement his ideas. Indeed, such responses often follow the publication of a particularly influential article that try to suggest additional “lines of inquiry” (as British detectives like to say, at least in British crime fiction) that expand on, revise, or contest these prior efforts at creating knowledge. Surprisingly, there don’t seem to be any such

essays that revise, correct, or expand on Bartholomae's work.¹⁶⁷ Instead, the literature seems to leap directly to undiluted praise ("Its ["Inventing"] observations and suggestions come across as fresh and as though-provoking as ever..." [Bartholomae and Schilb 260]) for what is, no doubt, an important addition to the field, particularly first-year composition and basic writing. But a closer look reveals that more work should have been undertaken directed at creating a better, more complete, and indeed more useful approach to teaching academic writing, one that not only defines the term more adequately but also develops in some detail a pedagogy that could be used to actually instruct students how to produce academic writing, a project that Bartholomae fails undertake, let alone achieve.

What may have happened to interrupt what should have been the traditional outpouring of response to what was obviously an important, indeed foundational work—responses in the academic journals supporting his article, revising it, or contesting it—was the sudden eruption of critical pedagogy (already discussed in a previous chapter), powered by the equally if not more influential development of the so-called "social turn" and the subsequent focus on "civic engagement" (also subjected to prior analysis in this work). In addition, "Inventing the University" had the misfortune of being shelved in the "Basic Writing" section of composition literature, a fate for which Bartholomae must in large part assume much of the responsibility as

¹⁶⁷ These "interchanges" and "responses" to academic articles constitute one of the great joys of reading academic journals allowing insight into how scholars advance knowledge in the academy. For example, the "debate" between Bartholomae and Elbow generated five responses in the same issue that their discussion appeared in February 1996 issue of *CCC*. The summer 1998 publication of "What Ails Feminist Criticism?" in *Critical Inquiry* generated several responses, as did Maxine Hairston's 1982 *CCC* article "The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing," which is still generating comments and responses. And another "debate," this one in the March 1993 issue of *College English* over the role of literature in the composition classroom between Gary Tate and Erika Lindemann, generated multiple responses for three years throughout 1996. And the intense and widespread conversation surrounding the "Bad Writing Contest" has already been noted. Unfortunately, "Inventing the University" provoked no such interest among Bartholomae's colleagues.

he himself assigns his article to that camp in its final pages where he discusses such issues as the “problems of curricula designed to aid basic writers” (646); the fact that basic writers have “the key words but not the utterance” (647); the claim that “the inexperienced writer is left with a more fragmentary record of the comings and goings of academic discourse” (648); and finally, “the case of the student with the ability to imagine the general outline and rhythm of academic prose but without the ability to carry it out, to complete the sentences” (649). In short, after framing the discussion as an overall exploration of the unique demands of academic writing (“inventing the university”), Bartholomae seems to abandon this concept in favor of a much more narrowly focused audience. So despite the general admiration and even adulation of Bartholomae’s contribution, without the force of a “pedagogical imperative” with direct implications for teaching first-year composition, “Inventing the University” seems to have faded from making much if any impact on the FYC classroom.

The problem for the advancement of academic writing as a form to be studied and emulated by first-year college students was, and still is, the fact that those developments in the field of composition that have had the most impact on FYC pedagogy—namely, critical pedagogy and civic engagement—have little relationship to academic writing. While critical pedagogy and civic engagement are certainly valid forms of writing, they do not, generally speaking, reflect the nature, purpose, or form of academic writing. Academics—that is, the professoriate engaged in research in major colleges and universities—have certainly been known to voice their opinions on public policy issues, and in fact they are often called on by various journalists, reporters, and commentators to discuss their opinions on public issues and government policies, but these contributions are usually not considered part of an academic’s professional writing—that is, contributions to *The Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, radio

and TV programs, or the local newspaper are not typically considered to be part of an academic's portfolio submitted for tenure review or other avenues for academic and professional advancement and recognition.

For example, economists Drew Fudenberg (MIT), Philipp Strack (UC Berkeley), and Tomasz Strzalecki (Harvard) may all have publicly voiced their opinions regarding such civic issues as gun control, abortion, climate change, gay marriage, physician-assisted suicide, transgender acceptance, and even the relative state of the union under Donald Trump and Joe Biden, but when it comes to their status as academic professionals, it will be their jointly-authored article on "Speed, Accuracy, and the Optimal Timing of Choices" in the December 2018 issue of *The American Economic Review* in which they discuss "the solution to a problem of optimal sequential sampling, where the agent is uncertain of the utility of each action and pays a constant cost per unit time for gathering information" that will be more important in determining their reputation and standing with colleagues, tenure review committees, advancement boards, and hiring panels (3651). Likewise, it will be their students' contributions to economic discourse in the form of their papers and class discussion, not to issues in the public square, that will determine their grades in the classes taught by Professors Fudenberg, Strack, and Strzalecki.

In other words, Fudenberg's, Strack's, and Strzalecki's students must learn the nature, purpose, and form of academic writing and how to produce it. As Bartholomae would put it, they must "invent the economics branch of the university," to "speak the language" of their professors, "to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of (their) community" ("Inventing" 623). But without a pedagogical imperative to match Bartholomae's vague admonitions for students to "imagine privilege" and

“establish authority,” the chances of students acquiring the language that allows them to “invent the university” are slim indeed. Most will remain “mystified” by the demands of speaking “as a companion, a fellow researcher” (“Inventing” 625) and so become subject to B/P’s demeaning remarks, “To the student who wrote the paper, we can say only, ‘No, that’s not it.’”

If Bartholomae and Petrosky struggle to find ways to tell students precisely what the “it” is that they’re looking for, to create ways for students to “speak the language,” to “try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing,” in short to fulfill the “pedagogical imperative,” they can take heart in the knowledge that they aren’t the only ones with this problem. For example, most attempts to identify the nature of academic writing begin with the certain knowledge that, as George Lukács puts it, “the essay has a form which separates it, with the rigour of a law, from all other art forms” (2). However, in spite of the implied promise to identify the “law” that he seems so sure exists, any explicit prose to that end is sorely lacking in spite of one hundred and seventy-four pages that follow. Instead of soul *and* form (the title of his book), Lukács produces the soul but without the form. In short, what’s missing is the “pedagogical imperative.”

Other more recent attempts also lack much in the way of a “how to” component in their struggles with defining the art of academic writing. For example, Susan Peck MacDonald makes the unremarkable observation that “academic prose has evolved as a vehicle for constructing knowledge claims,” but again, her effort is remarkably lacking in setting forth precisely how a student might go about constructing such “knowledge claims” (9), thus arriving at about the same place as Bartholomae when he proclaims that students must “invent the university” but without providing any solid ideas about how to get that job accomplished. Similarly, although with even less evidence of specificity, Helen Sword sets forth to demonstrate, at least in her

subtitle, *How Successful Academics Write*, but she gives notice that she has absolutely no intention of actually delivering on that promise when she admits that “This book offers no ready-made blueprint for academic success” (x) and then proceeds to launch into the same logical fallacy of circular reasoning that infects other presumptively titled “how to” books such as the highly popular but ultimately useless *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*—namely, that the blueprint for achieving success is created as the result of being successful rather than its cause. In fact, Sword begins her quest by stating with categorical certainty that “all successful writers anchor their writing practice on four base habits,” namely “behavioral, artisanal, social, and emotional habits” (4), but of course, these so-called habits are the marks of success, not necessarily its cause.

Other efforts to expound on the concept and practice of academic writing are equally disappointing in their inability to address the “pedagogical imperative”—what can instructors tell their students to help them write papers that do not elicit the death knell of the Bartholomae/Petrosky response, “No, that’s not it”? For example, the promising title *Academic Writing* starts with a first chapter presumably devoted to “Essay Writing Skills,” but consists of only seven pages beginning with a less than enticing first sentence, “The origins of prose writing are probably coeval with the use of alphabets to form narrative statements” (Strongman 1). Joining Strongman in an inability to provide any concrete suggestions about how to produce academic writing in spite of the promise of the title is *The Handbook of Academic Writing: A Fresh Approach*, a work with an appealing title but a correspondingly disappointing content. For example, the chapter promising tangible results (“Advancing your writing: Starting, gaining momentum, and engaging creatively in the academic writing process”) delivers instead reflections on “Exploring the motivation to write,” “What academics like about writing?,” and

“What do academics dislike about writing?” (Murray and Moore, 22-28). In a word—useless, at least in terms of its application to effective pedagogy.

There are other attempts to create “how to” books on academic writing that are not quite as disappointing, but only in the sense that they focus on some attempt to define what academic writing is, not that they represent a pedagogical solution to the problem. *How Scholars Write*, for example, produces the claim that “For even the most accomplished researchers, writing is a process not of transcribing preformed thoughts but of delving deeply into what they don’t yet understand. Scholars are learners,” a process that occurs when they “seek out what they don’t know, when they display knowledgeable ignorance” (Ritzenberg and Mendelsohn, 2-4). This search for knowledge, according to Ritzenberg and Mendelsohn’s unremarkable claim, is conducted in the form of “scholarly conversation” in which “scholars reference the studies that came before them and allude to studies that they hope will grow out of their research” (15).

While very little in their book can be categorized as providing original insights into academic writing beyond the claim that the form requires the search for knowledge, it does provide at least tacit consideration of the value of what many call “academic writing,” but few are able to define, let alone provide proposals for how to teach it. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Modern Language Association decided to take up the challenge of exploring the nature and purpose of academic writing (without actually calling it that) in a special edition of their eponymous journal *PMLA* grandly titled “How We Write Now: The Humanities, the Academy, and the Twenty-First Century,” but again without attempting to develop anything approaching pedagogical proposals.

However, the introductory article does provide some additional help in identifying the purpose of academic writing, specifically, “While we convey what we know and think through

writing, it is not simply a vehicle for *delivering* knowledge. It is a way of *acquiring* knowledge” (Bammer 124, emphasis Bammer). In short, Bammer *et al.* recognize the point that many of the anti-agonists have been making for some time, which is nicely framed by Michel Meyer in his book *From Metaphysics to Rhetoric*. Agonistic writing, or in Graff’s world “argumentative writing,” is really just a short-hand way of restating Michel Myer’s position in *From Metaphysics to Rhetoric*: “Is argumentation truly anything other than a technique for making people act and think, an act of violence upon freedom and upon respect for truth?” (1). It is this realization that has led many composition scholars to reject the current notion that an essay must feature what has seemingly been construed as the very reason for its existence: the thesis statement or, to use Graff’s terms, the “I say” in response to the “They say.”

As University of Michigan Dean of Literature, Science, and the Arts Anne Curzan explains the problem,

This practice of having students draft a thesis statement first is so common as to be unremarkable... *But I believe that if a student already knows the thesis before starting the process of drafting the essay, it is probably not that interesting a thesis.* Why? Because we write *academic essays* to figure out what we think—not just to explain what we already believe we think. (emphasis mine)

Or as Lynn Hunt, professor of history at the University of California at Los Angeles and former president of the American Historical Association, puts it,

Everyone who has written at any substantial length, whether prose or poetry, knows that the process of writing itself leads to previously unthought thoughts. Or to be more precise, writing crystallizes previously half-formulated or unformulated thoughts, gives them form, and extends chains of thought in new directions.

Clearly, academic writing is a form that is far different from the argument essay that Graff proposes, prompting his comment “Would that it were so!” to Deborah Tannen’s complaint that “college students are advised to look for someone to attack in order to generate a paper topic.”

Other scholars recognize this unique form of writing that is so different from the argument essay as prescribed in today’s FYC civic engagement pedagogy. For example, Boise State University English professor Bruce Ballenger complains that when his first-year students arrive in his classroom, they have been “battle-trained in writing thesis statements.” The problem with this training, according to Ballenger, is that

Rather than opening doors to thought, the thesis quickly closes them. Instead of offering a guiding hand, the thesis carries a baseball bat, muscling its way into writers’ thoughts and beating information into submission... (The) thesis is an anathema to academic inquiry... Academic essays requiring a thesis that must be proved ultimately limit what students can write about. The habit of rushing to judgment short-circuits genuine academic inquiry.

Ballenger’s views about academic writing closely reflect those of Hunt and Curzan who both would most certainly agree with Ballenger’s claim that “What motivates us is the act of discovery, of coming to see things differently.”

In short, the essential nature of academic writing is that it must, in fact, be rhetorical because if truth has already been established—if the essay consists of a thesis to be proved, if it is ontologically certain—then there really isn’t much else left to do other than set forth the proof. To put the case in more metaphysical terms, “ontology opposes itself to rhetoric”; in other words, the thesis-based essay is “rhetoric reduced to propaganda,” a “*logos* closed upon itself and in which discussion exists only in the form of a vehicle for pre-constituted truths” (Meyer 1, 2).

But even though the works of Ritzenberg and Mendelsohn, Bammer, Curzan, Hunt, Ballenger, and Meyer have provided a much needed and consistent insight into the nature and purpose of academic writing, and a welcome departure from “Butler-bashing,” there is still the issue about how to teach it. As Associate Professor of Rhetoric at Boston University Matt Parfitt frames the problem:

“Somehow, we need to introduce students to the discourse conventions of the academy, but we need to do it in such a way that students find fulfillment and satisfaction in doing it... If we shouldn’t avoid introducing students to the discourse conventions of the academy, can and should we teach academic discourse in some ‘improved’ form? What would such a form, or forms, look like?”

In short, academic writing (or discourse) seems to find itself at the point of evolving from the “slings and arrows” of outrageous pillorying by both the academic and popular press (including mass-market cartoon strips) into serious consideration as part of the field of writing studies.

However, the pedagogy needed to realize this goal in the classroom is far from established. As Parfitt observes, “Academics have tended to take their discourse conventions for granted, supposing them to be, as David Russell has shown, ‘transparent’. Consequently, we have less complete information on academic discourse than we might,” in spite of the fact that Graff and Birkenstein have, almost by proclamation, decided that academic writing consists of a series of “moves” based on their belief that the academy is defined by what they call the “argument culture.” And in spite of the popularity and obvious practical benefits of their textbook, it is not at all clear whether their formulas and templates are, in fact, the moves that actually do matter in academic writing as opposed to argumentative writing.

As discussed earlier (“The Formulaic Turn – How to Do Things with Formulas “), the majority of the criticism surrounding *TS/IS* has focused on the value of forms and templates with the following previously cited criticism representing a good summary of the naysayers’ position: “To say that a mode of writing instruction is formulaic is to charge it with having a “cookie cutter” quality: the student writer presumably inserts raw material into a mold, and the product automatically comes out, no thought required” (“In Teaching Composition” 18). But a closer analysis has revealed this to be very weak criticism indeed. In fact, as G/B put it, “Templates do more than organize students’ ideas, they help bring those ideas into existence” (*TS/IS* xxi). However, another less widely discussed concern focuses on whether these forms and templates actually do represent the way that academics write, whether they really are “the moves that matter in academic writing.”

