

BURDENS AND BLESSINGS: HEURISTIC PEDAGOGY FOR  
THE RHETORICAL ENDEAVOR IN COMPOSITION

by

Joshua Bela Lenart

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Dr. Kirk Branch

Approved for the Department of English

Dr. Michael Beehler

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

Dr. Bruce R. McLeod

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Joshua Bela Lenart

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## ABSTRACT

Rhetoric has been a cornerstone of Western thought for at least the last 2500 years, whether disdained as manipulative techniques exercised by immoral lawyers and corrupt politicians or prized as an elegant mastery of language displayed by leaders and dignitaries. This essay posits that rhetoric is always a fundamental part not only of Western but of all societies. Maintaining such a constitution necessarily raises the questions how and why should educators acknowledge rhetoric's role in their instruction. Of the innumerable sites for introducing an increased focus on rhetorical instruction in universities, the most obvious should be first year composition classrooms since these sites are oftentimes 1) mandatory and 2) already situated, loosely or extensively, around rhetorical understandings of the classroom and the world in which the classroom exists.

The methods of this heuristic essay are designed to draw attention to the need for composition instructors to increase instruction on and around rhetoric, both classical and modern, in order to gain a fuller understanding of how our culture exists within itself and in relation to other cultures. In order to illustrate this need, I offer an historical overview of the discipline, as first designed by classical rhetors beginning with the early sophists and Aristotle, which continued largely unchanged until the middle part of the nineteenth century and the inception of the Morrill Land-Grant College Act after which time emerged what is popularly termed *modern* rhetoric. By examining these two discrete eras in rhetoric's history, I hope to highlight not only the need for, but in fact the demand for revisiting both eras in contemporary composition classrooms.

This essay also posits that rhetoric, historically and contemporarily, can have the most dramatic effect on changing the social conditions in which students and educators exist. This argument could not operate without the understanding that increased focus on compositional rhetoric is necessary today insofar as it strives to continually realize social and political change, which focuses primarily on achieving a greater sense of democracy in our educational systems and thereby our culture. Consequentially, the conclusions reached here are at best suggestive and, as the title suggests, heuristic.

EPIGRAPHS

*[Socrates] separated the science of wise thinking from that of elegant speaking, though in reality they are closely linked together...This is the source from which has sprung the undoubtedly absurd and unprofitable and reprehensible severance between the tongue and the brain, leading to our having one set of professors to teach us to think and another to teach us to speak.*

--Cicero, *De Oratore* III xvi

*A classical teacher who has no original, spontaneous power of thought, and knows nothing but Latin and Greek, however perfectly, is enough to stultify a whole generation of boys and make them all pedantic fools like himself.*

--Jonathan Baldwin Turner

*Those who do not study the history of rhetoric will be victims of it.*

--James J. Murphy

## CHAPTER 1

*PROAIRESIS ENDOXA*

*That rhetoric, therefore, does not belong to a single defined genus of subject but is like dialectic and that it is useful is clear—and that its function is not to persuade but to see the available means of persuasion in each case [...]. In addition, [it is clear] that it is a function of one and the same art to see the persuasive [...] for sophistry is not a matter of ability but of deliberate choice [...]. This will be so if we know what makes character. One way, certainly, is to make deliberate choice clear: what the character is on the basis of what sort of deliberate choice [has been made]. And choice is what it is because of the end aimed at.*

--Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* 1.1.14,  
3.16.8

*proairesis (f.): deliberate choice or moral purpose, a decision made on the basis of character.*

--George Kennedy, "Glossary" of  
Greek terms

We can begin by viewing rhetoric as a middle ground. Try to envision any interaction you have ever had with another culture, society, individual, religious conviction, or political doctrine. If you can picture the *space* where you crossed into contact, either negatively or positively, with another one of these "other" entities that space of interaction could be thought of as rhetoric, or, at least, it could be called a space where rhetoric always exists: a rhetorical space as it were. Now within this space also exists countless interactions not only between you and the other, but between you, the other, and the myriad factors which collectively comprise you and the other. It

follows that we should be able to agree on the premise that rhetoric, defined as an interaction fostering space, has existed since the first man began interacting with the larger world around him. This idea of man and rhetoric's coexistence is not new, nor however should it be considered lightly. Michael Bernard-Donals, through a reading of Mikhail Bakhtin, reminds us "that material reality is ideologically and linguistically constructed [...]. Rhetoric, then, becomes the study of the mismatch between constructed and actual experience" (Qtd. in Covino 47). As such, we should not be fooled into believing, as has naïvely been suggested, that rhetoric is "the study of everything." Rhetoric is not the study of things in themselves; rather, it is the study of how things relate and communicate, verbally and nonverbally, with one another. Rhetoric is a middle space where such interactions occur; to study rhetoric is to study interactions, not "things."

If we continue building on this definition of rhetoric as space and Bernard-Donals' idea that "material reality" is rhetorically constructed, it is from this vantage point that we can explore how interaction shapes our present reality, and how it has shaped what we remember as *real* in the past. James Berlin reminds us of two essential characteristics of this endeavor. First he argues that a compelling reason to study rhetoric is because "it so readily reveals its epistemic field, thus indicating, [...] a great deal about the way a particular historical period defines itself" (*Contemporary Composition* 269). Understanding particular historical periods becomes invaluable when trying to draw connections with current periods. For example, an examination of classical rhetoric in ancient Greek and Roman societies reveals much about how those cultures valued communication and language, which, in turn, establishes a litmus test

by which we may assess how our culture views and uses language. Furthermore, since what we know today of classical rhetoric was recorded largely from the various schools in antiquity, such as Plato's or Aristotle's, it is necessary for consistency to draw connections with the university today where language still performs a material role in the construction of reality. A comparison then between rhetoric in ancient Greek and our society is really just an analysis of classical rhetoric and its modern day manifestations, which, I argue, are located primarily within university composition classes today; this leads us to Berlin's second reminder: "[t]o teach writing is to argue for a version of reality, and the best way of knowing and communicating it" (256). The question then left to ask is, what version of reality do writing teachers wish to teach?

The first two chapters of this thesis examine two unique historical periods in rhetoric, the classical Greek era and American rhetoric between 1840-1890, because the trends that emerge from analyzing these eras will prove invaluable to our discussion of contemporary rhetoric in chapters three and four, respectively. This chronological approach to discussing rhetoric will help us draw connections, not only between rhetoric's history and its contemporary forms, but also between the ways different cultures have used and viewed rhetoric during each of these distinct periods. It would be impossible to thoroughly discuss these periods in a hundred different essays let alone just one, so, in order to focus this analysis, my main concentration examines specific ways in which classical Greek rhetoric has evolved into American rhetoric, which in turn has transformed within our own short history (as will be illustrated by a comparison between mid-nineteenth century and contemporary rhetoric). I also focus the scope of this essay by concentrating on two of the most important qualities

identified by American rhetoric: 1) the inseparability between it and our higher education systems, which, as Berlin suggests, is evident by its use in writing classrooms, and 2) the ways in which writing courses utilize rhetoric to labor toward establishing a more democratic “version of reality” (256) by encouraging students to take more active roles in our society as a whole. The difficulty, of course, with such an undertaking is that in order to discuss such a topic, it regrettably follows that the very fluid nature of rhetoric becomes fixed in the act of discussing it. As suggested, to study rhetoric is to study interactions, which are not fixed but are transient; studying interactions proves problematic because they have multiple meanings in various cultures at various times. By trying to explore rhetoric for consistency, it is first essential to narrow one’s focus on only a few of its features, which will then serve to facilitate a discussion about its more general attributes. Therefore, although I make substantial claims regarding historical and modern rhetoric, I simultaneously acknowledge Kenneth Burke’s caution against “the expectation that there will be ‘one idea pervading [the] whole work,’” and also Vickie Ricks’ reminder that “histories of composition and rhetoric should not form a single definition or authoritative history but should allow for diverse [...] as well as multiple perspectives from which they may be viewed” (Qtd. in Ricker 241).

If for discussion purposes it is essential to focus rhetoric’s definition in order to base arguments on it, then it is also necessary to further define its two features, which appear repeatedly throughout this essay; I will begin with the latter. Rhetoric in America has become so thoroughly incorporated within writing courses, that indeed the two seem to stem from a single source, although, as I will illustrate, this has not always

been the case. This composition-rhetoric relationship in American universities stands as a combination of, not just loose associations between grammar instruction and audience manipulation, but, rather, as a collective enterprise created by optimistic educators to establish a greater sense of democracy amongst this country's citizens. This essay understands that although rhetoric and composition have not always fostered democracy, they have, since their involvement with one another in the mid-1800s, operated together to produce a more democratic society in which we live. However, this has only been the case because of deliberate decisions made by mid-nineteenth century and contemporary educators to realize this goal by promoting the notion that "education is meant to help you do something for others" (Horton 3). The type of democracy I am discussing in the context of this space is similar to Myles Horton's conception of the term when he writes, "[i]f you believe that people are of worth, you can't treat anybody inhumanely, and that means you not only have to love and respect people, but you have to think in terms of building a society that people can profit most from, and that kind of society has to work on the principle of equality" (7). This understanding of democracy highlights rhetoric's other feature in this essay, which purports its implicit connection to the university. When educators deliberately use composition-rhetoric to produce democracy within our society, they are really *creating opportunity* for students by helping them *participate more actively* in the various cultural and political spheres in which students exist. This essay explores the idea that a deliberate focus on rhetoric in the composition classroom can facilitate this kind of democracy not only within educational but within our cultural and societal structures as

well. In short, this thesis can be read as an attempt to continue the work that moves toward this goal.

From this stated goal, we can begin detailing the underlying form of this heuristic study. First, it operates from a position that maintains rhetoric's existence since man's existence; however, it is quite impossible, except through speculation, to ascertain all of rhetoric's history since so little (recorded) evidence remains from before the fourth century B.C. It would be fallacious to assume that because I begin chapter one by examining "classical" rhetoric first outlined by Plato, but with revealing characteristics dating as far back as the early sophists in the sixth century, that I mean to argue this is when rhetoric began—I am not, and it is not. I begin here because the inextricable connection between culture and rhetoric was first explicitly investigated during this discrete period. Secondly, it is imperative to understand that I do not believe classical rhetoric existed unchanged within its own historical period—any quick comparison between Plato and the sophists reveals this—nor do I believe that it exists unchanged from that era until now; what we refer to today as classical rhetoric is merely a modern interpretation of what it once was. This consideration is a central element of this essay, which focuses on a fundamental shift that occurred within the discipline between 1840-1890. I argue this shift (detailed in chapter two) occurred as a direct result of the effects that the Morrill Land-Grant College Act has had on the discipline, the university, and American culture in the mid-part of the nineteenth century. It is important to understand the concurrent features of classical rhetoric, as they exist within mid-nineteenth century rhetoric, because this essay concludes by focusing largely on how these periods have affected contemporary transformations in

the discipline. In chapters three and four, I argue that the dramatic shift that occurred, after the Morrill Act, was the beginning of educators' push toward using rhetoric in composition classes to create democratic opportunities for citizen. For this reason, it should be helpful to contemporary composition-rhetoric instructors to consider these periods so that they can gain a greater understanding of why these changes happened in the past, and how they prove relevant for application in contemporary writing classrooms.