For example, a 2016 *College Composition and Communications* article put the question directly, “Do academics really write this way? Do the moves and templates presented in the textbook accurately reflect patterns of language use in written academic discourse as revealed through the analysis of academic writing?” (Lancaster 439). Although Lancaster discovers that there are many different ways to “Entertain Objections” and “Make Concessions” other than the ones in *TS/IS*, their basic conclusion is that there is “empirical support for the basic approach taken in *TS/IS*” (444). Other studies, such as the one conducted by Teresa Thonney in the journal *Teaching English in the Two-Year College (TETYC)*, reach similar conclusions. In her review of the literature, Thonney found that “linguistic scholars have demonstrated that patterns and formulas prevail in academic writing” (347). More specifically, she cites a study showing that “Lexical bundles (*familiar sequences of three or more words such as G/B’s templates*) account for 20 percent of the words in academic prose” (355, my italicized comments).

At this point, it might appear that Graff and Birkenstein should be standing at the top of the “Academic Writing Pedagogy Competition” platform waiting for gold medals to be placed over their collective heads, and the phenomenal sales of *They Say/I Say* since its initial publication in 2008 (now on its fifth edition) would seem to confirm their status at the pinnacle of academic writing scholars and pedagogists achieved by having met the challenge of answering Lynn Worsham’s call of the “pedagogical imperative”—that “every theory of writing translate into a pedagogical practice or at least some specific advice for teachers” (96).

But to appropriate a long-running cliché, I’d like to proclaim, “Not so fast!” and pause the awards ceremony. There are, to use the terminology of rhetoric and philosophy, certain “anomalies” that call into question the decision by the marketplace to award the top prize for academic writing pedagogy to *They Say/I Say*. Although the critics reside almost exclusively in the “anti-formulaic” camp and others in the similar but theoretically broader anti-formalist contingent, many of them can be read in a different context, namely that their complaints center not on formalism or formulaic writing or templates but on the content that these forms produce. In other words, the problem isn’t formalism or forms, it’s the content produced by following the form.

As mentioned previously, if the form calls for a thesis statement in the first paragraph (as is the case with the now thoroughly vilified five-paragraph essay), then chances are good that some sort of thesis statement will appear in the first paragraph. If the form is G/B’s argument generating “uber template” (the eponymous “They say” with an “I say” in response), then the resulting essay will be some representation of the G/B argument template. And if students follow Amy Lynch-Binieć’s less formalized but still clearly defined essay prompt (“Consider the factors that affect your identity as a writer. What influences your perceptions of writing, your idea of yourself as a writer, and the development of your work?”), then the result will probably not

contain a thesis statement in the first paragraph, nor will it be an argument formed as an “I say” in response to a “They say,” but more likely a self-reflective personal analysis of the student as a writer. To quote David Bartholomae (citing Roland Barthes’ “greatest paradox”), “A writer does not write but is, himself, written by the language available to him” (*Margins* 67). In other words, it does no good to criticize or complain about formulas and formalism. The only question, in short, is not whether writers will be constrained by a formula, but which formula will it be that constrains them?

It is the product of the form, then, and not the form itself—the content and meaning generated by “lexical bundles,” by formulas and templates, by “performative utterances,” and not the bundles, the formulas and templates, and the utterances themselves—that defines where I want to focus my analysis. For example, one concern I have with the product of the G/B forms is that the product (the content) is, as Graff and Birkenstein readily admit, grounded in what they call the “argument culture,” which is perfectly acceptable if an argument is the desired result. However, G/B have equated that “argument culture” to academic writing—academic writing by G/B’s definition consists of arguments—and that, I believe, is not an altogether accurate equation.

Academic writing certainly does contain arguments, and therefore knowing how to create effective arguments is a valuable skill for student writers wishing to become academic writers. The problem, though, is that academic writing is much more than arguments generated by the Graff/Birkenstein templates. In other words, the templates do, in fact, lead students to write argumentative essays, but if the purpose of FYC pedagogy is, as Graff maintains, to “demystify” the college experience, to provide clues to the “clueless in academe” (to reference Graff’s book), then the forms, formulas, and templates must accomplish a lot more than simply generating well-formed arguments. So while they may produce arguments, they do not produce knowledge, and

the production of knowledge, the creation of new knowledge, achieving a “perennial impulse of wonder” (Bernstein 28) are perhaps the defining characteristics of academic writing. But creating “wonder” and producing new knowledge do not constitute the purpose or the content of *They Say/I Say*, which perhaps should be subtitled, “The Moves that Matter in *Argumentative Writing*.”

If the G/B forms and templates produce argumentative rather than academic writing, then the challenge at this point is to explore the possibility that other forms can, in fact, generate the kind of knowledge production that academic writing seems to demand. In fact, this possibility has already been introduced much earlier, specifically, the idea that creating a sense of “wonder” as imagined by philosophers—from the ancients such as Plato to Aristotle to more modern philosophers like G. K. Chesterton, Alfred North Whitehead, and Ludwig Wittgenstein—might be incorporated into first-year composition lesson plans, even to the point of elevating the sense of wonder achieved by creating new knowledge over the need for winning an argument achieved by being on the more persuasive side of a binary.

Creating the forms/formulae/templates/utterances/lexical bundles necessary to accomplish the same generative goals for academic writing that Graff/Birkenstein have done for argumentative writing might seem a formidable task. However, as noted earlier, the general outline for achieving this goal has already been developed a couple of eons ago, but for whatever reasons, the work was left to languish, and I propose that it will be valuable to try to resurrect it, at least to the point of testing its capabilities in fulfilling the oft-stated “pedagogical imperative,” the demand that theory be translated into classroom practice.

At first glance, this might seem like a difficult goal to achieve because it requires turning abstractions (*noumena*) into concrete realities (*phenomenon*). For example, I have referred to the word “wonder” from time to time without ever trying to explain what I mean by the term or how

it might possibly fit into a FYC lesson plan. When Plato claims that “Wonder is the beginning of wisdom” (*Theaetetus* 155d), and Aristotle proposes that “It is through wonder that men... began to philosophize” (*Metaphysics* (982b12), or when G. K. Chesterton suggests that “The world will never starve for want of wonders, but only for the want of wonder” (*Tremendous Trifles* 7) or Alfred North Whitehead observes that “Philosophy begins in wonder” (*Modes of Thought* 232), and Ludwig Wittgenstein implores, “Man has to awaken to wonder” (*Culture and Value* 5)—none of these quotes translate easily into traditional lesson-plan language, “Students will be able to...”

Typically, it seems that academics who have struggled with the term often wind up using even more abstractions to explain another. For example, Australian National University history professor Marnie Hughes-Warrington observes that “wonder” is a “realization of the strangeness of the everyday.” Metaphors often help relate the general concept to a physical reality, but not in this case when Hughes-Warrington’s tries without success to link the concept of “wonder” to “the cross-beams and limits of history’s blueprint.” In a similar unsuccessful attempt to provide clarity, Kelly Fitzsimmons Burton expounds, “Wonder is connected to curiosity, our desire to know.” And Oxford University Associate Fellow Neel Burton, M.D. attempts a slightly more concrete explanation, but one still short on specifics necessary to get the point across in a way that might help first-year college students write their essays: “The kind of wonder that moved Theaetetus to philosophy is not so much wonder in the sense of awe as wonder in the sense of puzzlement and perplexity.” Moreover, according to Burton, “To wonder is also to wander, to stray from society and its norms and constructs, to be alone, to be free...” None of which seems likely to be helpful in instructing FYC students how to write.

However, at least one scholar ruminating about wonder and “The Origins of Philosophy” appears to focus on a genuinely helpful observation, namely that “Philosophy begins when we wonder about what otherwise is taken for granted or assumed to be true.” Perhaps not surprisingly, the author, CCNY Queensborough Community College professor of philosophy Philip A. Pecortino, appears to be a dedicated classroom pedagogist following in the footsteps of Myna Shaughnessy at CCNY, who has a specific goal for his students: “To consider that all things may not be as you think they are now.” In other words, wonder happens when new knowledge is created. In short, the way to create wonder is to create new knowledge by challenging existing knowledge, that is to contest a commonplace.

In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle, perhaps the most famous of all composition pedagogists, developed a specific way to contest commonplaces in order to create wonder. As explained by University of Notre Dame professor of philosophy Christopher Shields:

Philosophical inquiry characteristically begins by presenting the phenomena or “appearances,” (*or what I will call “commonplaces”*); then collecting the endoxa, the privileged opinions we find ourselves unreflexively endorsing and reaffirming (*or what I will call a “first glance”—evidence that supports the commonplace*); next discovering the aporiai or “puzzles” (*or what I will call “anomalies” that the “first glance” leaves unexplained about the commonplace*); and finally critically surveying the endoxa (*or what I will call the “closer look”*), which is intended to reveal the refinements that must be made “the constellation of concepts which must be refined if we are to make genuine philosophical progress. (Shields, my italicized comments and additions)

This summary of Aristotle’s “endoxic method” provides a clear path to a pedagogy for teaching academic writing, or writing that produces new knowledge, which will result, then, in a sense of wonder.

For example, in order to create new knowledge, there must first be a sense of current or existing knowledge—just another way of saying that before contesting a commonplace (the first step in creating new knowledge), the nature of that commonplace (existing knowledge) must first be understood and explained, particularly the reasons for its existence. In Aristotle’s terms, “Inquiry begins by presenting the *phainomena* (or “appearances”), and then collecting the *endoxa* (the privileged opinions we find ourselves unreflexively endorsing and reaffirming). Then, in the same way that Thomas Kuhn proposed that “scientific revolutions” are caused by “the awareness of anomaly, i.e., with the recognition that nature has somehow violated the paradigm-induced expectations that govern normal science” (53), “puzzles” (or “anomalies” or “*aporiai*”) appear that neither the commonplace/*phainomena* or nor first glance/*endoxa* can explain, an occurrence that then generates the balance of the essay, the “closer look” or critical examination of the commonplace/first glance to try to generate another explanation, that is, new knowledge.

I have found that students become quickly adept at understanding and completing these formulae/templates that will generate the content prescribed by Aristotle’s forms as demonstrated by one of my lessons using this “commonplace/first glance/anomalies/closer look” format:

1. Summarize Current Knowledge—The “Commonplace”

The beginning of the essay sets forth existing or “common knowledge” or commonplace—the *phainomena* about a particular topic. Given the fact that FYC students are still neophytes at this process and completely unfamiliar with it based on

their high school courses, I provide them with topics that have generally accepted commonplaces. For example, the current pandemic has thrust first responders into the spotlight, particularly nurses, and there are a large number of sources setting forth the public's general adulation of the nursing profession—the commonplace. In another example (expectations that they attend college), students can use their own experiences to readily recognize the commonplace about going to college—it's what's expected of them. And a particularly useful commonplace that I use for so-called “basic writers” who are trying to place out of the dreaded “Zero” class (the section of composition for which they get no credit but must pass and *pay for* in order to move on to Comp 101) is the belief that “praise or discouragement” from their teachers can have a significant impact on their “literacy attitudes”—praise enhancing their experience while discouragement detracting from it (Jackson).

2. Support the Credibility of this Knowledge (“First Glance”)

After summarizing the state of current knowledge (the *phainomena*), the next step in the essay (following Aristotle's form) is providing support for the credibility of the commonplace—the *endoxa*—the reasons why people find this commonplace as knowledge to be accepted and believed, “the privileged opinions we find ourselves unreflexively endorsing and reaffirming.” So, for example, it's reasonable to believe that a commonplace about nurses might be the following: “nurses are kind, caring, gentle, compassionate, and even motherly” (from a student essay). And there are many sources that support this commonplace including articles from professional nursing journals, first-person testimony by nurses themselves in addition to their patients, and media reports on nurses and nursing. Also, evidence is widespread supporting the general conviction that a

college education is necessary for success. Similarly, support for a common belief in the benefits of praise in helping students learn to read and write is also plentiful, including personal examples, which in the case of “developmental” students can be negative—that is, they have been criticized for their lack of reading and writing skills more frequently rather than praised.

3. Find Anomalies Contesting the Commonplace

The “anomalies” or “puzzles” or “*aporiai*” are the engine that drives the essay. Without anomalies, there is no reason to contest the commonplace because the lack of anomalies suggest that the current/old knowledge is an adequate representation of the truth. In the case of the nursing example, a glaring anomaly appears to be a first-person report by Annie Dillard about nurses in a maternity ward who seem to treat newborn babies with anything but kindness, caring, gentleness, compassion, and even motherly tenderness (16). The college essay also presents some interesting anomalies, namely students who graduate without a job, or with a job that doesn’t meet their expectations (a Starbucks’ barista instead of a Fortune 500 marketing specialist), or with a debt load they cannot repay resulting in the now clichéd trope that finds them living in their parents’ basement. In short, college has turned out to be a waste of time and money. And students’ own experience is evidence that their learning is not as complete if they hear only praise and never criticism from coaches, teachers, and parents.

4. Reconcile the anomalies, critically analyze the *endoxa*

Since the commonplace cannot explain the anomalies, this is where the rhetorical work must be done to create new knowledge that can explain the anomalies. For example, the anomaly that Annie Dillard presents about nurses who seem to be objectifying newborn

babies, treating them like assembly-line products or “dirty dishes” in a sink, can be explained by discovering that the criteria for being a good nurse is not always the way it’s presented in the commonplace. In fact, nurses who exhibit commonplace characteristics of kindness, caring, gentleness, compassion, and even motherly tenderness may actually be unsatisfactory nurses under certain circumstances, such as maternity ward nurses (the ones Dillard describes) who must be vigilant and extraordinarily efficient because their evaluation of a newborn (the “APGAR test”) has to be conducted twice within moments of birth by measuring five different criteria. They cannot make mistakes, a requirement that would lead to nurses who might otherwise seem cold, uncaring, and highly focused on their tasks rather than on nurturing and emotionally caring for the newborn. In short, the lesson to be learned from what I call the Candy Striper Essay is that truth and knowledge can be highly contextual. In the college essay, a student’s “failure to launch” after graduation must lead to the possibility that, to use a well-worn phrase, college might be a “waste of time and money” for which the only solution is a reliance on the ancient “Seven Virtues.” And the anomaly showing the value of hearing an occasional “discouraging word” leads to the conclusion that educators—parents, coaches, advisors as well as teachers—must employ a wide range of motivational techniques and not just praise for their students. All of these examples result in students’ creating “new knowledge” that advances the commonplaces with which they began the essays. In short, they have become academics, “inventing the university.”