Lastly, this heuristic study hopes to explore how composition-rhetoric educators can claim to work toward achieving greater democracy while we live in a country that is already one of the most democratic nations in the world. What does *more* democracy mean for a country that already enjoys it? I attempt to answer this question by establishing a vision of rhetoric for our culture that stems from a fuller understanding of its history, and not just from its history in two discrete periods as existing individually from each other. Rhetoric, today, is the same *middle space* it has always been; it is just much easier to theorize about rhetoric when looking at brief historical periods in relation to other brief periods. Today is simply another era in rhetoric's history in which it is still in the process of facilitating interaction; in the future today's rhetoric will merely be an aspect of our culture by which historians may judge us.

I would like to continue by more clearly describing contemporary composition-rhetoric before offering an in depth account of the historical features of the discipline, beginning with the classical era, which have most influenced this modern version. In the latter part of this chapter, I will then examine the cultural factors, which

have helped determine and shape rhetoric during each of these three periods. Composition-rhetoric, in a more narrowed sense, is the link that connects democratic educational aims to the university by providing purpose and relevance to educators through offering students a framework and a location in which to critically examine their various social environments or “discursive communities.”<sup>1</sup> Compositional pedagogy, which focuses on rhetoric in its instruction and as a way of viewing the world, attempts to validate students’ academic lives as intricate parts of their lived experiences outside of the university. Rhetoric, within composition, is a culturally constructed ideology that endeavors to enhance students’ involvement in voicing their thoughts and concerns in an increasingly volatile culture. This conception of rhetoric began in antiquity when Greek sophists traveled the countryside instructing young men not only on how to conduct themselves, but more importantly on how to speak and persuade audiences in Athenian cultural and political spheres. Although highly criticized in Plato’s dialogues, sophists were some of the first recorded teachers who worked directly with their students by instructing them on how to more fully participate and become leaders in Greek society. Sophistic instruction is the first recorded example in Western history of rhetoric’s use as a means of teaching students on how to more fully participate in a democratic society; however, it is important to note, as Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee do, that although Greek society is often regarded as a democracy, their system was quite different than how we use the term today. They

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<sup>1</sup> Anis Bawarshi argues that students constantly recontextualize themselves in light of their various “discursive communities.” Bawarshi’s most poignant idea argues for a mode of “teaching writing not so much as ‘composition’ but as rhetoric—as a way of being and acting in the world, socially and rhetorically, within genres—and [...] to teach FYW in this way” (14). Although this thesis never uses the term ‘genres’ in the way it is used here, it does refer repeatedly to discursive communities.

point out that Greek citizens, “aristocratic or not,” played a direct role in the democratic political system, although qualifications for citizenship were determined “by a very inclusive [set of] requirements [...which] excluded the bulk of the population, who were women, foreign-born, or slaves” (21). Incidentally, Crowley and Hawhee also remind us that although Americans have a more nonbiased understanding of citizenship and political involvement today, it is important to recall “for almost half of [our] history, the United States limited suffrage to white males” (21); nonetheless, many similar features are easily recognizable between Greek and American variations of democracy—mainly the participatory nature of both cultures in which citizens are, directly or indirectly, involved in forming legislative and judicial systems. Consequently, we should not wonder that rhetoric participates in either realm, or that teachers of rhetoric maintain direct involvement in both political systems.

The important function that rhetoric instructors maintain in promoting democratic participation in various cultural, political, and academic spheres is a recurring theme in this essay that I would like to examine more closely here. As mentioned, Plato resented early rhetoric instructors, but Plato has often been accused of being “an Athenian aristocrat, an enemy of democracy, and a bit of a xenophobe” (Crowley and Hawhee 23), which is why his legacy, where this essay is concerned, is only important insofar as to be read against the sophists. It is no doubt that the sophists were important figures in ancient Greek society, but, since so little of their writings remain today, arguably the only reason they are remembered is due to Plato’s recollection of them in his dialogues. For this reason, as a rhetor (one who “practice[s] rhetoric”) Plato’s writings are only circumstantially important to this study; although,

as a rhetorician (one who “teach [rhetoric] or theorize about it”) his work remains an invaluable asset to an examination of the democratic function rhetoric instruction performs in education.<sup>2</sup> Alfred North Whitehead suggests, of course, that Western philosophy is but a footnote to Plato; however, in contrast, Aristotle’s work emerges as being substantially more important to an examination of classical rhetoric in contemporary contexts than does Plato’s. Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric* remains central to the contemporary classroom because of his attempt to systematize rhetoric by outlining its utility when effectively wielded in cultural and political settings; this idea complicates Plato’s arrogant, and quite impossible, unrequited search for Truth. Aristotle recognized that truth was constructed dialogically between the social context, “a speaker and a subject on which he speaks, and [the person] addressed” (Aristotle 1.3.1). Aristotelian rhetoric exists only in a specific time, a specific context, and among specific people; thus, Transcendental Truth was and is a myth. The sustaining power of *On Rhetoric* is not located in Aristotle’s thoroughly constructed argument; rather, it is located in the importance he places in his instruction, much like the sophists, on the constant interplay between speaker, audience, and context, which in turn creates the rhetorical endeavor. The reason rhetoric, historically and contemporarily, is so influential is because rhetoric *always* participates in the formation of truth and knowledge: truth, relativistic as it may be, “do[es] not draw conclusion[s] only from what is necessarily valid, but also from what is true for the most part” (Aristotle 2.22.3). Recapturing such an understanding of truth and knowledge becomes extremely valuable to rhetoric instructors today because such understandings more accurately

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<sup>2</sup> See Crowley and Hawhee for a detailed comparison between rhetors and rhetoricians (22).

account for the infinite factors that make up our increasingly pluralistic society than do outdated Platonic models of ephemeral absolutes, which are unaffected by audience or cultural factors. Similarly, the Aristotelian model better highlights the ways in which we relate to one another, whereas the Platonic model over simplifies and oftentimes neglects human relationship to all but the aristocratic class. This distinction becomes evident when comparing classical with more modern rhetorical instruction.

Robert Connors, in his *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*, exhaustively accounts for the high regard classical rhetoric has enjoyed for much of the past 2500 years. Connors argues that only as recently as 1840 has rhetoric fallen from this high standing due to numerous cultural changes, both within and outside of the university, suggesting these changes happened possibly as a result of women's introduction into the university, society's move from an oral to predominantly written tradition, and/or the decline of abstract agonistic argumentation for the more cosmopolitan, multimodal personal-exposition (Connors 44). Connors concludes that in a matter of fifty years (between 1840-1890) rhetoric plummeted from being one of the most useful disciplines worth studying to one of the most worthless. As a result of the changing cultural climate of this era, rhetoric shifted from a discipline that once constituted much of a student's education, to a generic survey loosely situated in quickly emerging English departments. It is interesting to examine how this unlikely coupling between rhetoric and English departments occurred, and how this coupling manifested in tandem the inception of a new field. This morphing of classical rhetoric and English studies, to create a new or modern rhetoric, is really just another brief evolution in an ancient discipline that continues to transform itself in today's

composition classrooms. Rhetoric functions in composition today by helping students situate themselves in their discursive communities and thereby encourages them to be more active participants in their specific communities by developing their communication and language acquisition abilities. But before we begin examining how rhetoric performs in such ways in composition today, it is first necessary to establish an understanding of how rhetoric operated in the university between 1840-1890 because a thorough examination of this period will reveal similar democratic aims to those we see emerging in classical times. Once I establish the ways in which rhetoric instruction in the mid-1800s labored to include more students in the university by encouraging them to take more participatory roles in their various social and political spheres outside the university, I can then draw stronger connections to the ways that rhetoric still maintains today similar deliberately-focused democratic aims in composition classes by increasing students' understanding of how rhetoric operates in our culture.

Rhetoric began to operate in mid-nineteenth century composition classrooms mostly as an attempt to foster greater communication “skills” within the university. Roderick Hart, in his *Modern Rhetoric Criticism*, argues “[r]hetorical people [have always been] optimists [because] they believe that talk can change human affairs” (61). Rhetoric, as described in the preceding paragraphs in the evolved, post-Aristotelian sense, relies almost entirely on dialogue, spoken or written, which seeks *human solutions* to social and educational conflicts: “[t]he mere agreement to talk documents that hope abides” (Hart 62). During this time, composition instructors started structuring their courses with rhetorical considerations in mind because they began to acknowledge the importance of teaching human solutions, as positive alternatives to

conflict resolution, and not simply structuring their classes in the innocuous ways that classical instruction often lent itself—ways otherwise useless where students' or society's well-being was valued. Classical instruction, almost continuously from the sophists to the early 1800s, usually centered around formalized agonistic debates between an instructor and a student or between two groups of students. Connors argues:

[a]rgumentative discourse had been the central cannon of rhetoric since the era of Corax and Gorgias [...]. Though classical rhetoric did not completely foreclose nonargumentative ends, in traditional rhetoric the narrative or [...] definition was always assumed to exist for the purpose of serving the master-end of argument [...which] was completely assumed for more than two millennia. (60)

However, by the 1840s when rhetoric and composition began to be combined into a single discipline, rhetoric dramatically changed from a combative study to an irenic, “multimodal, private, nonthreatening discourse [that became] absolute[ly] predominant in actual teaching after 1870 [during which time...] the almost universal requirement of college composition courses [occurred] at exactly the same point that elocution courses were being remanded to elective status” (60). The composition-rhetoric class of the 1840-1890s became a site for *reestablishing* rhetoric's role in communication (versus argumentation), which could be used to mediate cultural and political conflicts because it at once contained older vestiges of the field: beautiful elocution, invention, logic, and available means of persuasion, with more recent developments in composition, which were oftentimes relegated to the rather mundane task of imparting students with a sense of basic sentence construction or proper grammar usage. When viewed in this light, these composition-rhetoric classes acted as a powerful alternative to what had

previously been two separate studies: the study of classical Greek rhetoric, which was rather removed from the pragmatic, every-day nature of students' lives, and composition, which was disregarded in the university as a subject that should only be taught at the elementary school level. Unfortunately, rhetoric during this period was not viewed as a positive alternative to an otherwise worthwhile study; as stated, the newly emerged field was regarded as an academic discipline unfit for serious university study. Connors recalls of this period:

rhetoric was at best [...] unscientific study, one seemingly unredeemable by research, and at worst simply unscholarly drudge work. It could not be buried and it would not go away, but neither could it be saved as 'real scholarship.' And so 'rhetoric' existed in universities [...] as a curious relic of another time, stranger every year. (180)

Rhetoric was viewed in this fashion almost exclusively for the next one hundred years before it began once again to draw serious academic attention during the mid-1960s.<sup>3</sup>

Before continuing to examine Connors' constructed history of rhetoric between 1840-1890 and the cultural considerations that effected such changes (which in turn affected the culture), it would be helpful to further consider Roderick Hart's fundamental premise on which he believes all cultural analysis should be based. Hart argues that historical, cultural analyses should "focus on the *presuppositions* imbedded

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<sup>3</sup> Connors argues that the 1963 CCCC conference, held in Los Angeles, was the first real resurgence of classical rhetoric in almost 100 years (206). This conference boasted over 1500 attendees and was one of the first times that such a large body of academically recognized scholars convened to voice their collective frustrations "about the clearly felt lack of center" (205) within rhetorical studies, and especially within fyw courses. The lack felt, and subsequently addressed, at this conference was based primarily upon negative cultural stigmas associated with rhetorical studies both within the university and society in general. The members of the CCCC conference were beginning to recognize the need to *re-define* rhetoric in its "older and fuller sense" (206) not only among themselves, but, more importantly, within the entire university. I discuss the importance of this conference more carefully in Chapter 4.

in discourse, on its *nonargued* premises, [and] on its *taken-for-granted* assumptions” (307) because such presupposed, taken-for-granted assumptions reveal cultural values, which are “so deep-seated that they seem nonexistent [and] so integrally a part of the text that [the embedded values] seem irrelevant to [the text]” (307). Cultural analysis, as understood by Hart, performs as the divisive, question-probing, postmodern inquiry that seeks to undermine and expose many of the hegemonic structures on which much of our cultural discourse is constructed. Such an understanding will be increasingly valuable once we draw comparisons between the middle part of the nineteenth century and contemporary culture and classrooms.