This structure of commonplace, first glance, anomalies, and closer look seems to be, if not a universal formula for academic writing, then at least one that can be applied across many different disciplines. For example,

- ◆ An article in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* on “Malignant melanoma associated with chronic once-daily aspirin exposure in males” begins with a commonplace stating “a study in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* demonstrated that chronic aspirin exposure before and after malignant melanoma (MM) diagnosis in a large midwestern US population was associated with overall prolonged survival,” which is then followed by an anomaly (“Conflicting evidence exists for the risk of malignant melanoma or ‘MM’ subsequent to chronic aspirin exposure, and the risk of MM subsequent to chronic aspirin exposure remains uncertain”), followed by a “closer look” explaining the anomaly: “The aim of this study... was to determine whether there was a detectable risk for MM after 1 year or more of chronic aspirin exposure” (Orrell *et al.* 762).
- ◆ A *Harvard Business Review* article on corporate planning also begins with a commonplace: “Planning has long been one of the cornerstones of management... It seemed sensible for executives to identify their objectives. They could then focus on managing in such a way that these objectives were achieved.” But anomalies are then presented, “In the face of relentless technological change, disruptive forces in industry after industry, global competition, and so on, planning seems like pointless wishful thinking”; which then prompts a “closer look” that reveals, “Planning twenty-first century style should be reconceived as agile planning” (Di Fiore).
- ◆ An essay in *Cultural Anthropology* also begins with a commonplace, attributing the cause of “a long string of tragic events, including the deaths of ethnic minority adolescents and youths in the banlieues of Paris, to interactions with law enforcement agents...” The author then introduces the anomaly, namely that concurrent with these

incidents was “the radicalization of governmental discourse and policies on issues of immigration that prompted the police to play a role far removed from their expectations and missions, the result being violent, ineffective, and counterproductive operations” (622). A “closer look” then revealed that the commonplace vastly oversimplifies the situation (Fassin).

The question at this point is whether this form of teaching academic writing (condensed to a short-hand version that I call “First glance/Closer look”) is all that different from the G/B “They say/I say” templates. In fact, a G/B advocate might argue that my formula for academic writing is substantially the same as theirs.

But “a closer look” reveals that the two approaches are quite different even though all of the authors cited above also have a clear argument, and it is formed in response to what others say—apparently the essence of the G/B template. But the purpose of the “First glance/Closer look” template is not to present an argument between Professor “A” and Professor “B,” but to use a “closer look” to explain how the anomalies contained in the commonplace can be accounted for differently—how the context of nursing defines the criteria for what constitutes a good nurse; how the fullness of a learning environment enhances literacy over a more simplistic culture focusing only on “praise”; and how the value of college education may not be determined simply on the basis of getting a good job. These are more than mere arguments; they are examples of advancing knowledge, of creating wonder.

Therefore, the “First glance/Closer look” form does not produce a traditional “argument essay” as Graff and Birkenstein, along with most of the entire FYC community, would define it. This is an entirely different form that generates an entirely different content, more evidence that “a writer is written by the language available to him.” In short, this academic form generates an

academic essay. Indeed, an adjective that might be applied to differentiate argumentative writing from academic writing is “persuasive,” the term that Dierdre McCloskey, as noted above, identifies as “sweet talk” in her white paper on “Humanomics.” In fact, for McCloskey, persuasion is the very definition of sweet talk. Sweet talk is persuasive; an argument based on the thesis/support model is its antithesis; it is agonistic.

What’s more, in addition to having the benefit of teaching students how to create knowledge rather than arguments, this academic form has the added benefit of being completely understandable to first-year college students. Indeed, there are several sources that support this contention that students understand and respond positively to this level and form of instruction. First, and perhaps most persuasive, is evidence from students themselves, even students at the so-called “developmental” level. For example, I used this method to prepare a class of eighteen developmental students to write an essay that would, if successful, immediately advance them from the so-called “zero” class to the regular, full-credit first semester composition course. All “zero” class instructors submitted their students’ essays to the FYC administrators, and from my class of eighteen, one-third of them were selected to advance into a “regular” first semester FYC class—“What a successful bunch!” was the reaction by the FYC office to this accomplishment (Gerdes-McClain).

This new approach to teaching academic writing has also been praised by FYC supervisors who have observed my classroom pedagogy where I used this “First glance/Closer look” format in both “regular” FYC classes as well as developmental classes. First, the observation of a “regular” FYC class by the former head of the University of Oklahoma FYC program is worth noting at length:

The most prominent of these rhetorical strategies was a particular kind of persuasive move: “At first glance, the object of investigation appears to exhibit a specific characteristic. A closer look, however, reveals that it exhibits another more complex set of features.” Once (Geoff) established the pattern and *saw that most students understood it*, he asked them how the patterns related to an essay’s thesis and what the rhetor needs to do to make that thesis compelling. They quickly recognized that the assertion of a hidden complexity, or the suggestion that there is something counterintuitive about a topic, could amount to the focal claim for an article... Within a very short time, he outlined many of the necessary components of a *scholarly article*, doing so not by lecturing but by getting students to think on their feet. He then asked them to put the rhetorical pattern (“At first glance A, but a closer look reveals B”) to work with the discourse communities they were in the process of studying outside class. At the end of the activity, students presented about sororities, religious groups, and campus-based student organizations. One student gave a memorable presentation about the Nigerian community he was observing. “At first glance,” he said, “the Nigerian community appears to be an isolated community. But on closer inspection, we see its members trying to assimilate to American culture.” (Chris Carter, italicized emphasis mine)

These comments regarding the effectiveness of teaching this “First glance/Closer look” approach to academic writing are reflected in another observation, this time of a developmental composition class by an “ABD” doctoral student working in FYC administration:

Geoff walked students through a systematic approach using terms seemingly chosen for their accessibility but woven into a coherent whole that could function as a *complex rhetorical heuristic*. The first of these steps involved addressing the context of a written

work in terms of accepted “commonplaces” which a piece of writing seems to draw on for its meaning and structure apparent to the reader at a “first glance.” The next step involves a “closer look” in response to the commonplace. Students seemed engaged by the concept of negotiating *why and how the “anomalies” challenged the commonplaces*. Geoff carefully led students to consider what an anomaly is, what specifically was anomalous in the text, and how the writer addressed the anomaly in a rhetorically convincing fashion. This process suggests a workable approach to invention, exigence, arrangement and delivery all in easy-to-grasp terminology. (Stinnett, italicized emphasis mine)

In addition to these formal responses (successful essays and positive observations) to the effectiveness of this new approach to teaching academic writing, I received a gratifying email from a student recognizing the value that this “First glance/Closer look” approach to teaching academic writing had in his other classes:

After pounding the thought into our heads this semester (and having never heard it anywhere else), I’m starting to notice it everywhere! I’m studying for my government class and the majority of the chapter sections are full of “First glance (contextualization)/ Closer look,” and it makes writing—and reading—so much better when you establish a place to argue against. You already know this, of course. I just thought it was interesting and wanted to let you know that you basically changed the way I read (for the better, of course!). You have exponentially helped me improve my writing. (Rash)

Just as important, in addition to gaining a reliable method for teaching academic writing and helping students create new knowledge, nothing is lost in terms of existing FYC goals of teaching civic engagement argument essays. In short, writing academic essays using the “First glance/Closer look” format incorporates the ability to write argument essays using “They say/I

say” templates, but without the agonism or teleological certainty that can reduce the effectiveness of such argument essays.

For example, the current “hot-button” topic of gun control generates countless civic engagement argument essays on both sides of the issue (particularly here in Oklahoma), thrusting students right in the heart of Burke’s “flurries and flareups of the Human Barnyard,” otherwise known as the “public square.” Unfortunately, argument essays debating the pros and cons of gun control are ultimately unproductive for reasons previously cited: they are “trivial and boring” (Welch *Contemporary Reception* 94); they lack “oomph” (McCloskey and Ziliak, 2303); they suffer from “lower rhetoric” (McCloskey *Bourgeois Equality*, 646). These are all common characteristics of thesis-driven essays dominated by the argument culture because there is no concern for creating new knowledge, only with proving a thesis following Graff’s formula of “They say/I say,” which Tannen rejects but Graff embraces as “positioning our work in opposition to someone else’s.”

Academic writing, however, solves both problems—Graff’s need for argument and Tannen’s plea to avoid “agonism”—and to do it more productively than either Graff or Tannen because the academic approach as set forth above (the “commonplace/first glance/anomalies/closer look” formula) requires that sufficient effort be put into the rhetorical canon of invention to create a commonplace, a condition that can be extremely difficult to create in “hot-button” “culture-war” topics. For example, there is no real obvious “commonplace” in the gun control debate (or other “hot-button” issues), no position about which “most people would probably agree.” A gun control paper using the current argument/civic engagement model requires that students take one side or the other, and the arguments both for and against gun control are so shop-worn that the only possible outcome of such a paper is to recite one side of the argument

and declare it to be superior based only on organization and style without adding one iota of new knowledge to the debate.

An academic approach, however, can use rhetorical invention to produce a commonplace that allows for rhetorical heuristics, not to determine the “winner” of the gun control debate but rather to explore the nature of American democracy and the effectiveness of rhetoric as a part of that democracy, a topic that can, indeed, produce new knowledge, or at least new perspectives. For example, the following can serve as a useful commonplace for the gun control issue: “Many people probably believe that the purpose of rhetoric in a democratic republic such as the United States is to resolve political, cultural, and social differences.” This claim can be supported with references to large issues and small, from women’s suffrage and the civil rights movement to local zoning ordinances as well as other issues, even those that were not successful such as the temperance movement and the eighteenth amendment. At this point, several “anomalies” can be introduced to contest the commonplace including the issue of gun control which seems particularly resistant to the forces of democratic rhetoric or “the marketplace of ideas.”

Such an academic paper, then, can begin to explore why this issue, as well as others such as abortion, is so intractable, focusing on the power of rhetorical appeals on each side (the opposing sides have dramatically different appeals, each with its own persuasive power). The conclusion of an academic paper, then, is not to argue a binary but to advance knowledge about the commonplace, and one way (although not the only way) to achieve that goal is to note that in some cases, the only way to resolve the debate is by calling on what some refer to as the “god” factor, in this case Supreme Court decisions. The “new knowledge,” then, is to recognize that even in a democracy, rhetoric and debate in the public square may not always be effective in terms of one side winning the argument. In other words, gun control advocates may have to

recognize Wittgenstein's observations that the limits of language (that is, rhetorical persuasion) represent the limit of their world. In short, there are limits to rhetorical language, which is "new knowledge" that has been created in response to the "current knowledge" proclaiming the effectiveness of rhetoric in a political democracy. Or to put it another way, "academic writing," based on the "first glance/closer look" model, can produce a much more satisfactory essay than "argumentative writing" based on the "They say/I say" model.

The Future, Part III: Living a Rhetorical Life – The Purpose of First-Year Composition

“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”
Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5

“How much is 2 plus 2?”
Apocryphal CEO question to the accountant
“How much do you want it to be?”
Accountant’s response

“The time has come,” the Walrus said,
“To talk of many things:
Of shoes — and ships — and sealing-wax —
Of cabbages — and kings —
And *why ComfortCare is extra thick* —
And other pressing things.”
“The Walrus and the Carpenter” (revised)
(Apologies to Lewis Carroll)

“There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet.”
T. S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

An oft-referenced episode of *The Simpsons* (“Homer vs. the Eighteenth Amendment”) features what might be called a “two-edge sword” scene in which Homer stands atop a stack of beer barrels with a mug held high (presumably filled with Duff’s beer), declaring that the effects of alcohol can cut two ways as both “the cause of and solution to all of life’s problems!” This situation in which one phenomenon is both cause and effect also applies to my project in that academic writing can be seen simultaneously as both the cause and the effect of living a rhetorical life, and at the same time a rhetorical life is simultaneously both the cause and the effect of academic writing. Academic writing and living a rhetorical life are like fraternal twins, different from one another but at the same time completely complementary, each the cause and the effect of the other.

Put another way, the broader the scope of students’ rhetorical vision as they become aware that life is, in fact, rhetorical, the better they become in producing writing that is at once both more academic and less argumentative/agonistic, while at the same time, the act of

engaging in academic writing encourages a personal life that is at once both more cosmopolitan (particularly in the sense that Kwame Appiah presents the term¹⁶⁸), and at the same time a life that is at once both more professionally productive and personally more fulfilling and less exploitative, objectified, reified, or monetized—in short, life that is more rhetorical. There can be no doubt that the number of students and former students who are examples of this dual causation of academic writing effecting a rhetorical life and vice versa are, like the devil, legion. So it is difficult to offer up a “for example” in support of this claim given that there should be so many examples of a rhetorical life to choose from. But in my experience, there is no one who fits this description better than the famed economist, historian, and, most important of all, rhetorician Deirdre McCloskey, who is a testament to the effect that her academic writing has had on her rhetorical life and her rhetorical life on her academic writing.¹⁶⁹

First, as evidence of her rhetorical life, there seems little doubt that McCloskey is an example of a famous quote from Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*: “One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one” (267). Or as Judith Butler reframes this statement in *Gender Trouble*, “‘Female’ no longer appears to be a stable notion, it’s meaning is as troubled and unfixed as ‘woman’” (xxxix); or again, “The very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms” (2); and yet again, in her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” “Gender is in no way a stable identity” (519), all of which lead to the question that drives her inquiry, “Does being female constitute a ‘natural fact’ or a cultural performance...?” (xxxix). In short, for both de Beauvoir and Butler, gender is a

¹⁶⁸ Appiah argues for a simultaneous celebration of both localism (“people accept the citizen’s responsibility to nurture the culture and politics of their homes”) and globalism (“each local form of human life is the result of long-term and persistent processes of cultural hybridization”) (619).

¹⁶⁹ Full disclosure: During the 2011 Spring semester at UIC, I was a student in McCloskey’s graduate seminar “Economy and Language,” and I have been fortunate to count her as a friend ever since.

socially constructed rhetorical invention, or in other words a “cultural performance,” and McCloskey is clear in her support of the concept that gender is a “cultural performance,” having begun her life as “Donald” McCloskey and eventually at the age of 53, emerging chrysalis-like as “Deirdre.” McCloskey herself recognizes that her life has been a creation that is the result of living a rhetorical life. As she herself puts it, “I couldn’t at age 53 ‘become’ a woman in genes or life history... Yet I could and did present as a woman” (“Before Caitlyn Jenner”).

In other words, rhetorical persuasion trumped ontological certainty, at least for her colleagues at the University of Iowa, who were completely accepting of her “crossing” (the title of her book on her experience), thoroughly persuaded by the rhetorical invention of “Deirde” as a replacement for “Donald.”¹⁷⁰ My point here is not to refute or defend Butler’s thesis, only to note that it seems quite evident that gender, particularly in the case of McCloskey, can be a socially constructed rhetorical invention – in other words, a creation that is the result of living a rhetorical life.

Indeed, a similar and perhaps just as controversial although not nearly as widespread a claim might be that all of life, both personal and professional, is, to quote Butler, a “performative act,” which reflects T. S. Eliot’s observation in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” that as one goes through life, we must be ready to “prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet.” Or more specifically in terms of scholarly work, paraphrasing de Beauvoir, “One is not born an academic, but rather becomes one,” a claim that can be applied to McCloskey and her academic career that began in the early 1960s as a “positivist” (her term) economics student at Harvard, eventually “transitioning” (to use the gender term) into a rhetorician when Wayne Booth, “a lifelong student of the art of rhetoric” (Fox), invited her, as a new faculty member at the

¹⁷⁰ Her children, however, apparently remain logical positivists, adhering to the “certain truth” that there can be only “Donald,” resulting in her never having ever seen her grandchildren (“Before Caitlyn”).