I would like to begin this cultural analysis of the mid-1800s by considering Connors’ progressive re-tracing of rhetorical studies, which he also begins by examining classical Greek and Roman rhetoric and then focuses heavily on the evolving rhetoric between 1840 and 1970. It would be impossible, and surely inappropriate, for me to attempt to recount the myriad changes that occurred within rhetoric in this (relatively) short period although I must again assert that probably the most dramatic changes occurred within rhetorical studies between 1840 and 1890 than since its earliest inception by the sophists. Connors argues extensively that the changes that took place during this historical period led to the direct creation of what we now term “modern composition-rhetoric.” Modern composition-rhetoric is, roughly, what I refer to when I discuss rhetorical instruction in the mid-1800s. Although I do discuss rhetoric in general terms during this fifty-year span, I would like to focus on the composition-rhetoric course after it was made mandatory by almost every existing university. Since this new mandatory class was generally required in a student’s first or

second year, it has many similar traits to what we now know as the first year writing (fyw) course, which is still mandatory in most colleges today.<sup>4</sup> Though the phrase did not appear until sometime later, the fyw course was first conceived and implemented at Harvard in 1885 in response to the growing number of inexperienced writers entering and graduating from its university (Connors 178-185 et. al.). Consider Adam S. Hill, one of Harvard's earliest Professors of Rhetoric, who in 1879 assess the dismal situation of students' poor writing by stating, "Everyone who has had much to do with the graduating classes of our best colleges has known men who could not write a letter describing their own Commencement without making blunders which would disgrace a boy twelve years old" (Qtd. in Connors 185). In response to this growing anxiety of English usage and correctness by its graduates, Harvard required all of its students to enroll in the mandatory fyw course as a proposed solution to addressing writing deficiencies. As other universities across the country adopted similar courses, rhetoric rapidly became known as a "remedial" course that merely inculcated students with the various prescriptive conventions that negligent elementary and secondary schools failed to teach. Connors attributes the growing disinterest for rhetoric in the university partially to the remedial nature with which the class quickly became associated, but also with the increasing workload that rhetoric instructors were asked to perform in such classes in terms of grading the "bad English" papers their poor students were producing; thus, the longstanding esteem rhetoric enjoyed for 2400 years was swiftly dismantled.

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<sup>4</sup> From this point on in the essay whenever I discuss composition courses after 1885, I am referring to the first year writing course unless otherwise specified.

It is important to distinguish between Connors' notion of composition and rhetoric, which are always inherently related one to the other, and earlier understandings (pre-1840) of each discipline, which tried to maintain a much more discrete separation. This is an important distinction to make because, I propose, neither composition nor rhetoric are as dependent on the other as Connors would have us believe for all times future. The mid-1800s is only a brief, although extremely important, period in rhetoric's history, which is why it would be beneficial to consider this era as an archeologist or a paleontologist might—a mere glimpse of a timeline we will never fully understand. I mention such a consideration because surely one can envision a composition course where rhetoric is engaged only peripherally, as is the case in any composition class focused on literature or creative writing, and it is equally as easy to identify rhetoric outside of the composition class as seen in the oratory of a spontaneous debate—one in which nothing is actually written. I illustrate this distinction to call attention to the necessity for composition instructors to consciously, intentionally, and aggressively refocus on rhetoric in their composition classes since composition and rhetoric are not always or inevitably connected. Connors' notion of rhetoric, and its relationship to/with composition, is mostly subtle but unquestioningly implied whereas I am arguing for an active and cognizant effort by both student and teacher to reexamine the composition-rhetoric relationship by not just presuming that the way they operate together today will always be the way they function together. This insistence is reminiscent of Terry Eagleton's reminder in which

[Rhetoric] saw speaking and writing not merely as textual objects, to be aesthetically contemplated or endlessly deconstructed, but as forms of *activity* inseparable from wider social relations between writers and

readers, orators and audiences, and as largely unintelligible outside the social purposes and conditions in which they were embedded. (Qtd. in Covino 46)

Such a view of rhetoric understands that truth and change are not something to be sought out, but rather something to be worked for, something to be created. That creation process occurs partially through dialogue and partially through revisiting classical rhetoric, and its changes over the millennia, “because it provide[s] a model for critical analysis and discussion of public issues” (Eagleton qtd. in Covino 46). Modern composition-rhetoric then is constantly shaped and reshaped by historical *and* contemporary cultural factors and not by fixed or transcendental understandings that hypothetically exist outside of us in some ‘other’ reality. Thus, composition instructors who focus on rhetoric acknowledge to their students the capacity in which rhetoric, and the course itself, are connected to broader social contexts.

As we continue to culturally analyze the mid-nineteenth century for trends that link rhetoric during this period to its function within composition today, we begin to see emerge the push to utilize classroom space as a site for fostering a critical education that “gives social change a central role” (Covino 46). Critical education or pedagogy operates within universities to identify hegemonic constructs embedded in language, which form and perpetuate oppressive relationships between students and their various social and political communities, as well as between the university and the cultural context in which it is situated. A composition class focused on rhetoric not only seeks to identify hegemony embedded in language, but more importantly it endeavors to create a “new” discourse with which to combat the old after hegemonic constructs have been identified. This new language is formed and informed by the specific social,

cultural, and political contexts in which students and instructors participate. Peter McLaren discusses how oppressive cultures often manipulate oppressed classes not by coercion or tyranny, but through language, through rhetoric. He writes, “[h]egemony is a struggle in which the powerful win the consent of those who are oppressed, with the oppressed unknowingly participating in their own oppression [...because] hegemony is a cultural encasement of meanings, a prison-house of language and ideas, that is freely entered into by both dominators and dominated” (76-77). In this sense, oppressed classes often perpetuate their own oppression simply by using the language created by their oppressors: “the values and beliefs of the dominant class appear so correct that to reject them would be unnatural, a violation of common sense” (McLaren 78). A critical education that centralizes rhetoric within composition studies fundamentally tries to help students, through new language production, negotiate with the language espoused by the dominant culture in order to expose ways in which the students are manipulated and/or oppressed. Only by mediating this old language with the new can communication occur between the two groups; it would be impossible to achieve a greater sense of democracy between either group without this channel of communication first being established. This new language established through communication between the two classes is a rhetorical language, which is precisely why the composition instructor prizes rhetoric as a device that facilitates social change.

By concentrating composition classes on rhetoric, instructors not only initiate ways for students to more effectively identify hegemonic constructs in our culture, but also participate in the creation of a new discourse that does not always (merely) replicate hegemonic interests. Such a focus often promotes more democratic

classrooms as well as a more democratic society by increasing students' abilities to learn to create a discourse that increases their participatory involvement in education and thereby society as well. By including students in the truth-making venture, rhetoric encourages students to take more active roles in critically analyzing those forces hedging in their individual liberties. John Dewey suggests, "the aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education [...] and [the] reward of learning is a continued capacity for growth" (*Democracy* 100). This "aim" satisfies a student's need for individual knowledge and growth from a university education; whereas, the "reward" Dewey discusses has a broader educational purpose, which more substantially fulfills a student's maturity in an expanding society. As a result, once hegemonic forces have been identified, this new language appropriately, fluently, and rhetorically responds to those hegemonic forces by challenging and hopefully changing that source of discontentment.<sup>5</sup>

Another trend that emerges when comparing rhetoric of the mid-1800s with today is the way in which it involves itself so completely in social and political change, as Crowley and Hawhee point out when they argue:

rhetoric is among the best ways available to us for rectifying power inequities [...]. We write in a postmodern era, an era that embraces change and hence demands flexible communication strategies [...]. We believe ancient rhetorics, which of course are pre-modern, offer an interesting starting point from which postmodern rhetors might think discourse anew.  
(3, xv)

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<sup>5</sup>This idea is similar to Audre Lorde's *The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House* in which she argues that utilizing the "Master's Tools" (i.e. his language) will only "temporarily beat him at his own game," but that "genuine change" will never be achieved until new tools (i.e. new languages) are created and then properly employed (99).

Incidentally, this is true insofar as composition classes must focus on rhetoric not as an end itself; that is, rhetoric should not be construed as merely talk for the sake of talking, but as a means for facilitating change by “rectifying power inequalities.” Composition instructors bent on change must be careful to utilize rhetoric as a fundamental utility of the composing process, which is valuable only when it is used in specific times and places for specific purposes. Rhetorical study does not lend itself, as is popularly believed in composition today, to innocuous theme essays, to discussions of literature, or to personal exposition; rather, it insists on being used not only in the classroom but in actual settings, in *lived* experiences within the discursive communities of a culture. Interestingly, Connors observes that prior to the 1840s the “classical tradition in *rhetoric* was essentially unconcerned with personal expression or personal experience. The tasks set for students in writing and speaking were from the earliest point concerned with the social and the cultural” (300). Connors concludes this observation by highlighting the fact that during the mid-nineteenth century “this classical approach, in a relatively few years, changed into a rhetorical praxis far more personal, private, [and] intimate” (302). It is important to analyze any taken-for-granted assumptions Connors may be making in this statement in order to gauge the accuracy of Connors’ argument. But, before I discuss Connors’ argument, I would like to highlight the way another historian of rhetoric, Sharon Crowley, records the same historical shift. She writes:

[b]y the midpoint of the nineteenth century [...] American rhetoric teachers had developed another pedagogical goal, one that eventually supplanted the older focus on public, civic, discourse [...]. This shift in the focus of rhetorical education— [occurred] away from civic virtue and toward the bourgeois project of self-improvement. (34)

Regardless of how accurate Connors' and Crowley's claims may be, of the various reasons they cite for the degradation of rhetoric in the mid-1800s, neither fully explores the possibility that rhetoric, as a discipline, declined only after its focus shifted away from the public and toward the personal. The discipline's decline in popularity in the mid-1800s correlates exactly with the time when rhetoric became burdened with the "lesser" tasks of improving grammar usage, correcting spelling errors, and encouraging personal irenic inquiry instead of focusing on previous agonistic classical tenets, which served mostly to prepare men for service and leadership in the community. Lisa Ricker writes, "[b]y the mid-nineteenth century, rhetoric has thus become detached from both its rich history and its traditional basis in orality. [O]ne of the main causes for [this] transformation [...] was the movement toward individualism" (242). Once rhetoric began to be viewed as only a means of providing better writers, and not as a way of creating discourse within a democratic society, it did not take long for the entire enterprise to be regarded as meaningless. Rhetoric became departmentalized and consequently reduced to its simplest form because it was being utilized only in part; however, it is also important to note that classical rhetoric often excluded women from preparing for social or political leadership positions. Viewed in this light, irenic rhetoric maintained some democratic aims by including both male and female students in its instruction whereas agonistic rhetoric, while outwardly promoting democratic participation in the community, actually limited equal access to such training because it was an almost exclusively male discipline before this shift occurred. What this means for composition today is that by refocusing the composition class on classical rhetoric,

which operates within “the social and the cultural” (300) and not just the personal, composition instructors actually elevate the discipline to its fuller and originally intended purpose as cultural purveyor of truth and knowledge so long as instructors also retain irenic qualities of rhetoric that include a broader spectrum of students in their instruction.