University of Chicago, to give a talk on the “Rhetoric of Economics” (“whatever that was,” mused McCloskey, *Knowledge and Persuasion* 15), a talk that proved so successful that she turned it first into a journal article, the “Rhetoric of Economics.” and then a book of the same title, in which she abandoned the positivist premise on which economic theory had been based and instead undertook to demonstrate that the study of economics is, in fact, founded on what she calls “sweet talk” and persuasion—in short, rhetoric, thus reinventing herself from an empirical, positivist economist into a rhetorical economic historian.

This is a transformation that is almost as dramatic as her “crossing” from Donald to Deirdre in that she sets aside a “Received View” (or “commonplace”) namely that economics must follow the “credo of the Scientific Method,” that is “logical positivism, behaviorism, operationalism, and the hypothetico-deductive model of science” and “the notion that we know only what we cannot doubt and cannot really know what we can merely assent to” (“Rhetoric” 484).¹⁷¹ In its place, she installs the intellectual foundation of economics not on logical positivism but instead on rhetoric, specifically the rhetoric of Wayne Booth (almost as large a figure in her world as Adam Smith) who asserts, as McCloskey quotes him, that the purpose of rhetoric “must be to engage in mutual inquiry, not to talk someone into a preconceived view; we believe in mutual persuasion as a way of life; we live from conference to conference,” and as McCloskey summarizes Booth’s views, “Rhetoric is exploring thought by conversation” (483).

McCloskey correlates this transition in her academic life from logical positivist to anti-foundationalist rhetorician to the transition in in her personal life (using the same term for

¹⁷¹ Note how McCloskey’s article follows the “Commonplace/First Glance/Closer Look” formula – the “Received View” is the commonplace, followed by the “first glance,” or evidence of its general acceptance within the field, which is then followed by the anomalies that dictate the “closer look,” succeeded by the argument itself—the fact that rhetoric explains the practice of economics better than “logical positivism, behaviorism, operationalism, and the hypothetico-deductive model of science.”

changes in both gender as well as philosophy): “Positivism,” according to McCloskey, “is a *male* method” (*Knowledge and Persuasion* 10, emphasis mine). What else but having lived a rhetorical life and engaging in the “sweet talk” of academic writing can explain the difference between the young man who in 1973 published the statistics-laden and data-driven (positivist) *Economic Maturity and Entrepreneurial Decline: British Iron and Steel, 1870-1913* (the book based on McCloskey’s dissertation as a graduate student at Harvard, Ph.D. 1970) and the older woman he became, who in 2007 published *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce*, the first volume in a trilogy exploring the idea that “Ideas, not capital, transformed the world” (“Bourgeois Equality”), having achieved along the way appointments as a Distinguished Professor in four separate disciplines (Communications, Economics, English, and History) at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), authorship of twenty-four books and some five hundred academic articles on economic theory, economic history, philosophy, rhetoric, statistical theory, feminism, ethics, and law, along with multiple honors, awards, prizes, and honorary degrees.

Although McCloskey’s life and career might at first seem far removed from the first-year composition classroom, as I have been arguing throughout this paper, the approach that she takes in advancing the rhetorical argument that lies at the heart of her life and career is almost completely at odds with the pedagogy promoted in the typical first-year composition classroom, based as it is on the argument culture (“Would that it were so that students look for someone to attack in order to generate a paper topic” [Graff *Clueless* 91]) and civic engagement. Indeed, FYC pedagogy reflects McCloskey’s view of the limitations of logical positivism and enacts Booth’s criticism of the kind of rhetoric that tries to “talk someone into a preconceived point of view” (*Modern Dogma* 137). Today’s version of first-year composition, based on the argument

culture (the opposite of McCloskey's persuasive "sweet talk") and focused instead civic engagement, cannot possibly enable students to read, comprehend, and appreciate works such as "The Rhetoric of Economics," let alone produce anything approaching comparable essays that rely on the "sweet talk" of persuasion instead of the agonism of argument.

In fact, based on her most recent trilogy (*The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce*, *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can't Explain the Modern World*, and *Bourgeois Equality: How Ideas, Not Capital or Institutions, Enriched the World*), which advances the argument that it is rhetoric that enriches the world, I'm surprised that she doesn't go back and revise one of her earlier essays, "One Quarter of GDP is Persuasion." Using her claim about the effects of rhetoric on capitalism and economic growth ("ideas [or rhetoric] not capital transformed the world" [*reason.com*]), it would seem to me that the amount of persuasion to be found in the GDP is considerably higher than 25%, in fact perhaps closer to 100%! To cite McCloskey herself, "I argue for a rhetorical cause of our greatly enlarged human scope" (*Cato*). Furthermore, McCloskey seems to ignore her "main man," Adam Smith (to whom she often refers by inserting a cross after his name – "Adam Smith+" – in the manner of Catholic priests). According to Smith, practically every economic transaction is an exercise in rhetorical persuasion:

If we should inquire into the principle in the human mind on which this disposition of trucking is founded, it is clearly *the natural inclination everyone has to persuade*. The offering of a shilling, which to us appears to have so plain and simple a meaning, is in reality *offering an argument to persuade* one to do so and so it is for his interest... And in this manner, *one is practicing oratory on another through the whole of his life*. (352, italicized emphasis mine)

In other words, rhetoric (“the means of unforced persuasion including logic and metaphor, fact and story”) is the underlying cause not just of economic growth but of innovation (her equivalent term for capitalism) that is both the cause of that growth and evidence of it (*Cato*).

The point of this discussion of the life and work of Deirdre McCloskey is not to argue for (or against) her point of view about history, philosophy economics, or capitalism or for (or against) her “crossing” from Donald to Deirdre but only to observe that she arrives at both points in her life and work by means of rhetorical persuasion or “sweet talk,” a process that is decidedly different from what occurs in today’s FYC classroom and from the argument-generating formulas presented by Graff and Birkenstein’s *They Say/I Say* or Lunsford and Ruskiewicz’s *Everything’s an Argument*. Indeed, if one of the goals of college is to help students move beyond the narrow confines of public debate and into the broader, more challenging territory of scientific, mathematical, historical, commercial, and especially cultural discourse by means of academic writing (such as what I propose in my “commonplace/first glance/closer look” formula for academic writing), then the structure and purpose of FYC must also be reformulated based on the challenges and benefits of learning how to lead what I call “a rhetorical life” rather than the more narrowly focused argumentative or contentious life centered on disputes in the public square, for as I have previously noted, “One of the great freedoms that a civilized society provides is the freedom *not* to preoccupy yourself with the political.¹⁷² Only politicians and political theorists are likely to think that the best state is one where every citizen is a politician”

¹⁷² Vivek Ramaswamy recognizes this same facet of “civilized society” in his book *Nation of Victims* when cites a letter that John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail in 1780 at the height of the revolutionary war, telling her that he “must study politics and war that our sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy.” According to Tunku Varadarajan in his review of Ramaswamy’s book, there is a connection much like Appiah’s, tracing a likely cause of Adams’s grandchildren ability to study such things as poetry to his participation in war and politics. (Varadarajan).

(Appiah 634). Or to put the case in slightly more colloquial terms, “Who the hell has that much time to march?” (Erickson).

So in addition to focusing FYC more on the academic lives that students will experience in college, FYC pedagogy must also keep in mind the nature of their lives after graduation, lives in the world of commerce and industry, as sales representatives, advertising copywriters, bench chemists, computer engineers, cost accountants, teachers, bankers, lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, nurses, and thousands of other careers (not to mention their ‘bowling lives’¹⁷³ as mothers and fathers, church-goers, PTA volunteers, bridge club partners, members of bowling leagues, and part of a foursome for the weekly round of golf) that have little or no connection to life in the public square.¹⁷⁴ Current FYC pedagogy doesn’t even attempt a curriculum that addresses how to live life at this level.

Perhaps the thinking is that trying to focus student attention on issues of public policy within the “argument culture” makes enough demands on young minds without asking them, in Bartholomae’s words, to “appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, ... to do this as though he (*sic*) were easily and comfortably one with his audience, as though he were a member of the academy, an historian or an anthropologist or an economist...” (624), that first year college students aren’t yet ready to adequately absorb the complexities of hermeneutical analysis and rhetorical production at an academic level (although my research suggests that

¹⁷³ I use “bowling” here as a reference to Robert D. Putnam’s *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* in which he uses the decline of bowling leagues as a metaphor to support his argument that “civic engagement and social capital” have experienced sharp declines since the middle of the twentieth century. “By virtually every conceivable measure, social capital has eroded steadily and sometimes dramatically over the past two generations,” thereby negating the fact that “civic connections help make us healthy, wealthy, and wise” (287).

¹⁷⁴ I recognize that this in itself is a contested statement—namely, that there are elements of one’s life that are not political, whereas Carol Hanisch and others argue instead that “The Personal is Political,” a document arguing that many women seek psychotherapy and counseling for personal problems that are actually political problems stemming from oppression by the male patriarchy.

composition scholarship does not even consider this to be an issue, perhaps because it doesn't recognize the existence of academic writing as separate and distinct from argumentative writing such as what I am trying to do in this paper).

But as Billy Collins observes in his poem "To My Favorite Seventeen-Year-Old High School Girl," "At your age Judy Garland/ was pulling down \$150,000 per picture,/ (and) Joan of Arc was leading the French army to victory." And, in Graff's earlier works, specifically his books and essays immediately preceding *They Say/I Say*, his focus is much broader in his desire to help students "demystify" their academic lives so that they can better "invent the university" (to return to Bartholomae). In "Hidden Intellectualism," for example, Graff goes so far as to claim that "inside every street-smart student (that is to say, every student), there is a latent *intellectual* (NOTE: not a "disputant") trying to break out, an identity that it is my job somehow to tease out and help to articulate itself" (23, italicized emphasis and additions mine). In other words, he recognizes that such intellectualism, while "hidden," must "undergo a transformation" (23). Or put another way, perhaps we should raise our expectations for the intellectual capacity of recent high-school graduates. As Malcolm Gladwell observes, "Genius, in the popular conception, is inextricably tied up with precocity—doing something truly creative, we're inclined to think, requires the freshness and exuberance and energy of youth" ("Late Bloomers").

Unfortunately, Graff confines himself to equating intellectualism with "argumentation" and civic engagement, to "putting special emphasis on argumentation as the form in which intellectualism needs to learn to express itself to *become effective in the public sphere*" (23, emphasis mine), thereby restricting first-year students from experiencing the "wonder" (to return to an earlier concept) of academic writing. What's important here is not identifying argument as the entry point into the public sphere, for indeed argument is almost the very definition of public

debate, but of misidentifying argumentation and public life as the ultimate expression of intellectualism rather than intellectualism as the ultimate expression of and entry into rhetorical life. So while “they say/I say” and “everything’s an argument” may be the formula that can transform students into disputants in the public sphere, my “commonplace/first glance/closer look” formula is what will enable them to participate in academic life and better prepare them to live rhetorical lives, both within and outside the academy.

And although this chapter has concentrated almost exclusively on providing both the rationale and the substance for a pedagogy of academic writing, including formulas that students can use to produce such writing, little attention has been paid to the theoretical foundations of this pedagogy, a requirement that instructors will need to support their ability to teach this new approach to first-year composition studies. As this paper has constantly noted, theory must be supported by the “pedagogical imperative,” but so too, then, must a pedagogy such as the one that I am proposing be supported by what might be called the “theoretical imperative,” particularly if the pedagogy is meant to provide an underlying framework for living a more productive, indeed a more satisfying rhetorical life. As W. Ross Winterowd puts the case in his introduction to Sharon Crowley’s *A Teacher’s Introduction to Deconstruction*, “Every English teacher acts on the basis of theory... That is, insofar as teachers choose readings and plan instruction, they are *implementing* a theory” (ix emphasis Winterowd’s). Or as Daniel Fogarty establishes as his “main point” in an early contribution to the revival of rhetoric at the midpoint of the twentieth century, “philosophy must go with rhetoric” (12).

And the theory/philosophy that has never been far from the surface of this paper is “anti-foundationalism,” a term that has been used previously in the context of criticizing writing instruction, specifically as an argument against the strictures imposed by rules-bound grammar

instruction in a “current-traditional” classroom and by procedure-bound step-by-step instruction in the process classroom (see Fish “Anti-Foundationalism, Theory Hope, and the Teaching of Composition” 342-343). Unfortunately, however, linking theory and philosophy with rhetoric and writing has never really gained much of a foothold in composition scholarship, perhaps because of Plato’s apparent distaste for writing and rhetoric in *Georgias* and the *Phaedrus*.

Even though there are scholars who argue that Plato held a very mitigated view of both writing and rhetoric, others maintain that he was entirely consistent in his condemnation of both writing and rhetoric in both *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias*. One of the most outspoken is Brad McAdon who argues that “Plato’s view of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* is consistent with the view expressed in the *Gorgias*—he denounces it completely” (22), and at first glance, there is much to support the claim that Plato held no truck with writing and rhetoric, particularly as evidenced by the specific textual reference. For example, there doesn’t seem to be any way around the conclusion that Plato doesn’t like writing when Socrates proclaims in *Phaedrus*,

The fact is that this invention (*writing*) will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it... They will entertain the delusion that they have wide knowledge, while they are, in fact, for the most part incapable of real judgment... Anyone who inherits such an “art” in the belief that any subject will be clear or certain because it is couched in writing—such men will be utterly simple-minded. (275)

As Socrates concludes (and *Phaedrus* of course agrees), “far more noble and splendid is the serious pursuit of the dialectician...” (276). And Plato’s negative view of writing in *Phaedrus* seems to be entirely consistent with his equally negative view of rhetoric in *Gorgias* when he compares it to “flattery” and “cooking” (463), the problem being that rhetoric is not an “art” but

a “knack” because “it aims at pleasure without consideration of what it best” (465). Or as McAdon summarizes the point, “That Plato was a rhetorician is not supported by the texts” (37).

While McAdon finds no reason to seriously contest his own claim that Plato “denounces” writing and rhetoric, he does acknowledge that his is a distinctly minority opinion. According to McAdon, “The prevailing view within rhetoric and composition circles finds a positive view of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* and that Plato is to be understood as a rhetorician in his own right” (21). One might argue that McAdon takes the position of what might be called “textual purity,” while his naysayers (to use Graff’s term) assume a more contextual, contingent, and situational perspective—in short, a more rhetorical stance that will allow the development of a “theoretical imperative” to accompany the pedagogical imperative, or to put it another way, to find a way to finally link theory with pedagogy—in other words, to merge philosophy with rhetoric, or, to use a phrase with frequent coinage in the field, to seek a resolution of the “old quarrel between rhetoric and philosophy” (Roochnik 225).¹⁷⁵ So, for example, while recognizing Plato’s apparently obvious dislike for rhetoric, Bizzell and Herzberg also argue that Plato differentiates between “false rhetoric,” which he condemns and “true rhetoric,” which he extols (56). And according to C. Jan Swearingen, “Plato seeks to distance himself from the widely reviled practices of the sophists” (526). Therefore, “he does not abandon rhetoric... but instead argues for a philosophical and ethical rhetoric that is dialogical and dialectical,” or, as she puts it more succinctly, “a rhetoric of inquiry” (526).