By analyzing how a culture’s values become embedded in its discourse, we can now retrace the history of the fyw course by considering, as Hart suggests, the values embedded within the culture itself. It would be helpful to begin by exploring the values maintained by the university in 1885 (the inception of the fyw course) in comparison with more recent developments of said course. Hart reminds readers, who are analyzing values embedded in a culture’s discourse, to tease historical trends out the discourse by recalling “rhetoric never escapes the influence of culture” (305); “[v]alues, it appears, seep inevitably into a society’s rhetoric” (308); and “[a] culture’s values are often best seen in contrast [because] there is nothing inevitable or invariable about such trends” (312). Hart is asserting two rhetorical considerations, which the perceptive cultural observer should begin to see emerging when analyzing American culture’s relationship to rhetoric in the fyw course. The first assertion is that “Americans believe that even value-based instruction can be systematized and delivered efficiently” (307), and secondly, “American rhetoric is distinguished by its blend of transcendental and pragmatic themes” (314). These themes represent how rhetoric was popularly understood after 1885, which is reflective in the ongoing dilemma that continues to plague composition today. These themes, however, have not emerged just since 1885; they can be traced much further back to the unresolved conflicts between Plato’s

transcendental comprehension of the field and the more pragmatic understandings employed by the early Greek sophists. By retracing these themes as they progress from the classical era, through the middle and later part of the 1800s, and until today, composition instructors can begin to more fully conceptualize the history of rhetoric and what that history means for current developments in the field.

Considering Hart's first assertion, that Americans believe value-based instruction can be systematized and efficiently delivered, Connors argues that the primary reason for rhetoric's initial degradation and near demise within the composition class after 1885 was because it was never efficiently translated into a systematized discipline. Early fyw courses were instituted merely as a response to the growing demand for linguistic competency within increasingly popular written (as opposed to oral) forms of rhetoric amongst the laboring class, which began to enter the university in large numbers during this time. Where classical rhetoric was heavily value based (i.e. training men for leadership in political spheres) this new rhetoric was viewed mostly as a weak amalgam of old vestiges and new aims designed not to train men for leadership, but, rather, to get students to write grammatically correct sentences. These new designs on classical rhetoric happened so quickly that neither rhetoric nor English studies had much time to adjust to one another—hence much was lost on each side. Another reason Connors cites to explain rhetoric's refusal to be "easily made scientific" was because the German educational system became increasingly popular in America during this time; by his assessment, American universities during the 1870s and '80s were increasingly modeled after this system:

[t]he defining ideal of the American university, adapted directly from the

German system so extravagantly admired by the American academic traveler, was the idea of pure scholarly research [...] in which pure learning based on disinterested research was the noblest of goals, were intoxicating for many young Americans, and they wanted to build in its image. (176-177)

Although plausible that rhetoric's downfall occurred because of its resistance to neatly meld into this Platonic German system, I think, however, that Connors' idealized language in recounting the cultural climate of this era seems a bit excessive. I am not arguing that his claim, regarding America's widespread acceptance of the German model, is not historically accurate; however, it would be helpful to consider this assertion from a different viewpoint. Connors' explanation, which suggests that the university was progressing forward and that rhetoric was not, does not account for the social and cultural factors that must have also influenced rhetoric's resistance to be easily made scientific. Rhetoric, from the sophists on, has widely been regarded as a craft, art, or knack, which, although extremely influential, was never fully grounded in empirical studies precisely because of its dependency on the culture in which it operated; thus, rhetoric was never esteemed by Plato and the like in the same way that the "purer" or more noble studies, such as science, logic, and (especially) philosophy, were. Historically, as is still true, one could not be an effective rhetor without firmly grasping cultural and audience considerations within the specific setting in which the speaker speaks; consequently, as universities became increasingly specialized and systematized when fyw courses began appearing, it was always rhetoric's dependency on culture that prohibited it from becoming an empirical discipline, which could exist *above* culture as the German system suggested. Rhetoric's resistance, then, to the German model was not characterized by a deficiency within the discipline; rather, it

stemmed from unwillingness to be used as solely a Platonic study, which aspired to no higher purpose(s) than to create better writers for their own sake. This resistance, I think, can be most appropriately classified as a reemergence of sophistic influences within the field during this time, which would not have fit well within the purely Platonic university that was being created.

Now, considering Hart's second assertion, that American rhetoric blends transcendental and pragmatic themes, one must again contrast larger aims of the fyw course when it was first designed with course aims today in order to understand how differences, even in defining rhetoric, have had powerful effects on the discipline. As stated, written rhetoric began rising in prominence between 1840-1890 over the earlier form of traditionally oral rhetoric, which is why the pragmatic aim of the fyw course in 1885 was designed almost entirely to produce more fluent and competent writers among the influx of the laboring class, whereas rhetoric's transcendental theme, preparing the rising aristocracy for leadership, was mostly neglected during this time. It is important to note that during the twenty-year period between 1869-1890 the *National Center for Education Statistics* reports that the number of colleges in America nearly doubled to 998 in 1890 from 563 in 1869 (Connors 80). Although this era experienced enormous growth in higher education, it is also important to mention that this growth did not occur without limitations; during this time, Congress placed numerous stipulations on the emerging universities if they hoped to receive funding from the newly created Morrill Land-Grant College Act (as will soon be discussed). I argue that the reason rhetoric's larger transcendental aims were originally neglected in the fyw course occurred primarily out of response to various stipulations Congress

placed on universities, in terms of how and what subjects should be taught, and not because of the explanations that have already been suggested. The increased demand to teach writing “skills” was a direct result of Congressional involvement in America’s changing culture at the time; as a result, the course became (mostly) a remedial learning class, whose primary goal was to churn out a greater number of competent readers, writers, and communicators. It would not be until after the 1963 CCCC conference that we see American rhetoric revisiting a blend of transcendental and pragmatic aims within fyw classes.

Similarly, I would like to highlight the way in which John Dewey refers to the era in composition, between 1840-1890, and the prescriptive, pragmatic methods then used to teach. Dewey describes composition during this time as “traditional education” in which teaching “was a matter of routine in which plans and programs were handed down from the past; [however] it does not follow that progressive education is a matter of planless improvisation” (*Experience* 28). Dewey argues that progressive education, which more closely resembles the blended fyw course we see today, is not simply doing away with the old and adopting the new; indeed, he cautions against such hasty transitions by observing that “the general principles of the new education do not of themselves solve any of the problems of the actual or practical conduct and management of progressive schools. Rather, they set new problems which have to be worked out on the basis of a new philosophy of experience” (*Experience* 21-22). I illustrate this point only to demonstrate complications associated with comparing rhetoric instruction, after the passage of the First Morrill Act, with rhetorical studies in the university today, which is much more progressive than the model it replaced.

Although much insight can be gained by comparing the two periods, this comparison is problematic because early fyw pedagogy often neglected broader educational aims in its rationale by focusing solely on grammar and sentence-level construction, which was rather limiting in democratic function. After its combination with English, rhetorical studies often forced most intellectual thinkers away from the discipline, and especially away from teaching the fyw course, because of the increasingly pedantic workload associated with reading such banal, solely-“pragmatic” freshman essays over the course of a few years. I am not suggesting that rhetoric and the fyw course have changed all that drastically in the last 120 years to over generalize on either as being completely progressive in comparison to its older forms; however, it is important to remain cognizant of historical approaches to the discipline, in light of the positive academic attention both are currently receiving. It is for this reason that fyw and rhetorical studies appear more progressive today, in the Deweyan sense, than was the case in 1885. To contrast then the significance of such cultural and educational concerns, between early and contemporary fyw courses, certain identifiable trends emerge that are not only understandable but which should have been predictable.

Such trends include and surely are not limited to the push for relevance, critical thinking, and especially interdisciplinary focuses, which have recently become associated with first year composition. These trends are merely rhetorical concepts that attempt to combine the pragmatic interest of producing grammatically correct writers with broader themes, reminiscent of the more classical (pre-1840s) rhetoric; indeed, what do the rather vague notions of *critical thinking* or *relevance* really mean when operating within a pragmatic framework? From a cultural analyst’s perspective, it is

doubtful whether universities, which purport such programs, can ever accomplish either intended aim in the same class. It is difficult to discern whether such language is merely constructed as an innocuous rhetoric designed to garner higher standing for composition within the academic communities, or if it is designed to actually resurrect classical aims and thereby mediate between the classical and the modern. Sharon Crowley is rather skeptical of this latter design when she argues that the fyw course is in place only because it “gives literary studies something to define itself against” (2) and that it is highly doubtful “whether it is possible to radicalize instruction in a course that is so thoroughly implicated in the maintenance of cultural and academic hierarchies” (235). Crowley is arguing that, unfortunately, the (largely) unassessed cultural and academic hegemonies still dictate most of the aims of the fyw course, when in fact students and instructors should have a much larger role in designing the aims of the course since they are the primary players in this rhetorical paradigm. Therefore, any attempt on the part of English departments to inculcate its freshmen with the belief that they must attend the required fyw class in order to master the arbitrary, abstract goal of fostering critical thinking or relevancy in writing must be seen largely as an ad hoc response to growing pressures within the university to justify the “need” for the required course to, not only its students, but to its instructors and to our culture as well. Contrasting repetitive trends, between fyw courses throughout history, reveals such a conclusion regardless of how disconcerting the exposed theoretical underpinnings often are (especially when examined by a fyw course instructor). Notwithstanding, such considerations prove significant insofar as they highlight the need once again for composition instructors to focus on a blended understanding of rhetoric in their

classrooms not as an end in itself but, rather, as a part of a larger cultural drama that encourages students to take more active roles in interacting with and within our society. Once this goal becomes internalized as an aim of fyw courses, what follows will be a renewed focus on classical rhetoric in its fuller sense as a fundamental means for effecting social change because, as Crowley and Hawhee write, “nobody thinks or writes in a cultural vacuum [...]. [T]he human desire to compose stems from the human desire to affect the course of events” (xiii).