Kathleen Welch devotes her essay “The Platonic Paradox” to addressing those scholars who “make Plato disappear, or more seriously, make him stand against rhetoric.” While aligning herself with others such as Swearingen who find in Plato someone who takes a beneficent

¹⁷⁵ Other scholars have used variations on this phrase. For example, Susan B. Levin uses the phrase, “The Ancient Quarrel between Rhetoric and Philosophy” in her book with the same title.

attitude toward rhetoric, she expands this argument to explore its impact on current pedagogy, claiming that “both interpretations have serious consequences for the theoretical bases of current work in rhetoric and composition,” here establishing the need to link theory and pedagogy. Indeed, according to Welch, “Such receptions show us the results of theory *unconsciousness* or the denial that all language study depends on theory” (4, italicized emphasis mine)—a clear statement of the “theoretical imperative” as a necessary twin of the “pedagogical imperative.”

Welch also expands on Swearingen’s identification of what might be called “Platonic rhetoric,” in Swearingen’s terms “a philosophical and ethical rhetoric... of inquiry.” Welch makes the distinction between “sophistic rhetoric” and “philosophical rhetoric,” arguing that Plato “denounces (reflecting McAdon’s language) the former and praises the latter,” thus resolving McAdon’s concerns that those who see argue for Plato’s embrace of rhetoric are creating an “apparent paradox”; therefore, according to Welch, “Plato does not contradict himself” (“Paradox” 9).

Fortunately, Welch goes into more detail about the nature of that distinction and why Plato found sophistic rhetoric so objectionable. To quote her at length,

In his heated attack against sophistic rhetoric in *Gorgias*, Plato complained about the prescriptions that the sophistic handbooks relied on. He railed against the illusory power of discourse that lack vital connection to human thought and essential principles. He worked against the absence of thought in these handbooks and the teachers who used them... Even more important, Plato could not envision a true rhetoric that does not deal with activity between the speaker or writer and the hearer or reader... Sophistic rhetoric denied activity between the message sender and received, and therefore allowed the soul to atrophy... Plato praised philosophical rhetoric because it depends on the active use of

dialectic. Passivity precludes dialectic. The interdependent exchange of ideas and emotions, the push and pull of spiraling intellectual and psychological inquiry, constitute Plato's concept of philosophical rhetoric in *Phaedrus*. ("Paradox," 9-10)

I quote Welch at length here because her insight into sophistic versus philosophical rhetoric is also an insight into my attempts to distinguish between argumentative writing and academic writing, "denouncing the former and praising the latter" for much the same reasons that Plato denounces sophistic rhetoric and praises philosophical rhetoric—indeed, for the same reasons that McCloskey scorns "lower rhetoric" and praises "sweet talk." In short, Plato seems to provide the theory that supports the pedagogy that I am proposing—a theoretical imperative in support of a pedagogical imperative.

There is, in fact, substantial support for Welch's position, which I have taken as my own, namely that Plato's valued form of rhetoric is philosophical rhetoric as opposed to sophistic rhetoric, which is equivalent to what I have been criticizing in this paper as argumentative writing as exemplified by the Graff/Birkenstein "They say/I say" approach, which focuses on the writer's "desire to have their view prevail over others" (Irani 3). Although Irani does not reference the concern of many composition scholars over what Tannen and others call "agonism," this is precisely what he is addressing throughout his book in terms that he calls "rhetorical ethos" (what Welch would call sophistic rhetoric) which "seeks to dominate or otherwise win over an audience" and "philosophical ethos" (what Welch would call philosophical rhetoric), which seeks only to "benefit others" (6). This is a distinction he explores throughout his book, concluding with a discussion of *The Phaedrus*, particularly Callicles and his view that "the purpose of argument is a matter merely of overpowering others..." (111).

Other scholars take up this same argument, positioning Plato not as an enemy of rhetoric but only of a specific kind of rhetoric, that which Welch calls “sophistic rhetoric,” Irani terms “rhetorical ethos,” and Richard Leo Enos designates as “sophistic deliberation,” which he then characterizes as “long-winded propositional arguments...” (that is, arguments that “maneuver the reader into believing whatever the psophist¹⁷⁶ has set out to prove [Neel 82] or put another way, set out to prove that which is already assumed) and claims that such arguments represent a special focus of Plato’s criticism (8). Rather than focusing on rhetoric that Plato dislikes, Marina McCoy explores Plato’s admiration of a special kind of rhetoric, but rhetoric nonetheless, establishing that with Plato, “there is a close connection between philosophical practice and rhetoric,” a relationship that is unlike other philosophers such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine who “took pains to distinguish and to separate the rhetorical elements of speech from dialectic or philosophical discovery; we find no such clean separation in the Platonic dialogues” (4). Indeed, according to McCoy, “the goal of Socrates’ argument (*that is, Plato’s rhetoric*) is to “affect a person as well as to prove a thesis” (4), a goal that he achieves most fully in Phaedrus, where “for the first time, we have a clearly articulated account of rhetoric in its positive sense,” making the distinction (using Welch’s language) between “philosophical (or Socratic) rhetoric” and “sophistical rhetoric” (167).

Now that it is clear that many (if not most) scholars agree that Plato is, in fact, an active supporter of “philosophical rhetoric” and critic of “sophistical rhetoric” and furthermore that this kind of “Socratic” or “Platonic” rhetoric” reflects my approach to “academic writing” as preferable to argumentative or thesis/support or “agonistic” writing, there needs to be a further exploration into why he’s an admirer on one rhetorical form and a critic of another because that

¹⁷⁶ “Psophist” is Neel’s way of spelling “sophist.”

analysis will lend support and meaning to my claim that it is through academic writing that students can best achieve what I am calling “rhetorical lives” (or lives based on “philosophical rhetoric”), and it is through living rhetorical lives (lives based on “philosophical rhetoric”) that students can best enact academic writing.

Indeed, Plato makes this very same claim—that the purpose of “good rhetoric” (that is, philosophical or Socratic or Platonic rhetoric) is to enhance the quality of people’s lives, both individually and collectively. So, for example, Andrew Beer declares that “Plato proposes that a cooperation of rhetoric and philosophy is essential for the thriving of any community” (“Socrates’ Changing Account”). Or to put the case in more negative terms, rhetoric that exhibits “flattery” (sophistic rhetoric in Welch’s terms) is the kind “practiced by one who tries to gratify others for his own gain and does not care whether his gratification is good for those who receive it” (“Two Kinds of Rhetoric”). The implication, then, for my pedagogy of academic writing is that by avoiding the “argument culture,” the “hard-edged disputatious style” of argumentative writing that Graff finds “virtuous” (*Clueless* 213), and instead adopting a formula for advancing knowledge, first-year composition can experience a merging of the pedagogical imperative along with a theoretical imperative which together can achieve that truly virtuous state that Plato envisioned for his approved rhetorical style, namely one that seeks to “benefit others” instead of trying to “dominate or win over an audience” (Irani 6).

Epilogue: Envoy — “Go, little book, out of this house and into the world”

“A ‘Yat’ is a fiction constructed in our heads.
But all property is a fiction constructed in our heads.”
Michael Arrington, Founder, Arrington XRP Capital

“There are those that look at things the way they are
And ask why?
I dream of things that never were and ask why not?
George Bernard Shaw and Robert Kennedy

Eventually, all things merge into one...
and a river runs through it.
Norman Maclean *A River Runs Through It*.

The late Eugene Goodheart, formerly Columbia University English professor emeritus, is effusive in his praise of Roland Barthes’ essay “Death of the Author”—“More than any writer on either side of the Atlantic, Roland Barthes has brought the reader into the foreground of critical discussion. It was he who first undermined and usurped the independent text” (216). After Barthes’ contribution, it seems that just about every post-modern philosopher from Foucault to Derrida—and later Stanley Fish, Steven Knapp, and Walter Benn-Michaels—has some connection to Roland Barthes. But as “avant garde” as these scholars may have first appeared, a closer look reveals that none of them have anything on Geoffrey Chaucer, who seems to have anticipated post-structuralist, post-modern, and anti-foundationalist theory by several centuries.

Chaucer, according to former US Poet Laureate Billy Collins, followed “a Medieval tradition” of attaching an “Envoy” “at the end of a long poem like *Troilus and Criseyde*, a little poem in which the poet said ‘Goodbye’ to his book and wished it on its way” (*National Public Radio*). And the “Envoy” at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* reads almost like a prelude to post-modern literary criticism:

And because there is such great diversity
in English and in writing of our tongue,
so *I pray God that none mis-write thee,*
nor mis-scan you through default of tongue.

And read, wherever you be, or else sung,
that you are understood, I God beseech. (Stanza 257, italicized emphasis mine)

Anticipating that the meaning of a text might be disconnected from authorial intent,¹⁷⁷ that “the text’s unity lies not in its origin but its destination,” that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (“Death” 148) is also found in Billy Collins’s own “Envoy” to his 2014 collection, *Aimless Love*:

Go, little book,
out of this house and into the world,
carriage made of paper rolling toward town
bearing a single passenger
beyond the reach of this jittery pen
and far from the desk and the nosy gooseneck lamp.

It is time to decamp,
put on a jacket and venture outside,
time to be regarded by other eyes,
bound to be held in foreign hands.

So off you go, infants of the brain,
with a wave and some bits of fatherly advice:

stay out as late as you like,
don’t bother to call or write,
and talk to as many strangers as you can. (126)

Such an acknowledgement of authorial humility at first seemed an appropriate way to give my work, non-poetic though it may be, a similar send-off into the world, the perfect “epilogue” to a work that has consumed me for several years. And now that the last “i” has been dotted, the final “t” crossed (or so I hope), all the help I have received acknowledged, my errors accepted, and the PDF file shipped to the printer, I can say that all that could have been done has been done, and as

¹⁷⁷ Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels would go on to advance the proposition that “Once it is seen that the meaning of a text is simply identical to the author’s intended meaning, the project of *grounding* meaning in intention becomes incoherent” (724, emphasis Knapp and Benn Michaels).

Barthes, Chaucer, and Collins suggest, the future of this project is now in the hands of its readers (including my dissertation committee), awaiting whatever fate has in store.

In other words, this project has apparently returned, at least in passing, to the “Prologue” where it first began, only now instead of asking for a “muse of fire” (the fire-engine red TR6) to guide it, flâneur-like, on a path of discovery and invention, the journey now becomes, in the “Epilogue,” a much less directed enterprise, or so it would appear, depending on what seems to be, at least from the perspective of Chaucer’s and Collins’s “Envoys,” a series of random encounters in which the text is encouraged to “stay out as late as you like and talk to as many strangers as you can,” encountering an unpredictable world where, as the cliché goes, “life happens.” Based on these “envoys” and the post-structuralist essays that follow centuries later, authors are said to lose control over their works, indicating that any attempts to control the fate of my handiwork may at first glance seem to be Sisyphean and Quixotic at best.

However, as powerful as the reader might be in the post-modern world, I would maintain that authors still maintain some influence over the destiny of their works because the works themselves never relinquish their hand on the tiller. In other words, the “Envoy” is not the series of random events it appears to be, subjecting the meaning of the text to the influence of the wiles of the world, leaving the author’s intent forlorn upon the shores. To return to Lennard Davis, the text has its own “overt aims and a hidden agenda” (*op. cit.*), a view that is certainly consistent with Knapp and Benn Michaels’ claim that “the meaning of the text is simply identical to the author’s intended meaning” (*op. cit.*).

Therefore, if this work ever does leave the harbor of its creation and venture on to other ports of call (to continue the nautical metaphor), its meaning, and hopefully its impact, will be quite close if not identical to my own. Assuming that this is the case, one of the first stops I’d like

for it to make would be at an apocryphal dive bar where disillusioned FYC teachers and scholars (mentioned earlier)¹⁷⁸ can go to forget their frustrations. Along with their favorite libations, perhaps the bartender can also fulfill the role of sage and counselor to the afflicted and serve up my plan to use the academic template of “commonplace, first glance, anomalies, and closer look” as a solution to the difficulties of teaching first-year composition by showing students how to live rhetorical lives instead of a life of argumentation and agonism in the public square.

Rather than assuming the rhetorical role of Teddy Roosevelt, extolling the virtues of “the man in the arena,” my proposal instead asks students to assume the role of an academic whose job is not to seek rhetorical victory in the public arena debating the issues of the day but rather to find ways to advance knowledge using heuristic rhetorical methods. This goal of teaching academic discourse instead of the argument style of civic engagement is much more achievable if only because first-year college students, who have little or no sway “in the arena,” can have significantly greater impact within the “hallowed halls” of the university by learning how, as David Bartholomae puts it, to

 speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community...., to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, as if he were a member of the academy, a companion, a fellow researcher. (“Inventing” 623, 625)

¹⁷⁸ See pages 19-22: Sharon Crowley (“abolish FYC”), Donald Daiker (“more doubts about composition’s future than the past ten years”), William DeGenaro (“WPAs are like Kurt Cobain”), Elizabeth Ervin (“Compositionists shift focus out of disciplinary ennui”), Lester Faigley (“intellectual foundations of composition studies are disputed”), Richard Fulkerson (“Composition studies less unified and more contentious”), Laura Micciche (“a climate of disappointment”), Ray Wallace et al. (“attempts to redress poor writing skills have failed”), Ray and Susan Wallace (“We are no closer to knowing how to teach writing than we were at the beginning of the process movement”), Jeffrey Zorn (“Compositionists are laughing-stocks”), and Edward P. J. Corbett (“repeated failures as a teacher of writing”).

Although perhaps no one has been more eloquent than Bartholomae in describing the goal of first-year composition, as I pointed out earlier he neglected to supply a “pedagogical imperative” to realize his ideas.

What my proposal provides, then, is a way for students to actually “appropriate the discourse” that Bartholomae wishes for his students but was unable to supply. Indeed, they can find the form almost everywhere. As previously noted by University of Oklahoma student Johathan Rash, my academic formula appears “everywhere.” Indeed, the ubiquitous nature of the formula shows itself not just in academic writing (Rash found it throughout the textbook for his government class) but also in everyday articles in the newspaper. For example,

- A *Good Morning America* news article relies on the commonplace of children selling lemonade during the summer. The article then proceeds to supply the “first glance” evidence for this commonplace: “At first glance, 12-year-old T.J. Guerrero’s neighborhood lemonade stand might be seen as a classic example of the nostalgic childhood rite of passage” (Tudor). Having set the stage for the drama (one of the powerful benefits of the formula is that it prepares the audience for the argument to come), Tudor then fulfills the expectations that the formula will set up with the “closer look”: “Guerrero’s stand, though (*a synonym for “a closer look”*), is not just your typical after-school activity. It has become a rallying point for community members after Guerrero’s 61-year-old neighbor tried to have the stand shut down.”
- A *Wall Street Journal* article shifts the focus to ordering veal in a restaurant, starting with the author’s personal commonplace, “Like many who came of age in the 1980s, I spent years not ordering veal,” followed by a “first glance,” an example in support for his actions, “Images of young animals confined to constrictive crates... left me,

and many others, with little appetite for it.” He quickly moves to the “anomaly” and a “closer look”: “So it has come as a surprise, recently, to see veal on the menu in restaurants known for the conscientious sourcing of their meat,” followed by support for this change: “It’s as humanely produced as one can reasonably expect meat to be” (Kronsberg).

- Another *Wall Street Journal* article looks at the commonplace of the “profound melancholy and sometimes even outright depression” that middle-aged parents presumably feel “once the children have moved away”—the so-called “empty nest syndrome.” Quotes from probably apocryphal parents are used as a “first glance” to support the claim: “It all went by too fast. We didn’t really enjoy those precious little moments as much as we should have. The future now looks so bleak... These are the sorts of things that rueful empty nesters—nostalgic for the glorious, halcyon days when their children were young and innocent and still nesting—say to themselves.” Then, predictably, the “closer look” trap is sprung, citing the personal experience of the author claiming what a closer look at this commonplace revealed: “From the moment my children left school forever ten years ago, I felt a radiant, ineffable joy suffuse my very being. Far from being depressed or sad, I was elated. I would never again have to think about the kids and school. Never, ever, ever” (Queenan).

Stories like these provide evidence for the need to expand McCloskey’s claim about the prevalence of rhetoric in the economy to its prevalence in all facets of life both personal and professional—that not just the economy but all of life is, in fact, a thoroughly rhetorical experience—and more specifically, an academically structured rhetorical experience that works to advance knowledge—even though (“at first glance”) we may not recognize it as such.

John Bender and David E. Wellbery recognize how thoroughly rhetoric infuses itself in our lives, creating a new term—“Rhetoricity”—to differentiate it from the classical use of the word. For Bender and Wellbery, “‘Rhetoricity’ penetrates to the deepest levels of human experience. It has become something like the condition of our existence” (25). In short, we are the embodiment of Lanham’s “rhetorical man,” motivated by Bernstein’s “impulse of wonder,” a fact that becomes apparent as the rhetorical formula for academic writing is revealed in almost every aspect of our existence. For example,

- **Business and Industry**—“**All property is a fiction constructed in our heads.**”¹⁷⁹

As mentioned previously (page 280), rather than GDP consisting of twenty-five percent rhetoric as McCloskey and Klamer suggest, it may actually be closer to 100% because McCloskey and Klamer base their measurements only on how much time various occupations spend on persuasion — “not information providing or command giving, but sweet persuasion”—100% for lawyers” and so on down a list of professions, with teachers’ aides at the bottom (192). But there is much more to the “rhetoric of economics” than one’s job title. In fact, there may not be any economic transaction that is not a rhetorical act.

For example, in the same way that Adam Smith’s formula (“The offering of a shilling... is in reality offering an argument to persuade”) frames every consumer purchase as an act of rhetoric, it also situates every commercial transaction as a rhetorical act. In other words, if a decision to exchange one’s shilling for a loaf of bread is an example of the baker’s rhetorical skills, so too is the decision to exchange several million

¹⁷⁹ Michael Arrington, founder of Arrington XRP Capital, quoted in a February 8, 2022, *Wall Street Journal* article by Rachel Wolfe “Marry NFTs and Emojis, You Get a Yat.”

(billion?) shillings for a jet aircraft by Delta's purchasing manager an example of the rhetorical skills of Boeing's sales and marketing team.

Broadly speaking, then, not only is the sale and purchase of every consumer product and service a rhetorical act, but so too is the sale and purchase of every commercial product and service the consequence of rhetorical persuasion (or "rhetoricity" [see Bender and Wellbery] or "sweet talk" [see McCloskey]).

Manufactured products are of particular interest because all manufacturing processes, and the capital equipment necessary to enact those processes, are as much an act of rhetorical invention and creation of language as is the final sale and purchase of the product they are employed to create. One small example is the role of the cost accountant, a job title that McCloskey and Klamer probably would not rank high on their list. However, I would argue that a cost accountant's reliance on rhetoric, on the "sweet talk" of persuasion, is every bit as important as a lawyer's. As the person who typically is at the very heart of the capital budgeting process, it is the cost accountant who must evaluate the potential productivity of manufacturing equipment based on a variety of future variables such as interest rates, market demand, and engineering reliability, none of which can be known at the time of the capital budgeting decision and must therefore be a rhetorical invention.

One way to visualize the potential impact of accounting rhetoric is to imagine the go, no-go decision that management must make about millions of dollars (or in the case of aerospace technology, billions of dollars) in capital investment at the end of every accountant's PowerPoint meeting in which they first present the "commonplace"—the current situation based on existing forms of investment (output and technology), supported by a "first glance" review of cost and production data, followed by a "closer

look,” specifically at the anticipated outcome of increasing (or decreasing) the amount of capital investment—a highly persuasive rhetorical move using what amounts to my formula of academic writing.

Perhaps an everyday example of how rhetoric infuses even the most seemingly mundane business decisions is reflected in the various brands of toilet paper, which are rated by *yourbestdigs*® based on softness, strength, absorbency, and (my favorite for best toilet paper euphemism) “lack of residual lint” (Vu). The point here is not to compare and contrast brands of toilet paper (or to make snarky comments about toilet paper euphemisms) but rather to highlight the fact that all of the characteristics featured in the review required a capital budgeting decision by the manufacturer—a rhetoric of accounting. For example, *yourbestdigs*® reviewers concluded that Cottonelle’s “Ultra ComfortCare®” brand and “its signature ripple texture” does “clean better after all” because “the deeper grooves potentially hold and trap more, and the horizontal banding adds to the effect of fluffiness with deeper pockets” (Vu).

There are three points to be made here: first, that these features do not magically appear on a sheet of toilet paper, but instead result from the rhetoric of capital budgeting decisions (“shillings exchanged as a result of rhetorical persuasion”) designed to produce these effects; second that toilet paper is just as much a subject of rhetorical analysis and persuasion as any topic debated in the public square; and third, that the process by which these decisions are made are based on the academic model of rhetorical production, not the argumentative one. So before making any major capital budgeting decision, management must consider the following (the basic structure of the academic model):

- The commonplace—that is, the current state of toilet paper marketing and production, including the features of competitive brands;
- A “first glance”—why and how has the market reached its current configuration;
- Anomalies, specifically, the competition’s lack of attention to important product features and/or consumer values;
- And finally, a closer look that examines the potential to achieve greater market share and profits with an investment in capital equipment that will help the company achieve a competitive advantage.

Moreover, Cottonelle’s “Ultra ComfortCare®,” brand along with every other brand reviewed, goes beyond capital investment to appeal to specific consumer preferences and invests even more money in capital equipment in what amounts to advertising to a captive audience (for example, embossing the brand logo onto every sheet) as well as in additional capital equipment and direct manufacturing costs (placing a very fine spot of extra-low-strength adhesive on the first sheet in the roll to prevent premature unspooling before initial use¹⁸⁰).

In short, even if students gain employment after graduation in what seems to be the utilitarian, prosaic world of toilet paper, they will still benefit more from studying my proposed academic form of FYC pedagogy instead of the argumentative, civic

¹⁸⁰ It’s worth noting that this decision to affix an adhesive spot onto a sheet of toilet paper is itself fraught with technological and rhetorical difficulties requiring an advanced degree in polymer chemistry to solve—the adhesive bond must be strong to hold the sheets together but not so strong that the toilet paper will rip when unrolled. A more thorough examination of the complexities involved in manufacturing even the most basic products can be found in the essay, “I, Pencil” by Leonard E. Read, first published in *The Freeman*, December 1958. A pencil, argues Read in the first-person voice of the pencil itself, may at first appear simple, but “I merit your wonder and awe,” (4). As does a “closer look” at a roll of toilet paper.

engagement model because it is on this academic model that manufacturing and marketing decisions are made, even in the toilet paper industry.

- **Finance—“Offering a shilling is in reality offering an argument to persuade” (*op. cit.*)**

One of the more touching moments in the movie *Mary Poppins* is a scene that moves many people to tears, featuring a song about a poor old woman who makes her living selling bags of crumbs for “tuppence” so her customers can feed the pigeons outside St. Paul’s Cathedral. Although quite obviously meant as an emotionally powerful scene, at the same time it also represents an economic transaction in precisely the same way that Adam Smith imagines it (even though on a much smaller scale—tuppence or two pence is worth only one sixth of the shilling that Smith uses for his example). In short, offering a bag of crumbs for tuppence is the same “argument to persuade” that Smith imagines with his unspecified “offering of a shilling” (we never learn exactly what is being offered in exchange, perhaps a loaf of bread).

Extending this reasoning, it becomes apparent that even the world of high finance, including the reporting of its news in the financial pages, might be the most widespread example of the power of rhetorical invention and persuasion—the offering not of tuppence for a bag of crumbs or a shilling for a loaf of bread but several trillion dollars as the measurement of the market capitalization of U.S. stocks on the New York Stock Exchange. Every day, the value of every company listed on the exchange is valued, revalued, and valued again, with the result that not just every trading day but every trading hour and minute, every company is in the process of being remade into something entirely new—reinvented as it were—with traders responding to whatever anomalies might contest the commonplace (the value at the opening bell) and then reimagining the

world as it is (the commonplace), creating something entirely new and different. Indeed, it just might be that the traders on the stock exchanges are one of the best realizations of William Covino's concept of those who practice the "art of wondering."

Therefore, perhaps one of the most significant examples of rhetorical invention and persuasion is represented by the daily stock market tables where reports of billions upon billions of "shillings on offer" (and accepted) are recorded every day. But stock tables are not the only examples of rhetorical invention and persuasion in the world of finance. They may reflect levels of persuasion far more complex than the old lady's sales pitch for her bag of crumbs, but nonetheless they are both still representatives of the same formula for persuasion that Smith presented in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* at the University of Glasgow in 1762-63. Here are a few more examples of how a shilling is offered to persuade, but on a very large scale, including some of the more recent innovations in corporate finance:

➤ **Venture Capital, IPOs, Mergers and Acquisitions—"Offering a shilling," Cont'd**

A long-standing New York Stock Exchange tradition assigns the job of ringing the opening bell to start the trading day to the president of whatever company is celebrating its first day of trading on the exchange. This is the culminating event of a long, arduous, and extremely expensive and legally complex process required by the Securities and Exchange Commission to take a company public, that moment when the company's stock begins public trading, the Initial Public Offering or IPO.

This singular event is one of the most spectacular demonstrations of Smith's claim that the offer of a shilling is in reality the *offering an argument to persuade* because the few moments that follow the bell-ringing will determine whether that

“initial public offering” (or IPO) will be a success or failure as the price established by the company’s underwriters and private venture capital investors will be tested against the power of an open market—if the price they set is too low, millions if not billions of dollars can be “left on the table”; too high, and the same impact will be felt only in reverse—fortunes lost in a matter of moments after the opening bell.

Many of the best-known start-up companies followed this path of financial baptism by rhetorical fire—on-line lodging rental company Airbnb, delivery services GrubHub and DoorDash; ride-hailing companies Uber and Lyft; social media platforms Snapchat and Twitter; and, of course, what might be called the GOATs (“Greatest of All Time”) of recent start-up companies (or in language more specific to technology and finance, “Unicorns”), Apple, Google, Meta (née Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp), and Amazon. They all underwent the venture capital rhetorical wringer in which “rich investors bet on young visionaries resulting in insane profits” (Rasmussen)— all examples of entrepreneurs (or, in my world, rhetoricians) who “dreamed of things that never were.” Or, to put it another way, those who successfully offered their shillings as arguments to persuade. Or, more simply, the world bought what they were selling.

➤ **SPACs—“Ontology opposes itself to rhetoric” (Meyer, *op. cit.*).**

For decades, the Initial Public Offering (IPO) has been the exclusive method of bringing new companies to be listed on the stock exchange, the result of Securities and Exchange Commission regulations developed and implemented by succeeding Congressional legislation and Commission-created rules, thus establishing two separate worlds in which venture capital companies must operate—a rhetorical world

that requires substantial persuasive powers to invest in the new venture, but one that must also operate in an ontological world of rigid rules and regulations controlled by the unyielding constraints of federal law administered and overseen by federal lawyers.

However, in a stunning display of rhetorical invention, the ontological side of the venture capital world turns out to be not as ontologically rigid as it might first appear to be. In fact, the unbending procedures for shepherding an IPO are, in reality, a socially constructed rhetorical invention—in short, a “commonplace,” which, like all commonplaces, can be contested using language and, conceivably, reimagined. In a development of almost mystical properties, some anonymous financier (or “rhetorician”) had the vision to see beyond (or through) the rules (or self-imposed ontological restraints) of the Securities and Exchange Commission regulating the process by which investors take a company public in an initial public offering (the commonplace); find anomalies (a company that was already listed on the exchange whose sole purpose was to acquire new ventures—a special purpose acquisition company or “SPAC,” Wall Street jargon for a publicly traded company that holds nothing but cash); and, by employing a “closer look,” create a way to simply merge the new operation into the existing one without all of the SEC’s rules and regulations. Thus were created out of “whole cloth” what are known as blank-check companies that exist solely to buy private companies, effectively taking them public while avoiding many of the requirements of a traditional initial public offering (Santilli and Ramkumar).

➤ **NFTs, YATs, Bitcoins, and Blockchains—“There’s no there there” (Stein).**

Even more esoteric than a SPAC (and bordering on the incomprehensible) is the evolving world of virtual financial instruments. Inventive rhetoricians (financiers) have developed the ability to create the appearance of reality even if there is “no there there” (Stein 289). It appears as if value is being created out of thin air, giving rise to comedians like Julie Nolke who take comedic advantage of the fact that no ordinary citizen can really explain an NFT (Non-Fungible Token), allowing her to create a wonderfully crazy sketch in which the indecipherable definition of one term is used to explain another indecipherable term—in this case, an understanding of NFTs requires knowledge of bitcoins, which in turn demands being on intimate terms with something called a “blockchain.” The humor arises from the fact that nobody has any understanding of what the terms mean even while trying to define and explain them.