Before continuing, I cannot stress enough the scope of Robert Connors’ account of the field during 1840-1890s; his scholarship is extremely thorough because it offers not only breadth of the sea-changes made in rhetorical studies, but also depth of insight into the implications which have resulted due to such changes. If we assume for the moment Connors’ analysis is accurate, based on his thorough attention to detail, then we should be able to draw accurate conclusions about cultural values that permeated throughout this time based on the historical context. Similarly, and maybe more importantly, we can continue to make comparisons between current cultural attitudes enmeshed within the fyw course by examining these historical trends. Chief among these are the effects that the Morrill Land-Grant College Act (MLGCA) has had on the discipline. Connors mentions this Act only briefly in his account of the changes that affected rhetoric in the mid-nineteenth century, which is rather surprising considering the immense importance this Act has had on the discipline. I will argue that the MLGCA of 1862, 1890, and its revisions throughout the past one hundred and forty years has had not just an important effect, but in fact has had *the* most dramatic effect on the changing nature of American rhetoric and English studies.

## CHAPTER 2

## DEMOCRACY'S COLLEGE

*We have just emerged from a most expensive war, and ought to exhibit that spirit which success justly inspires, grappling with the financial difficulties remaining as a part of our inheritance with the courage that conquers, and thus secure the vital interests of our own people.*

--Justin Morrill, to the House of Representatives, 24 July 1867

*Certain forms of knowledge and control require a narrowing of vision. The great advantage of such tunnel vision is that it brings into sharp focus certain limited aspects of an otherwise far more complex and unwieldy reality. This very simplification, in turn, makes the phenomenon at the center of the field of vision more legible.*

--James Scott, *Seeing Like a State*

Settings

Russell Thackrey, scholar and historian of state universities, believes that until the rise of federally funded universities and the introduction of the Morrill Land-Grant College Act that “95 per cent of the people” or, as Jonathan Baldwin Turner termed them, the “industrial classes” received no higher education beyond a few years of primary schooling (9). Thackrey charges that before 1850 “existing colleges served only 5 per cent [of the people]—the ‘literary’ and leisure classes” (9). The MLGCA’s primary role then was to assist in the education of the industrial classes not only for

their individual betterment, but also (and more importantly) the betterment of the nation by giving rise to a burgeoning professional-managerial class that would displace the gap between the highly educated and the poorer classes. The MLGCA was written and introduced to Congress by then Congressman, later turned Senator, Justin S. Morrill, the son of a Vermont blacksmith. Morrill was a tireless champion for promoting public higher education; he believed firmly, much like Thomas Jefferson, “that the future success of American democracy rested on the nation’s ability to maintain an informed and educated electorate” (Cross ix). When once asked why he “led the battle for the College Land-Grant Act?” Morrill answered that he “saw the most valuable lands being dissipated and squandered by reckless grants for all sorts of local and private objects, without the benefit to the nation as a whole” (Qtd. in Nevis 4). Ultimately, Morrill’s goal was always toward establishing a greater sense of democracy in this country by encouraging men and women of all racial and economic backgrounds the opportunity to participate in the educational systems that were once reserved for the male leisure class, and then to use that education to become more active members of their local communities in order to better shape our nation as whole.

So it was that after Morrill’s Act passed in both Houses, President Abraham Lincoln ratified it in 1862 in the midst of some of the most intense fighting of the Civil War. This Act was a testament to the vision of men like Lincoln and Morrill who viewed the country not as it was, but how it ought to be. Such leaders diligently sought out a direction for this country that anticipated the end of the War from which a stronger and more unified nation would emerge as a result of overcoming this conflict. Before the Civil War the country had only relatively small universities, located

predominantly on the East coast, in which enrollment was reserved exclusively for the wealthiest citizens; however, after the War, with the passage of the MLGCA, colleges for *all peoples* began appearing across the country especially in the West and Mid-West where the country's focus was beginning to shift. In 1863 Iowa and Michigan became the first states to accept the terms of the First Morrill Act; in the next five years over 28 new colleges were started as a direct result of this Act (Nevis 3-14 et. al.). Today the MLGCA supports over 105 colleges and universities with at least one in all fifty states and U.S. territories. Collectively, this Act has educated the largest majority of students in this country than any other federal legislation or private funding. One estimate is that "some 20 million Americans, men and women of every race, ethnicity, religion, and economic background have been educated by Land-Grant colleges and universities" (Cross x). No other Act of Congress has had as wide-ranging effect, in terms of percentage of students educated, as this Act has on our nation's educational system, which is not to say that its first few years in operation were trouble-free.

As the MLGCA slowly began to assert itself during the war torn Reconstruction years, huge influxes of young people began attending universities, and although many of these new students did not study agriculture, many were farmers and sons of farmers (McDowell 17). During this era, Land-Grant institutions receiving Morrill funds were required to focus university instruction on "such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanical arts" as well as on language and communication studies (Original text; Section 4 of the First Morrill Act, July 2, 1862 qtd. in NASULGC 12). Interestingly, increased funding was requested for Land-Grant programs in every amendment to the First Morrill Act that passed before Congress; whenever Congress

granted the additional funding, it also attached increasingly more stipulations as to where the new monies were to be directed—English language and studies were always among the list of studies to receive increased funding. As an example, consider “from 1857 to as late as 1890, Michigan State required for admission to the freshman class [...] the satisfactory passing of an examination in arithmetic, geography, grammar, reading, spelling, and penmanship” (Eddy 66). Four of the six “basic requirements” at one of the first publicly funded Land-Grant institutions dealt specifically with language usage, comprehension, communication, and presentation. What began as an obscure reference in the First Morrill Act, “English language” studies, would quickly become interpreted and defined as “language, literature, composition, rhetoric, and oratory” (Qtd. in Thackrey 12). The importance of communication and language usage was essential to advanced studies—liberal, technical, or otherwise. The problem, of course, with this understanding of English and rhetoric was the fact that as Land-Grant universities admitted many more “under” educated students its academic admission standards inevitably lowered to account for the influx of such students; it is at this point that rhetoric took on the unique role of re-educating or re-mediating students simply to get them to satisfactory introductory levels. The fyw course was created out of this atmosphere, and was implemented mostly as a response to the multiplicitous implications of the MLGCA; the Act encouraged so many new students to go to school that language departments became faced with the task of maintaining academic respectability within the discipline, and also, most importantly, maintaining university standards. If universities were to uphold their authority, they could not produce student bodies that could barely speak, read, or understand the English language.

What is most interesting, though, about how the MLGCA influenced the field of composition-rhetoric is represented by the changing nature of Land-Grant institutions themselves. The Morrill Land-Grant system, while outwardly concerned with increasing democratic participation within higher education, simultaneously allowed private, non-democratic interests the opportunity to manipulate these universities because of the vague language in which the First Act was written. Consider Sections 3 and 4 of the First Morrill Act, which was presented to Congress in July of 1862:

*And be it further enacted, That [...] out of the treasury of said States, [any State that chooses to participate in the program and comply with the requirements] receives the entire proceeds of the sale of said lands [that] shall be applied, without any diminution whatever, to the purpose hereinafter mentioned [...] That all moneys derived from the sale of lands aforesaid by the States to which lands are apportioned and from the sales of land scrip hereinbefore provided [...] in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life. (Qtd. in NASULGC 12)*

It should not be surprising that discrepancy between Morrill's overt democratic aims and private interests' designs for the Act would arise from this purposefully vague language. Notable among these private interests have always been agribusiness manufactures, wholesale distributors of farm related products, drug companies, and medical research interest groups. Such lobbyists contributed a large percentage of the revenue generated by the MLGCA, after the initial land sales were made, and continue to support Land-Grant institutions today. This revenue, which is used to fund much of the operating and program costs of many of these institutions, is often given freely enough but not without first stipulating, in much the same way Congress did, what "kinds of research" these monies are to be directed. Justin Morrill purposefully rewrote what we now refer to as the First Morrill Act in this manner, in the hopes of pleasing as

many and upsetting as few as possible, because the original Act was actually first proposed in 1857 and vetoed by then President James Buchanan in 1859. President Buchanan refused to sign the Act because he believed its language was written with too overt an emphasis on the federal government's intervention into state education. Although only indirectly connected to state's rights issues as a means of encouraging Southern states to reenter the Union after the War, President Buchanan feared the Act would draw too much criticism from Southern Democrats who were quickly agitated by any infringement on an individual state's rights. Ross writes, "Buchanan's veto message was to become a classic of individual reasoning. In an illogical [...] obiter he argued the [financial] inexpediency and ineffectiveness [of the Act] before the judgment of unconstitutionality was pronounced" (58). Buchanan claimed the bill was economically unfeasible due to the current instability of the country, the fear that private interests could gain control of large portions of land without federal consent, and "because Congress does not possess the power to appropriate money for education" (Eddy 32); albeit these concerns may have been founded, Eddy suggests that Buchanan merely bowed to pressure exerted by the Southern Democrats. Consequently, Morrill was forced to rescind and rethink his proposal; what resulted eventually became known as the First Morrill Act, which is a stunning display of intellectual and political rhetoric because the way he worded the Act, to please as many as possible, was effective in getting it passed even if such wording also contained space for undesired, non-democratic manipulation to occur.

To illustrate this point further, the Act of 1862 was different from the Act of 1857 in two fundamental ways. The first way was *when* the 1862 Act was repropoed,

and the second was *how* it was repropoed. Morrill actually waited until 1861 to reintroduce the bill that failed in 1859, which, not coincidentally, was the same year the Southern States seceded from the Union. In 1861, Southern Democrats were no longer an opposition to the Act's passage, which is evident by the fact that Morrill added a section in his second proposal from the first (1857), which stipulated, "No State, while in a condition of rebellion or insurrection against the United States, shall be entitled to the benefits of this act" (Original Act, Section 5 qtd. in NASULGC 13). Such a stipulation clearly testifies to the democratic vision men such as Morrill, Lincoln, and the (remaining) members of the Thirty Seventh Congress had for the country by passing such an Act while torn apart by civil war; although, again, such stipulations can also act as a reminder of the possible non-democratic intentions such men may have had. Surely one can argue that Morrill may have added such a disclaimer as a way of rewarding Union politicians by allocating federal funding, in the absence of Southern states, in order to strengthen Union states during and after the War; however, such an interpretation would be too lengthy to detail here without detracting from the focus of my argument. The second way of *how* the Act of 1862 was unique from the Act of 1857 is exemplified by the different way Morrill rhetorically constructed the language of the Act that was ratified by President Lincoln. The rhetoric of the 1862 Act was vague, unspecific language, and as such it was never certain as to what qualified as "liberal" or "practical" education. Questions immediately arose in regards to defining such idealistic sentiments, which eventually led to problems for every state that established new Land-Grant institutions under this Act. Most common among these problems was agreement between Congress and the states as to what was meant by "the

entire proceeds,” which were to be given “without any diminution whatever” (Qtd. in NASULGC 12). Conflicting definitions of Morrill’s language became a dilemma because new Land-Grant institutions found it increasingly difficult to procure the promised funds, let alone request any additional funding.

Earle D. Ross, MCLGA(s) historian, recalls that “Land-Grant foundations were not to be trade or vocational institutes for training working farmers and mechanics but colleges or departments for educating leaders” (88). With this intended goal of Land-Grant institutions in mind, it is quixotic to learn that during this same period the attitude still existed that “classical tradition had been entirely opposed to specialization” (108), which, when combined with a lack of funding, caused one professor at Massachusetts to act at different times as “secretary, librarian, and teacher of military tactics and gymnastics, entomology, zoology, anatomy and physiology, rhetoric and English language, and history” (109). Another professor at Iowa acted at “various times in addition to [...] continuous administrative service ranging from student clerk to acting president, taught English, mathematics, business law, and political economy and sociology [...] Latin, History, Rhetoric [and] chapel services of the Sabbath day” (109). Early accounts of colleges and universities are filled with numerous stories as outrageous as these primarily because a lack of funding forced educators to perform multiple roles in order for the university to run, but also because American education models were so new they did not have previous examples with which to compare themselves. Early universities operated (somewhat) on a trial and error, figure-it-out-as-you-go basis because they had to make do with available funding for a limited amount of personnel while mediating between classical and modern pressures.

Nonetheless most of the emerging universities would not be disheartened by such discrepancies in the language of the First Morrill Act, appropriation of funding, or definition of pedagogical requirements. These colleges were pioneering a completely unique educational experience, which attempted to combine transcendental *and* pragmatic aims in light of evident economic and experiential deficiencies; hence, previously undiscovered pedagogies were constantly emerging as a result of the requirements of the universities, the capabilities of the faculty, the needs of the students, and the local communities. All of these entities were loosely, yet collectively, grouped together under the Morrill Land-Grant College Act for educating the laboring class and making higher education available to more of our country's citizens in the high hopes of ensuring a more democratic nation. These aims, combined with this intended goal, I argue have had a far greater impact on transformations in rhetoric and compositional studies than has any of the other reasons that have previously been suggested regarding rhetoric in the 1840-1890s.

### Language and Players

Before I begin reexamining the changing nature of rhetoric in the mid-1800s, I would first like to finish describing the language Morrill needed to use to ensure the passage of the 1862 Act, because such language idealizes the changing way in which rhetoric constantly adapts to the culture setting in which it is located; this will be an important feature of my discussion of the fyw class in the next section. The language of the MLGCA(s) has constantly been reshaped throughout history because the wording

of the 1862 Act could never hold up to the hardships it would be put through after those first few years. Without a federal legislative or judicial body to follow up and inspect the newly formed colleges, they developed primarily unregulated until the Second Morrill Act was passed in 1890. Although the Second Act is popularly known as the “Negro College Act,” because seventeen all-Negro colleges were started as a result of it, the language in which it was written applied to even those early schools established under the First Act.<sup>6</sup> The Second Morrill Act was worded much more precisely when it was presented to Congress; however, it was no less important than the First Act because it continued to promote democracy not only amongst the industrial classes but also amongst Southern blacks who had only recently acquired their freedom. The Second Morrill Act was really an amendment to the First and as such it is remembered as only one of a long line of similar amendments. Thomas Williams, 1890 Morrill Act historian, writes, “the history of the 1890 Land-Grant institutions is part of the struggle of American blacks for equality. [T]hese factors should be understood by those who seek to effect change [...or by those who] accept the fact that they can be changed and can also be the impetus for change” (2,4). The 1890 Land-Grant Act worked toward and accomplished such change specifically by “raising literacy levels [and] teach[ing] independence of thought and the ability to reason” (Williams 5). Such was the reasoning that prompted Morrill to pen in the 1890 Act “[t]hat no money shall be paid out under this act to all States and Territories for the support and maintenance of a

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to mention that of the seventeen colleges created by the Second Morrill Land-Grant Act only one, the University of Maryland Eastern Shores, was not located in a Southern state. This should be a testament to the Act’s focus on fostering democracy; where once slavery existed now the federal government was funding the education of those very individuals.

college where a distinction of race or color is made in the admissions of students” (Original text; Section 1 qtd. in NASULGC 14).

Similar to race specifications outlined in the Second Morrill Act, the language was more exact in terms of defining the pedagogical aims for which Land-Grant institutions were to strive. The First Act stated the pedagogical aims as promoting “the leading [subjects] shall be, without excluding other scientific studies and classical studies, [...] to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanical arts [...] in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes” (Original text; Section 4 qtd. in NASULGC 12). The aims of the Second Act in comparison demonstrate the difference in writing and rhetorical style between the two Acts:

To each State and Territory for the more complete endowment and maintenance of colleges for the benefit of agriculture and the mechanical arts [...] in accordance with un [sic] act of Congress approved July second, eighteen hundred and sixty-two [...] to be applied *only to instruction in* agriculture, the mechanical arts, the *English language* and the various branches of mathematical, physical, natural, and economic science, with special reference to their application in the industries of life. (Section 1 qtd. in NASULGC 14; emphasis added).

The language of each Act was written within a historical setting *when* and *how* it needed to be in order to promote its democratic ends in American universities by including more than just the ruling elite in its instruction. With each amendment made to the First and Second Act, the language of these Acts was constantly defined and refined by Congress yet what has remained consistent between all the amendments has been the Acts’ focus on language and the training of the industrial and leisure classes in rhetoric and communication.

For further evidence that rhetoric and language was/has always been prized by the various Morrill Acts, consider “The Digest of Rulings and Opinions on Acts of August 30, 1890 and March 4, 1907” which states “[said] funds cannot be used for salaries of instructors in philosophy, psychology, ethics, logic, history, civil government, military science and tactics, [or] in ancient and modern languages *except English*” (*Rulings of Secretary of the Interior, August 3, 1899, November 2, 1911, and May 23, 1916* qtd. in NASULGC 17; emphasis added). One can only speculate as to why Congress prohibited Morrill funds from going to these specific disciplines, but I would argue the two primary reasons for issuing this prohibitory clause was because these disciplines remained classical vestiges of an older academic tradition that our culture was trying to move away from, and/or because these were specifically the kinds of academic studies, which more fully lent themselves to continual academic usage and not to pragmatic applications that the Morrill Act was trying to promote. I would also argue that Congress promoted English studies in order to establish more uniformity between Land-Grant institutions and curriculums, which is why universities were required to submit annual reports to the Secretary of the Interior, after 1890, for further “clarification” of funding and legislative rulings so that all Land-Grant universities could adhere to the same policy.

Although I have focused this essay almost exclusively on the MLGCA(s) explicit democratic fostering function, it is important to remember other cultural factors that played a part in the passage, implementation, and interpretation of this Act. Ricker argues this very point when she writes, “many elements may have played a role in the transformation [of rhetoric in the mid-1800s], some with roots in theories or praxes

predating the era of coeducation [...thus such changes] were neither sudden nor unexpected [...and] possibly unsurprising to its witnesses or participants” (241). One can easily recall the social climate of the late-1800s, which pushed for increased Western migration and agricultural development that would directly lead to the extermination of American Indians from their native lands, which undoubtedly was a limiting democratic byproduct of the Act. But before one dismiss the MLGCA as having only non-democratic ulterior motives, one must first consider the changing nature of America during this time. James Scott, in his *Seeing Like a State*, argues that in the nineteenth century “the state’s role represented a fundamental transformation” (91), which does not excuse the federal government’s ill treatment of Native people, but only helps us better understand why such actions occurred. Scott continues by discussing the modernist attitude that existed during this time:

[Before the 1800s the] state’s activities had been largely confined to those that contributed to the wealth and power of the [elites...]. The idea that one of the central purposes of the state was the improvement of all the members of society—their health, skills and education, longevity, productivity, morals, and family life—was quite novel. There was, of course, a direct connection between the old conception of the state and this new one. A state that improved its population’s skills [...] and work habits would increase its tax base and field better armies [...]. And yet, in the nineteenth century, the welfare of the population came increasingly to be seen, not merely as a means to national strength, but as an end itself. (91)

Reservations then against the MLGCA’s explicit aims should not completely disqualify its democratic intentions within education because Scott also reminds us that “[a]lthough, like all utopian schemes, [they] fall well short of attaining [their] goal, the critical fact is that [they do] partly succeed” (19), which is precisely why the First Morrill Act contained no provision for policing the Act itself or of said monies it

promised. As I have already argued, this was a necessary feature (or omission) of the First Act because the programs, the colleges, the faculty, and the students were so new that it would have been nearly impossible to establish uniformity between all institutions from the outset. Each of those early Land-Grant institutions were literally formed out of the culture and context in which they were situated; however, by 1890 when the Second Morrill Act was passed, a precedent had been established among Land-Grant participants, which is why the Second Act required “[t]hat on or before the first day of July in each year [...] the Secretary of the Interior shall ascertain and certify to the Secretary of the Treasury as to each State and territory whether it is entitled to receive its share of the annual appropriation for colleges” (Qtd. in NASULGC 15). Hence, these Secretaries became the legislative bodies that began policing Land-Grant institutions. The schools became directly accountable to Congress, which became the judicial body in rulings over said monies, and the annual reports Land-Grant institutes had to submit became the primary reason for increased uniformity among universities their academic aims.

In order to clarify even further how English studies was defined and how that definition was used to promote democratic participation in higher education, bear in mind that the Secretary of the Interior ruled on December 7, 1900 and May 23, 1916 that “[i]nstruction in English language [would be defined as] English language, English literature, composition, rhetoric, and oratory” (Qtd. in NASULGC 17). Language uniformity and clarification still plays an important role today in reshaping the First Act, which is apparent even as recently as 1994 with the passage of the Equity in Education Land-Grant Status Act. Though, admittedly, this Act ideally should have

been passed 120 years early than it was, it did establish 29 “tribal colleges” to begin receiving Land-Grant monies under the same presumptions, which operated “in accordance with the provisions of the Act of July 2, 1862” (Original text; Sec. 533 qtd. in NASULGC 23). It has been necessary for Land-Grant universities to constantly clarify the language of the Act in order to maintain a focus which promotes greater equality within our universities and our society by guarding against President Buchanan’s original fear that the private sector, as mentioned, will take advantage of our educational systems unbeknownst to the federal government, the states, and the students themselves.