Briefly, a piece of artwork realized as an NFT is a purely virtual experience—it exists only as a digital representation, not as a physical object to be hung over the fireplace. And a single bitcoin can be purchased in excess of \$20,000, but don’t expect to be able to put it in a safe deposit box—it is a digital currency without any physical reality. Or a Yat (apparently an acronym without any meaning) is a custom string of emojis—consecutive images of a surfer, palm tree and thumbs-up, for example—sold as digital assets. More specifically,

A one- to five-character design costs anywhere from \$4 to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Typically, the shorter and more memorable the combination, the higher the price. Yat Labs says it has sold nearly 160,000

Yats for a combined \$20 million since last February, when the company launched. The highest price paid for a Yat was \$425,000 for the single-character Key” (Wolfe).

And the cornerstone that holds all of these pieces of virtual reality together is a “blockchain” that “stores information electronically in digital format. The innovation with a blockchain is that it guarantees the fidelity and security of a record of data and generates trust without the need for a trusted third party” (Hayes).

Surely, there can be no better illustration of Stein’s famous saying that “there is no there there” than these virtual financial instruments lacking any semblance of physical reality. However, the point here is not to try to explain these terms (it’s much funnier to watch Julie Nolke’s sketch) but to establish the fact that they are all creations of language, rhetorical inventions based not on “seeing things the way they are and asking why, but on dreaming of things that never were, and asking why not?” (Shaw). In short, these financial instruments come into existence, virtual though that existence might be, solely as the result of their creators living rhetorical lives in which they explore commonplaces, find anomalies, and then apply a “closer look” to create entirely new inventions—they demonstrate the ability to be persuasive in offering a shilling, even though that shilling has no form of physical reality.

- **Art—“Art is not what you see, but what you make others see” (Edward Degas¹⁸¹)**

The impact of rhetorical invention on the art world is not limited to the modern-day creation of NFTs and YATs. Of course, there is the process by which an artist’s stature can change over time, an event that Stanley Fish might call “transmuting the lump,” in

¹⁸¹ Quoted by R. H. Ives Gammell in *The Shop-Talk of Edward Degas*, page 22.

reference to his essay detailing the sea-change in interpretative opinion that the last two books of *Paradise Lost* experienced, from being designated an “untransmuted lump” by C. S. Lewis to their elevation to their present place of honor” (“Transmuting the Lump” 247, 260). Much the same analysis could be applied to the transmutation of an artist such as Vincent Van Gogh, from a “lump” who “famously sold only one painting during his entire career for the equivalent of less than \$100. He died penniless and destitute believing himself to be an artistic failure” (*artlyst.com*).

In addition to the rhetorical impact of art critics and historians, other examples of the impact of rhetoric on artists and their works are the auctions at world-renowned houses such as Sotheby’s and Christie’s where the rhetorical power of competitive bidding establishes artistic value. In other words, even though the critics and historians might marvel at the works of Leonardo da Vinci, his “Salvator Mundi” became the world’s most expensive work of art (\$475.4 million) not because of the critical opinion of art historians but because that was the value established by the rhetorical process of competitive bidding at auction (Kooness). Kooness also estimates that the “Mona Lisa,” if sold at auction, would fetch upwards of \$870 million. This process is yet another example of Smith’s “offering of a shilling” as evidence of “an argument to persuade,” but again at a much more exalted level.

Lost in the dollar signs and the auction hype, however, is the more compelling rhetorical story of Mona Lisa’s value. According to an article in the *New Yorker*, the fame and value of the painting is not based on its inherent artistic value established over the centuries. Rather, what catapulted Mona Lisa into the artistic financial stratosphere was not the aesthetic opinions of the art world but rather the fact that in 1911,

... the relatively uncelebrated painting was stolen from the Louvre. It took twenty-eight hours before anyone even noticed that it was gone. The painting was missing for two years, and during that time, a great many people went looking for it, and the media attention helped turn the “Mona Lisa” into the most famous painting in the world. (Halpern).

Another report makes what amounts to the same claim:

Thanks to the high-profile heist, the “Mona Lisa” was now a global icon. Under a shower of even more publicity, it returned to the Louvre following mobbed exhibitions in Florence, Milan, and Rome. In the first two days after it was rehung in the Salon Carré, more than 100,000 people viewed it. Today, eight million people see the “Mona Lisa” every year. (Zug)

In short, the elevation of the “Mona Lisa” from an object of relative neglect and indifference to an aesthetic experience of immense financial value seems to be the result of what amounts to a publicity stunt, unplanned though it may have been, created not by the persuasive power of a critic’s pen or the offer of millions of shillings but by what can only be described as the power of mob mentality—if everyone else thinks that the painting is great, then great it must certainly be, or to repeat Degas’s observation, “Art is not what you see, but what you make others see” (*op. cit.*).

The conclusion of these tales of artistic valuations seems clear: whether occurring over decades and even centuries, or during the bidding process of an auction, or the unlikely notoriety generated as the result of an art heist, the persuasive power of a shilling is as evident in a piece of painted canvas as in a jet aircraft or the most mundane, prosaic, even banal consumer product like toilet paper. And all of these are examples of the

academic writing formula: defining a commonplace supported by a “first glance,” identifying its “anomalies,” and creating (inventing) a more compelling explanation for the phenomena (the “closer look”).

- **Sports—“Three yards and a cloud of dust” (Woody Hayes, Ohio State football coach)**

When fans gather to watch sports competitions, they no doubt have no inkling that they are experiencing a socially constructed, historically contextual, rhetorical invention.

Every sport (although there may be an exception) is the product of some iteration of the academic formula proposed in this dissertation—a commonplace and “first glance” (for example, the established, unquestioned, orthodox form of the “scissors-kick” in the high jump or a swimmer touching the end of the pool before starting on the return lap or the two-handed “set shot” in basketball or the sure knowledge that running the ball was the only way to move the first-down sticks in football); followed by anomalies (the high jumper’s “Fosbury flop, the swimmer’s flip turn, the basketball player’s jump shot, and of course the quarterback’s forward pass); then the challenge of a “closer look” that these “anomalies” impose on the commonplace, culminating in a rhetorical process employed by the various rule-making bodies that finally “legalized” (“ontologized”) these developments, creating the sports that we know today, with the result that the former “commonplace” is now a historical oddity. “Three yards and a cloud of dust” is rarely part of anybody’s game plan in modern-day football.¹⁸²

¹⁸² To avoid the wrath of Ohio State Buckeye fans and demonstrate again the power of my academic essay form to create new knowledge and with it “wonder,” I want to point out that a “closer look” at Woody Hayes reveals that rather than an anachronism he was actually quite prescient, if his “Three yards and a cloud of dust” quote is interpreted not as a fixation on the ground game but rather a recognition of the fact that a team has four plays, not three, to get a first down, an observation that has become something of an epiphany among head coaches, motivating them to “go for it” on fourth down. The result? “4th and Go” was “the decision that took the Buccaneers and Chiefs to the Super Bowl” (Beaton, “4th and Go”). Indeed, “modern” coaches have started to come around to Hayes’s “ancient” way of

In addition, there are various teleological “truths” about the business of sports that “everyone knows”—for example, a football team drafts to meet its needs, and if they are going to draft a quarterback, he should be fleet of foot, quick of arm, and tested on the field of battle. But in the spring of 2000, “New England Patriots quarterbacks coach Dick Rehbein arrived at the University of Michigan to scout a player no NFL team seemed to want, who played a position where the Patriots didn’t need any help and was a draft mystery in part because he’d been saddled in college with a system of shared-starting that perhaps no one ever heard of before” (Wetzel). Thus did Tom Brady arrive in Foxboro, Massachusetts as the 199th overall draft pick and fourth on the depth chart “behind three-time Pro Bowler Drew Bledsoe and two capable backups in young prospect Michael Bishop and veteran John Friesz.” What the “closer look” revealed is now football history.

And in another famous example, the 2002 Oakland A’s baseball team demonstrated that the “commonplace” method of evaluating, drafting, signing, and paying players, in spite of a “first glance” demonstrating its dominance and long-standing history in major league baseball personnel decisions, was rife with anomalies that led to a “closer look” (termed “Moneyball” or more generally “sabermetrics”) and a new system of evaluating players that led to a record-breaking 20-game winning streak and the American League Western Division championship, all accomplished with a payroll ranked 25th out of 30 major-league teams. And even more significantly to my project, this

thinking. For example, during the 2020 season, “Teams ‘went for it’ 19.2%, up from 16.2% the year before, 14.9% the year before that, and 12.5% the previous year” (Beaton “4th and Go”). One reason why is the “offensive boom” in the NFL” due to the team’s ability to “stretch to field” both horizontally and vertically (Beaton “Space Race”). Rather than relying on “packed formations that limited them to narrow lanes down the field, they challenged defenses to cover the entire field...” (Beaton, “Space Race”). The result? “Offenses averaged more points per possession and yards per play in 2018 than ever”—and “4th and Go” became more of a commonplace after a “closer look” revealed its wisdom (Beaton, “Space Race”).

approach to baseball, now the new “commonplace,” demonstrates that my academic formula for FYC pedagogy can also be a dramatic success in just about any rhetorical situation, even the movie-making business with *Moneyball* a major 2011 movie starring Brad Pitt, grossing over \$100 million, and featuring a plot based on the aforementioned “commonplace, first glance, anomalies, and closer look” academic formula.

- **Movies—“A willing suspension of disbelief” (Coleridge)**

I doubt that many people watch a movie with an explicit awareness that it is a rhetorical experience, that there are “ideological underpinnings of every movie—how they work upon a viewer, affecting or molding their beliefs and attitudes” (Harrington vi). Not even the movie makers come to the project with any “conscious thoughts of ‘persuading’ anyone” (4). In other words, movies are (not surprisingly) much like Lennard Davis’s novels, “a cultural phenomenon with certain overt aims and a hidden agenda” (5).

Such explorations into specific rhetorical elements of film-making certainly lend support to the rhetorical nature of movies, but they don’t capture the sheer immensity of the rhetorical achievement that any movie represents, let alone the ones that cost close to one-half billion dollars to make.¹⁸³ For example, two mitigating factors that no doubt helped smooth the way to “green lighting” the fourth installment of *Pirates of the Caribbean* (“On Stranger Tides”) was the fact that the first three had already grossed over a billion dollars and featured “bankable” box office stars in Johnny Depp and Penélope Cruz. Imagine, then, the “sweet talk” of persuasion that had to be employed to get *Lawrence of Arabia* produced, a movie, as described by Omar Shariff, at the time a

¹⁸³ The fourth instalment of the popular *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise has been revealed to be the most expensive movie in history with production costs of \$410.6 million according to new research by *Forbes* (Sylt).

relatively unknown actor, “without any big stars about a bunch of Arabs riding camels across the desert with no girls and no love story. It didn’t seem like something people would want to go see. It’s amazing that people put money into the project” (“Making of Lawrence of Arabia”). Steven Spielberg estimated that to make this movie today would cost in excess of \$285 million (“A Conversation with Steven Spielberg”).

Perhaps the best way to get even a minimal understanding of the “rhetoric of the movies” is to study the so-called “credits” that roll at the end of the movie. Instead of being the cue to get up and leave the theater, the credits begin to reveal the thousands upon thousands of hours of human capital required to produce even the most modest movie, let alone an enterprise like the “blockbusters” that fill up theaters all over the world, reaping revenues of billions of dollars. Persuading an audience to “suspend their disbelief” consists of rhetorical acts of both tiny and enormous proportions, a realization made possible by applying my academic formula: a commonplace and “first glance” that a movie is an aesthetic experience, the anomalies that almost the entire cost of a movie is incurred to ensure its rhetorical effectiveness, and the closer look establishing that a movie is, in fact, a rhetorical invention of almost unimaginable magnitude. Here are a few examples of the rhetorical construction of a movie worth mentioning:

The Actors—“Background Artists” and “Casting the Camels”

Probably the most talked about element of every movie is the cast. Discussions about actors and acting can erupt at any time and for just about any reason, and everyone has an opinion. The point here is not so much to analyze the roles of individual actors in specific movies, but to point out that all of these discussions and arguments about the actors have an underlying theme—all of are focused on Aristotle’s three categories of rhetorical appeals—ethos, pathos, and logos. In

short, the unstated subject of these discussions is rhetorical—how effective is an actor in advancing the “argument” of the film, in convincing the audience to “suspend their disbelief” and accept that what they are experiencing is “real” rather than a socially (and physically) constructed rhetorical invention.

Perhaps it is necessary to cite a couple of obvious examples. At one end of the acting spectrum there is Johnny Depp trying desperately to be Tonto, and at the other is Rick Blaine (looking suspiciously like Humphrey Bogart) wondering about Isla Lund (an amazing likeness of Ingrid Bergman), why “of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine”? Bogart and Bergman suspend our disbelief; Depp reinforces it.¹⁸⁴

However, the cast of a movie or TV show consists of far more than the actors who actually speak on camera and include what are commonly called “extras” or more accurately “background artists,” a term much more descriptive of their importance because these are the people (and animals) who give the production “verisimilitude” (or rhetorical effectiveness), and an understanding of a movie must take into account that every single person (and animal) who appears on screen, no matter how minor the role, is a rhetorical construction—created and used for the specific purpose of making the production believable (that is, giving it authenticity or “ethos”). As *Backstage* magazine puts it, “No one would watch a show set in Victorian London and believe the only people present in the entire city

¹⁸⁴ Perhaps the necessity for the actors to advance the “ethos” of the film is best illustrated by the decision made six weeks after filming had begun to replace Eric Stoltz, the original actor hired to play Marty McFly in *Back to the Future*, with Michael J. Fox. According to the *Hollywood Reporter*, “the filmmakers thought (Stoltz) was just not the right fit for the role” (Parker). Quoting Christopher Lloyd, the actor co-starring as “Doc Brown,” “They just decided that they needed somebody with a comic flair.”

are the detective and his sidekick” (Ross). And in TV shows with multiple episodes, the producers make sure that the non-speaking parts (that is, a nurse or surgeon or administrator on a medical show like *House M.D.*) is always played by the same “background artist.” To demonstrate how detailed these casting decisions can become, even the animals are subject to the casting call. In what might be an extreme example, *Lawrence of Arabia* featured hundreds of camels and their riders, all of which had to audition for the role: “The camel must match the personality of its rider and be a picture of health and endurance (“Casting the Camels”).

The point is simply this: what might “at first glance” appear to be a very unremarkable scene—of course, there are several hundred camels and their riders galloping across the screen—is revealed to be (given a “closer look”) a carefully constructed rhetorical invention designed to enhance the film’s credibility (ethos).

The Score – The New Classical Music?

Very rarely, memorable, even great films (the Coen Brothers’ *No Country for Old Men* and Hitchcock’s *The Birds*) come along that have no soundtrack or musical score (*ScreenCrush*). On the other hand, there are those movie scores that are so memorable that just a few bars can identify the film itself and even evoke characters, settings, lines of dialogue, and entire scenes that play out in the mind’s eye based only on the theme from the movie’s score. Examples include *The Godfather*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Chariots of Fire*, *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (and all of Clint Eastwood’s “Spaghetti Westerns”), and perhaps the score that may stand alone as the epitome of symbolic musical compositions, the theme from *Jaws*. Who, upon hearing that famous theme, does not immediately visualize the opening scene when the eponymous fish dines on

the young female swimmer or Chief Brody (Roy Schieder) informs Quint (Robert Shaw) that they're "going to need a bigger boat"?