Such intersections between the private sector and public education are unmistakable in English studies when one examines how instructors conduct teaching and researching practices. “Leftist intellectuals,” as many critics such as Tom Wolfe have begun calling contemporary English and composition instructors, are in many cases forced to defend and justify the relevance of English and rhetorical studies by only citing its pragmatic and feasibly-marketable qualities.<sup>7</sup> The necessity to *employ* English and rhetorical skills undermines both early notions of the social and political importance that classical rhetoric played, and the hope of establishing a more

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<sup>7</sup> See Tom Wolfe’s rather cynical essay “In the Land of the Rococo Marxists” in which he scathingly defines “intellectual” as a word “used as a noun referring to the ‘intellectual laborer’ who assumes a political stance, which did not exist until [...] 1898” (116). Although some of Wolfe’s disdain for American intellectuals’ agendas in “English and comparative literature departments [...] at many universities [...] which are filled with] skepticism, cynicism, irony, and contempt” (124, 117) is valid, Wolfe wholly fails to acknowledge the historical context of the late 1800s in which these laboring intellectuals first began appearing. It was mainly the need to democratize education in this country, which led to the creation of the intellectual; the MLGCA acknowledged that the leisure class should not be the only class who could afford to be educated. Not surprising, what follows, then and today, is an increased focus on class arguments since it was these conflicts that promoted the creation of the MLGCA in the first place.

intellectual populous as opposed to composing, solely, a community of more productive workers. The MLGCA, although outwardly created for the industrial classes to promote agriculture and mechanical arts, was never intended to simply train more efficient workers. In a beautifully stated passage, Edward Eddy, in his *Colleges for Our Land and Time*, surmises about the salient logic of this argument when he writes:

[t]he liberal arts have thus prevented the Land-Grant Colleges from becoming merely trade schools with utility as the primary purpose. By stressing the traditional academic approach, liberal education has kept the colleges from becoming too practical. The modern liberal arts have made a contribution, too, in their concern over human values. (215)

This sentiment should be an important reminder to the harsh critics of English studies that utilitarian aims are not always the most beneficial or productive goals of a society, because often the intrinsic aims of English are as important as the explicit ones. “In general, then, it could be said that the liberal arts in the Land-Grant Colleges have been more valuable historically for what they have prevented than for what they have produced in terms of a new and differing concept of education” (Eddy 215-216).

### Relationships

Returning now to our examination of the changes that occurred in composition-rhetoric because of the introduction of the MLGCA, it would be helpful to begin by looking at the changes that occurred in the student-teacher relationship during this time because this relationship most clearly illustrates the deliberate attempt hopeful educators made to foster democracy within universities after 1862. Robert Connors clearly identifies the changing nature of rhetorical instruction by observing the shift in

rhetoric that occurred simultaneously with the inception of the fyw course by highlighting numerous seen and unseen reasons why this change, from an agonistic to irenic based discipline, happened when it did. Connors argues that paramount among these hypotheses was women's introduction into the university, beginning in the 1840s, which became the impetus most responsible for rhetoric's change; however, it was not until after the passage of the First Morrill Act that coeducation in universities became pervasive. Once the Second Morrill Act of 1890 was passed an estimated "71 percent [...] of all American colleges admit[ed] women [...whereas] [p]rior to 1860 there were only five coeducational colleges and universities in the United States" (Ricker 238). In light of this huge influx of women into the university, Connors reasons that universities and instructors were "forced" to change how they taught rhetoric to accommodate them. Walter Ong recalls that "[a]cademic agonism [arose] from a disposition to organize the subject matter itself as a field of combat, to purvey, not just to test, knowledge in a combative style" (Qtd. in Connors 26). After women entered the (previously all male) university, rhetoric instructors could no longer agonistically challenge their students as they had since the early sophists, because such "combative educational methods [...] now came to seem violent, vulgar, [and] silly [...because] to attack a woman, either physically or intellectually, was thought ignoble" (Connors 26-27). Connors concludes that the shift away from agonism toward irenic modes of instruction resulted in what we know today as an amalgam between "newer" irenic values and "half-understood survivals" from classical times (27). Connors' reasoning here, although informed, seems to suggest that rhetorical instruction was merely an inevitable response to changing relationships between rhetoric instructors and their

students. Rhetoric, in Connors' argument, is regarded as a socially inept discipline that fluctuates in response to societal whims as opposed to performing as a deliberate and integral part of social changes. I propose that the changing nature of rhetoric and between student-teacher relationships after 1862 occurred, not simply in response to women's entrance into the university, but rather as a conscious attempt by optimistic educators to utilize rhetoric as a primary means of increasing democracy in this country by beginning with coeducation in universities.

I would like to continue exploring rhetoric's shift from agonistic to irenic modes by recounting Chapter Two of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in which he elucidates student-teacher relationships. In this chapter, Freire discusses the differing aims of two fundamentally different forms of pedagogical instruction—namely the “banking concept of education” and the “problem-posing method” or simply put, the “teacher-student contradiction.” Under the banking concept of education, instructors work at odds against their students because instructors are regarded as the power holders possessing all the knowledge, which is begrudgingly translated to the student; the more meekly a student acts as a receptacle for the knowledge, the better the student. In contrast to the banking concept is the problem-posing method, which fuses teacher and student together in the educational endeavor as copartners engaged in a constant effort to learn and re-shape the rhetorical processes in which both are always involved. Student-teachers and teacher-students interact in dialogical relationships with one another to ensure that knowledge is learned, acquired or often created in the interaction between their collective coupling. I describe these two vying pedagogical methods only to illustrate ways in which Freire's notion of teacher-student relationships begins

to complicate Connors' argument that the shift from agonistic to irenic rhetoric happened merely in response to women's enrollment in the university. Was the changing nature of rhetoric in the United States after 1862 due to the university's inevitable response to women entering the university or was the country embracing the "raison d'être of libertarian education" (Freire 58) and moving toward a greater conception of democracy by including women in its instruction?

Freire's observation of the student-teacher contradiction complicates Connors' argument precisely because of how closely Connors' interpretation of the agonistic university pre-1862 correlates with Freire's banking concept, and also how similar Connors' account of the irenic university post-1862 resembles Freire's problem-posing education. Freire argues that "only a revolutionary society can carry out [problem-posing] education [because...it] posits as fundamental that men subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation [...] by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism" (66). This argument better explains why some of the changes may have occurred within rhetorical studies when they did; conversely, Connors appropriately highlights the changing nature of rhetoric in the mid-1800s, but he is extremely shortsighted to attribute these changes primarily to the new coeducational universities because this interpretation fails to account for the changing nature of the entire country following the Civil War. As already briefly mentioned, more than one interpretation can be drawn from the implications of the Morrill Land-Grant College Act when one examines the cultural factors occurring during this time. For example, consider that the MLGCA was signed into Congress the same year in which the Homestead Act was passed. Similarly, during this era, the Industrial

Revolution was beginning, Western migration and expansion were leading many people to journey West in search of previously unsettled regions, and immigration from Europe began rising in the largest numbers since the first Europeans began to populate the continent. When one considers these factors, which also affected America's changing culture in 1862, any changes that occurred in educational systems should seem no less dramatic than what was happening across the entire country during this era. Without speculating too much, I would argue that most of these transformations occurred because the nation was in search of defining a greater sense of humanity than it had previously known, because, as Ross argues, our new "distinctly American" education design during this time "was [just] one phase of an awakening nationalism" (1). This "nationalistic" American attitude typifies the transcendental notions that democracy, equality, and freedom have always exemplified because such ideals have never been static; rather, they have evolved from struggle, hope, and "the interplay of the opposites permanence and *change*" (Freire 66), which characterized America's search for itself and for democracy in the late nineteenth century.

That rhetoric as a theory and as a practice in the classroom changed only exemplified educators' acknowledgment that "authority must be on the side of freedom [and] not against it" (Freire 63). Women's enrollment in the university after 1840 was not the impetus that changed rhetorical studies; rather, their involvement was actually the result of a country's collective move toward defining a greater participatory democracy for its citizens. Rhetoric was not shaped by the changing nature of the student-teacher relationship so much as it *helped* shaped the newly-emerged relationship. Rhetoric was acting as a mediator between social classes (the laboring

and the leisure), amongst power distribution (between teachers and students), and especially between men and women because women were not only encouraged to enter the university, but were treated more respectfully once they arrived. Rhetoric in this sense is not a watered-down conglomeration of what it once was combined with what it is forced to submit to; rather, it should be regarded as it always has in past times—as a pivotal point where two opposing sides may engage in communication with one another in order to resolve conflict. Where Connors' shortsighted analysis of the rhetoric's changes in the mid-1800s fails to satisfy, Freire offers proper treatment to the cause of the changes:

The pursuit of full humanity [...] cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity; therefore it cannot unfold in the antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed. No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so.  
(67)

The shift in rhetoric from agonistic to irenic in the mid-1800s was the response of a nation calling for greater humanity, socially and educationally; the MLGCA and women's enrollment were merely examples of that humanity revealing itself.

### Aims and Direction

At this point I would like to conclude my discussion of the implications the MLGCA had on the rhetoric and the university between 1840-1890 and shift instead to a discussion of what the MLGCA means for composition-rhetoric and the university today. Ultimately, I argue that today's fyw course is a direct legacy of the MLGCA, in that its instructors are still faced with mediating between transcendental purposes

designed by the academy and the pragmatic methods prescribed by cultural influences. However, I will add that although this mediation has obviously changed from the mid-1800s, to account for current progressions and dilemmas within the university and society alike, it has not changed so much as to not be easily recognized as a part of the age old dispute between Platonic and sophistic understandings of rhetoric, which is idealized by mid-nineteenth century rhetoric. I conclude this chapter by issuing a call-to-arms for fyw instructors to deliberately focus on classical and contemporary rhetoric in order to educate students on how to become more vocal members in this country's social, cultural, and political spheres, but not without first finishing my analysis of how the MLGCA has impacted American rhetoric as well as our higher education systems.

Edward D. Eddy, much like Robert Connors, recounts some of the numerous changes that occurred in universities after the passage of the MLGCA. During this era, Eddy recalls, “[t]he methods of teaching in general had not yet changed. But the *purposes* of the new institutions were different” (52; emphasis added). Eddy argues the new Land-Grant institutions centered around three key premises which included: “bringing education to the masses without sacrificing quality”; increasing attention on liberal studies, of which English and rhetoric were surely a part, because of “the prevailing opinion that these constituted the only true education”; and for the promotion of a collective education that was regarded as “practical and useful as distinct from the classical and useless” (52-53). This *new education*, as it was popularly regarded, had much more liberal teaching purposes than were previously entertained within universities. Older or traditional purposes quickly became synonymous with an understanding of education steeped in rigidity, uniformity, and nonconformity to

broader social and cultural agendas. It was under conditions such as these that rhetoric became prized as the medium to facilitate changes in emerging state universities, and also, simultaneously, as a means of introducing labor class students to a higher education that had previously been inaccessible to them. To more completely understand rhetoric's role in the university, and the changes it helped facilitate, it is necessary to again reflect on the implications that the MLGCA had on the discipline.