The quality of these scores is such that many argue that they represent the today's classical music. So instead of Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms, Bach, Chopin, and Haydn, today there is Maurice Jarre (*Lawrence of Arabia*), Nino Rota (*The Godfather*), John Barry (eleven James Bond films), Bernard Herrmann (Clint Eastwood's "Spaghetti Westerns"), Hans Zimmer (*Lion King*), Max Steiner (*Gone with the Wind*), and John Williams (*Star Wars*, *Jaws*, *Indiana Jones*). In fact, Williams' score for the first Star Wars movie (*Episode IV: A New Hope*) was selected as one of 50 recordings named to the Library of Congress's National Recording Registry because "this soundtrack score has been credited with reviving symphonic film scores in Hollywood motion pictures" (Drees).

Apparently the argument against this view is that "film scores can never be classified as 'classical music' because they are composed for images and not for concerts" (Hans Zimmer). Put another way, the criterion for determining whether a score can be considered classical is its context—apparently, there is "pure" music composed for no other reason than the music itself, and then there is what might be called "occasional" music; that is, music written for a specific occasion.

There are three problems with this argument. First, many famous classical composers (Mozart and Beethoven, for example) wrote occasional music that is considered some of their most important works, including scores composed for operas and not just for the concert hall. In other words, the overture for Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* is no different in its contextual purpose than John Williams'

opening theme music for *Star Wars*, but Mozart is acclaimed as a “classical” composer, while Williams is simply an accessory to a commercial movie. In other words, the implication is that if a work has a rhetorical purpose, that is, to enhance the meaning and purpose of a movie, rather than a purely aesthetic one, then somehow its value is lessened. Sir Arthur Sullivan (the composer of the Gilbert and Sullivan team) always felt “a desire to break away and make his name as a classical composer,” as if composing the music for fourteen of some of the best-known “comic operas” of all time was somehow not a great accomplishment (Richardson). Second, and perhaps even more significant, is that a work of art, which at first glance might appear to be purely aesthetic and self-referential, will always have a rhetorical context. What Gerald Graff said about poetry applies equally to music, whether concert, operatic, or a film: “poetry (*and here I am arguing all forms of artistic expression*) is a mode of propositional statement” (*Poetic Statement*, italicized comments mine). In short, art, music, and poetry are all rhetorical. And third is the fact that classical music has long been used in movies, TV shows, and even commercials. For example, in *Fantasia*, Mickey Mouse performs to the music of French composer Paul Dukas’s 1897 symphony *The Sorcerer's Apprentice (L'Apprenti sorcier)*, Richard Strauss’s 1896 composition *Also Sprach Zarathustra* became the title track for *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and in perhaps the most striking example, every week Rossini’s overture to his opera *William Tell* introduced *The Lone Ranger* to his thousands of TV fans, none of which makes these scores any less “classical.”

Special Effects: “Foley” Artists and Set Decorators

The only “special effects” stories that seem to get any notice today are those connected with the “blockbuster” movies featuring dinosaurs, cartoon characters come to life from comic books, or large-scale war movies. Internet searches for “movie special effects” now yield links to so-called “CGI” or computer graphic images, which are now so common that “gun muzzle flashes, smoke and debris, and aerial explosions can be dragged and dropped into your project from a site like *actionvfx.com* featuring ‘The Best Stock Footage for Visual Effects’” (“Top Gun Without FX!”).

As spectacular as these CGI effects are to experience on the screen and as expensive as they are to produce, in many ways they take the focus off the rhetorical point to be made here because they are so noticeable and self-referential. They are obviously there to enhance the impact of the movie, in short, to sell more tickets. It’s the more subtle, less noticeable effects that support the claim that *everything* about a movie is artificially constructed; there is nothing that is not a rhetorical invention.

Perhaps the best example of this claim is the existence of the so-called “Foley Artist,”¹⁸⁵ a creator of low-tech sound effects designed to attach an appropriate sound to a movement on the screen:

The amount of detail and meticulousness required is excessive. Even the smallest movement, like a person crossing their legs with jeans on, needs to make a sound. Reproducing the sound of footsteps is done by wearing

¹⁸⁵ The term “Foley” comes from Jack Foley (1891-1967), a sound effects pioneer who never received much credit besides the term itself (Maio).

different kinds of shoes and walking on different kinds of surfaces to get the perfect sound for the character. Foley artist Marko Costanzo used dry leaves to create the swirling sound of the witch from *Into the Woods* and the cracking of celery to create the sound of breaking bones in *The Big Lebowski*. (Maio)

Another little-recognized contributor in the quest for film verisimilitude is the set decorator, who can, for example, create the appearance of the absolute reality of a Naval commander's office in late 1930s for one of the opening scenes in the pre-World War II detective series *Foyle's War* or any one of a hundred different restaurants, bars, or nightclubs, all of which appear to have been in existence for decades rather than having come to life practically overnight due to the expertise of a set decorator.

- **Music — “Music is ineffable.” (Vladimir Jankélévitch)**

Trying to argue the rhetorical nature of artistic expression, and particularly musical composition, is, to put it mildly, a hard sell. Although the most vocal advocates of what might be called musical artistic “purity,” both in its composition and performance, can be strident in their distaste for any rhetorical engagement with art, preferring instead to simply experience it—looking at a painting, reading a novel or poem, or listening to music should not be analyzed. For many people, to interpret a piece of artwork in whatever medium is to impoverish it. This attitude can be summed up in the final line of Archibald MacLeish's poem “Ars Poetica”: “A poem (*and in this case, music*) should not mean but be.” Or, to put the claim in the words of Vladimir Jankélévitch, “Music is ineffable.”

Susan Sontag calls such rhetorical interpretation of artistic expression “reactionary, impertinent, cowardly, stifling.” According to Sontag, such interpretation is “like the fumes of the automobile and of heavy industry which befoul the urban atmosphere. The effusion of interpretations of art today poisons our sensibilities” (7). The result? “The modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys...” (7). Less caustic but equally negative is a *Wall Street Journal* article decrying the apparent belief that the ability to appreciate classical music requires some kind of college degree. As former operatic music director and Grammy, Tony, and Emmy award winner John Mauceri notes, “The response to music will always be emotional.”

But what Mauceri fails to address is an interesting anomaly. Inside the program flyer passed out at every musical performance (and inside every CD) are the ever-present program or liner notes that do, in fact, “excavate” the compositions and the artists who perform them, but ironically, the effect is to enlighten and elevate not destroy. This approach to a rhetorical view of music is captured in a *Wall Street Journal* article by Lawrence Kramer, a composer and professor of music and English at Fordham University, who argues,

I have often written against this idea that music is ineffable. We use language to breach the ineffable constantly; why should music be exempt? Why should we be afraid to use language creatively to explicate the force of musical experience? It does not matter whether we *should* address musical experience with words because the fact is that we *do*. We do it all the time but, more importantly, we do it when some musical experience has touched us in a profound and personal way. How should we regard the speech or writing that result? As a kind of diary entry?

A subjective reaction? Or is it an *act of discovery*? A form of insight? The easy answer – ‘all of the above’ – is true but useless. As my own language implies, I am firmly on the side of *discovery and insight*. (Italicized emphasis mine).

And what high school literature teacher hasn't encountered students who complain that any form of theoretical interpretation spoils the fun of reading.¹⁸⁶

In short, applying my formula for writing an academic essay enhances not only music appreciation and appeal but also movie magic, athletic performance, artistic expression, and economic growth.

Conclusion

As my theme is the importance of “living a rhetorical life,” it's apparent that I could go on (and on) with more (and more) examples of what Bender and Wellbery call “rhetoricity,” their term for a modern form of rhetoric that “infuses itself in our lives, penetrating to the deepest levels of human experience, which has become something like the condition of our existence” (*op. cit.*). What prevents me from expanding on these observations about the breadth and depth of our rhetorical experience is both a concern about exceeding an unstated page limit for the dissertation form and, more importantly, a fear of advancing a misunderstanding of my purpose, particularly near the end of my project.

Unfortunately, while showing how rhetoric infuses all of the aforementioned areas of our lives, at the same time it has the potential of promoting a thesis that is actually inimical to my purpose—namely, what seems to be a growing trend of advancing the idea of what might be called “the rhetoric of everything,” that “everything's an argument.” For example, the literature now features not only McCloskey's *The Rhetoric of Economics*, but *The Rhetoric of Science*

¹⁸⁶ These complaints are usually designed to get out of engaging in theoretical interpretation.

(Gross), *Rhetoric in the Human Sciences* (Simons), and most prolifically, *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences* (Nelson et al. editors) consisting of all manner of essays proposing the “rhetoric of this and the rhetoric of that”: “The Rhetoric of Inquiry” (Nelson *et al.*), “Rhetoric and Mathematics” (Davis and Hersh), “The Rhetoric of History” (Megill and McCloskey), “The Rhetoric of Theological Argument” (Klemm), “Rhetoric and Law” (White), “The Rhetoric of Anthropology” (Rosaldo), “The Rhetoric of Psychology” (Carlston), and “The Rhetoric of Social Science” (Shapiro). Much like the “begat” section of *Genesis* detailing how Adam and Eve’s descendants “begat” one generation after another, similar academic articles keep appearing suggesting that there is a “rhetoric of everything,” such as “The Rhetoric of Liberty” and “The Essential Rhetoric of Law, Literature, and Liberty” (McCloskey), “Rhetoric of Science, Rhetoric of Inquiry, and Writing in the Disciplines” (Charles Bazerman *et al.*), and “The Rhetoric in Mathematics” (Reyes).

These titles have the unfortunate tendency of suggesting the idea that there is, in fact, a “rhetoric of everything,” when I would contend that there is not an inherent rhetoric of anything, and indeed that has been one of the major claims of this project, essentially the same point that Richard Vatz makes in his stand against Lloyd Bitzer—“meaning is not intrinsic in events, facts, people, or situations” (156). “Meaning” for Vatz, and for me, “is a consequence of rhetorical creation... In short, the rhetor is responsible for what he chooses to make salient” (156). Summing up his point, Vatz concludes that “this may be the *sine qua non* of rhetoric: the art of linguistically or symbolically creating salience” (160).

Or to return to my point, there is really not a rhetoric of anything—whether of economics, science, math, anthropology, psychology, history, law, financial instruments, art, music, movies, or even toilet paper—until a writer invents a “salient” rhetorical situation, first

by identifying a commonplace, then determining how a “first glance” confirms its apparent acceptability, next pointing out one or more anomalies, and finally creating a new and more satisfactory way of explaining just a little better how the world really works—whether with SPACs, YATs, toilet paper with a “lack of residual lint,” or a musical score that transforms an audience. To put the matter another way, a rhetorical situation is not a phenomenon to be discovered (“rhetoric is not situational”) but a condition to be created (*invented*) by the power of language (“events become meaningful only through their linguistic depiction” [Vatz 157]). In other words, a writer must apply the formula for writing an academic essay, whose purpose it is to advance knowledge, to engage in acts of “discovery and insight,” to create “wonder.”

This conclusion summarizes the importance of my approach to writing an academic essay in first-year composition classes because it—not the traditional argument *qua* civic engagement essay—is the means by which students can discover, learn, and apply the power of language to engage and change the world around them to make it more “wonderful.” Such an approach reflects Kathleen Welch’s insight, which can also serve as a peroration for this dissertation:

All aspects of composing merge in various ways with one another. Invention, for example, is a primary generating issue in all five canons. While we can isolate it..., we need to maintain its sense of recursiveness and recognize its presence in every aspect of composing... (“Platonic Paradox” 6)

In many ways, then, Welch’s reflection is an acknowledgment of the rich benefits that come from learning how to live a rhetorical life when, to quote Norman Maclean’s summation of his tale about growing up along Montana’s Blackfoot River: “Eventually, all things merge into one... and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood... and runs over rocks from the basement of time” (4).

To put Maclean's musings into the language of rhetoric, life cannot be separated from creative power of language just as the river cannot be separated from the rocks. But neither can the linguistic power to forge this merger be separated from the inventive power of the academic essay—there can be no symbolic river running through a merger of all things unless and until a writer first takes a “closer look” at what, “at first glance,” appears to be simply a fast-flowing body of water running over a bunch of rocks, then reflects on the anomalies inherent in the age and condition of both the rocks (“from the basement of time”) and the river (“cut by the world's great flood”), anomalies that inspire a new way of experiencing the universe—as a merger of all things into one, a result of the inexorable passage of time when “all existence seems to fade into a being with my soul and memories...” (4).

The academic essay achieves the same rhetorical synthesis regardless of topic or genre. As previously discussed, it forms the basis for productive discourse about business, finance, and the arts including film, music, and painting. And beyond its ability to encompass topics far beyond the confines of civic engagement, the academic essay also serves as a means to address these issues more effectively. Discourse about current social, political, and cultural topics such as gun control, abortion, and even the value of a college education becomes more productive when subjected to the discipline of the academic essay by identifying a commonplace (*phainomena* or current knowledge), exploring a first glance (*endoxa*, or the “privileged opinions we find ourselves unreflexively endorsing and reaffirming”), discerning anomalies (*aporiai* or “puzzles”), and finally applying a critical “closer look.”

Such, then, is the power of the academic essay proposed in this project to create the “wonder” of new knowledge. And it is this power of the academic essay to create such wondrous new knowledge that produces the engine of rhetorical invention and ultimately the

foundation for a new pedagogy for first-year composition designed to help students learn how to experience the great breadth and depth of living creative, rhetorical lives, finally replacing the current civic engagement model professing a pedagogy that limits students to lives of argument, agonism, disagreement, disputation, and dissension.

The choice, it seems to me, is clear. But not, I'm afraid, imminent. I'm reminded of John Kennedy's First Inaugural address in which he proclaims his vision but at the same time anticipates great difficulty achieving it: "All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin."

Similarly, there are many roadblocks to the implementation of a new pedagogy so decidedly different from the civic engagement argument model. For example, I have alluded to the state of FYC as an entrenched bureaucracy—its size (four million students in sixty-thousand sections at more than seven thousand institutions for the 1994-1995 academic year); its status as a "lofty and lucrative industry" (Haynes *op. cit.*); and perhaps most inimical to my project is its power and hegemony as a "pedagogical apparatus" (Haynes *op. cit.*), "impervious to the challenges of other approaches, dispatching them with the brutish power born of preeminence (Gere *op. cit.*).

So while recognizing the challenges, I still hope that, unlike Kennedy's pessimism, some progress can be made at least during our lifetime on this planet. But no matter what the time frame, we must first begin, and I hope that this dissertation does, in fact, represent the start of a journey of what will no doubt be at least a thousand miles.

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¹⁸⁷ "-30-" at the end of a manuscript is the traditional designation for the end of a reporter's story.

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