Education, generally speaking, is simply a reflection of a culture's collective social desire to pass information on to younger generations; therefore, rhetoric is commonly used within a culture as a way to express those desires and as a way to facilitate a student's educational experience. John Dewey, in a lecture series he gave in 1938 titled *Experience and Education*, develops a line of reasoning that argues no experience occurs in a vacuum, which is why a child's environment has an effect on the upbringing and subsequent growth of the child. For example, Dewey states, "[n]o one would question that a child in a slum tenement has a different experience from that of a child in a cultured home [...or] a boy on the seashore one different from the lad who is brought up on inland prairies" (40). Consequently, Dewey implores educators to consider the "physical and social" environments in which they educate their students (40). Dewey continues his reasoning by condemning the "traditional" style of education, closely related to Freire's banking concept and pre-1840s agonistic rhetoric, because it neglects to account for students' environments, and thereby fails to acknowledge our culture's desire for an educational system that is more democratic than older models traditionally were. Although Dewey wrote this lecture nearly 80 years after the First Morrill Act was signed, I would argue he is writing toward similar

purposes as that of the “new education,” which the MLGCA sought to implement.

Dewey’s “progressive” education advocates:

a demand that the teacher should become intimately acquainted with the conditions of the local community, physical, historical, economic, occupational, etc., in order to utilize them as educational resources [whereas the] [t]raditional education did not have to face this problem; it could systematically dodge this responsibility. (40)

In a way, the MLGCA was a step in this progressive direction because of the increased attention it offered to agricultural and mechanical studies; instructors in almost every discipline were forced to acknowledge “environmental” considerations when planning syllabi or course activities. In the first few years after the MLGCA was passed, composition-rhetoric studies drove many good instructors away from the discipline; however, by the passage of the Second Act of 1890 better qualified and specialized teachers were sought with increasing frequency to engage in a more progressive style of education than had been witnessed since the sophists.<sup>8</sup> Rhetoric instructors, who formerly instructed only in the classics and public oratory, were now asked to teach more technical languages and communication skills since pragmatism and the environments encompassing students’ lives were regarded as increasingly important. Returning then to the aforementioned dilemma, between the changing historical nature of the discipline and the implications of the MLGCA, it should be evident that the conflict between “traditional” and “progressive” education in the mid-1800s was the result of yet another predilection of this country’s desire to become increasingly democratic as opposed to being an inevitable byproduct of changing social and cultural

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed account of teacher qualification and specialization after the MLGCA see Connors’ “Shaping Tools: Textbooks and the Development of Composition-Rhetoric” (69-111).

stimuli, which operated apart from our culture's ability to help shape our educational system.

Perceiving this trend in our educational system's history aids us in better understanding the environment of the first year composition-rhetoric class today, which has changed in two primary ways since the creation of the MLGCA. The first is the way in which the fyw course is still regarded as having no higher purpose than to remediate poor students with pragmatic understandings of "proper" word usage, and the second is the attempt of elitist English departments to elevate rhetoric in similar ways as occurred in England when their working classes became interested in English studies: "[by trying to determine] how to make [English studies] unpleasant enough to qualify as a proper academic pursuit" (Eagleton 53) and thereby try to dissuade the working class from an interest in such studies. Ironically, however, both moves by composition instructors (to reduce the discipline or elevate it) eventually accomplish similar objectives. The first direction refocuses students' educations on cultural and academic contexts, hegemonies, and happenings as they occur in order to involve students in these very structures, whereas the second direction, in the very act of resurrecting classical rhetors in order to make the discipline less attainable or desirable, educates students of the historical tenets that initially established the discipline, which is useful knowledge to acquire. Initially, such objectives seem to contradict one another as well as to undermine the aims of the university because, I think, it is evident that today's university is only mildly interested in increasing attention on classical rhetoric and is altogether unconcerned with refocusing students' educations on destabilizing cultural hegemonies as they exist within the university or within society as

a whole. It seems anathema to the interests of higher education to ask students to focus their attention, not on themselves, but, rather, on those social and cultural forces surrounding them because one could argue the goal of advanced education is primarily to better oneself, and only then to indirectly serve the community. By focusing fyw courses on rhetorical studies, critical educators can and have easily been accused of pseudo-Marxism, which merely displays self-interested, nonacademic gain. Neither of these concerns are unwarranted; although, neither stigma fully grasps broader understandings of a rhetorically-focused composition class.

Fyw classes, which reinvent classical rhetoric and then apply such inventions in pragmatic ways within appropriate social, cultural, and political contexts, actually better educate students by the increased focus on writing competency *and* on classical rhetoric's transcendental aims designed to promote genuine leadership and/or change. Such classrooms are no longer haphazardly comprised of only the incessant ebb and flow of popular composition theories; rather, they become fixed on salient conventions throughout history, which still prove important to the field as aids in language competency processes. Rhetorical composition instruction encourages students to develop working histories from the past with applied focuses on the present and the future. In such classrooms, students are taught by traversing an historical overview of the field so that they can begin to tease out repetitious themes and principles from the classics, which in turn will prove invaluable to the construction of a new persuasive language. Also, rhetorical composition classes maintain university interests by inculcating students with various writing goals ranging from effective argumentation and persuasion to citing sources. Lastly, when rhetorical education operates in the

composition class, society stands to gain from the endeavor as well, because universities (indirectly), students (directly), and teachers (deliberately) become focused on bettering our respective cultural environments, which, I think, remains one of the intended goals of the MLGCA's legacy.

An educational perspective of the world as it ought to be has always had rhetorical purposes in mind because it focuses on creating goals and then recreating those goals in light of what has been learned. Consider compositional theorists Linda Flower and John Hayes' "Cognitive Process" that purports a similar understanding of deliberative writing processes in which "goals lead a writer to generate ideas, [just as] those ideas lead to new, more complex goals which can then integrate content and purpose [in students' writing]" (281-282). While Flower and Hayes' method operates efficiently as a theoretical model, I believe Patricia Bizzell's critique of their empirical method in "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty" most accurately encapsulates concerns against constructing composition as an overly rigidly and systematized discipline (to be discussed more fully in the next section). Flower and Hayes' Platonic model fails to account for the rhetorical interaction between cultural and social contexts within fyw classrooms, which eventually become primary sites for constructing knowledge and growth because these sites are the most important aspects of students' lives. Fyw courses should constantly be reshaped by acknowledging the importance the interactions, between a culture and the classroom, perform within students' composing processes, within their knowledge acquisition, and in the extent to which deliberative change occurs. Approaching composition studies in this way not only allows but *advocates* that political agendas and rhetorical dilemmas be brought into the classroom

to be dissected and then reshaped through an ongoing dialogue occurring within the classroom, the culture, and the student's writing in much the same way that the MLGCA attempted to implement a study of composition-rhetoric that could easily be fashioned, in practical ways, within the local communities in which the Land-Grant institutions were located. Such a focus historically has been, and continues to be, a daunting task to hopeful composition instructors, but only by examining how language shapes and is shaped by its culture will it be possible to sustain a deliberative conversation in which assumptions are dismantled and deep-seated emotional beliefs are challenged, in the hopes of utilizing rhetoric to continue to promote democracy in this country.

## CHAPTER 3

## THE VOYAGE

*The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts.*  
--C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*

Setting Sail

For the moment, I would like to continue by focusing less on the mid-nineteenth century and more on composition-rhetoric as it exists today. In this chapter, I argue extensively for the continual need for fyw instructors to focus on rhetoric in their composition classrooms because, as I have illustrated, composition and rhetoric became paired only as recently as the 1860s. I also assert that composition-rhetoric continues to operate within the university to expose and dismantle hegemonies as they exist within our culture in much the same way that the MLGCA operated toward similar ends; however, in this section I detail numerous complications, disagreements, and fears that are problematic to a rhetorically-focused composition class and to the fyw class's ability to establish a sense of democracy that encourages students to participate more in our culture. In the second section of this chapter, I then offer suggestions as to ways in which fyw instructors can overcome such complications and fears by returning to an earlier argument that encourages instructors to work *with* their students by *borrowing*

*liberally* from rhetoric's rich history, and by accounting for an array of contemporary rhetorical theories when they design their courses. As such, I would like to begin this section by examining the nature of rhetorical studies today and the way in which composition-rhetoric theorists relate one to another.

As fyw instructors engage in discussions of rhetoric's role in composition, complex layerings of theoretical predecessors begin to surface. The more instructors uncovers by researching, the more they discover about theorists and their broad spanning literary and theoretical influences, which can assuredly discourage many researchers from future exploration of rhetoric, and yet, by the very nature of rhetorical studies, nothing said can ever be duplicated, exact same conclusions can never be drawn, and research in one university is often unknown to neighboring universities. Therefore, discoveries made are oftentimes only considered discoveries because new audiences have yet to hear old punch lines.<sup>9</sup> As an example of the mastitic way in which research in rhetorical studies manifests itself in the academy today, consider a variety of composition-rhetoric theorists who have made important contributions to the discipline after the major shift occurred as a result of the MLGCA. Upon researching a few of the major contributors, I began focusing on the work of Patricia Bizzell, David Bartholomae, and James Berlin, whose work inevitably was influenced by a deeper layer of composition-rhetoric theorists, which includes but surely is not limited to: Linda Flower and John Hayes, Janet Emig, Kenneth Burke, Stanley Fish, Peter Elbow;

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<sup>9</sup> In Hart's cultural analysis of myths he cites Edward Said [1979] who observes "that each time a myth is used it creates new variations of itself that are sometimes more interesting than any consistencies" (322). In this section, I am suggesting similar conclusions in regard to the nature of researching rhetoric, as well as the nature of rhetoric's use in composition instruction.

below this foundation surely exists yet deeper layers in which Bartholomae draws directly from Bizzell and Berlin with Bartholomae. I highlight this complexity of rhetorical theories and theorist only to expose ways in which the field is constantly evolving in response to not only cultural factors, as suggested in chapters one and two, but also to the work compiled within the discipline itself; researchers in rhetoric must understand that every examination of a theorist is always complicated by layering upon layering of other theories and theorists that will always reveal newer texts which, of course, will indicate something slightly different than the previously examined text. Amongst all this layering the composition instructor, acting as researcher in the hopes of working toward social change by focusing on rhetoric, must know how to separate the chaff from the grain.

Competing theories, which permeate throughout the composition-rhetoric field, can oftentimes create a dissonant gonging in the ears of those forced to traverse this minefield of contradictions and misgivings between the various theories. In his “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” James Berlin writes of the necessity for rhetoric, or rather “rhetorics,” to be used in composition instruction. Berlin’s “rhetorics,” I think, is a much more appropriate use of the term than I have been using thus far because it insists that there is not one but many approaches and understandings of the term and the discipline; “rhetorics” constructs rhetoric not as simply a singular term, but as an idea, as an ideology to be explored: “rhetoric is regarded as always already ideological” (717). From this understanding of rhetorics, composition-rhetoric theorists and instructors can begin to draw conclusions between differing theoretical approaches. Similarly to Berlin, David Bartholomae also recognizes the need for

rhetorical instruction when teaching writers how to compose essays when he points out that “[o]ne of the common assumptions of both composition research and composition teaching is that [...] a writer’s ideas or his motives must be tailored to the needs and expectations of his audience. Writers have to ‘build bridges’ between their point of view and the reader’s” (628). Patricia Bizzell also advocates the essential quality of promoting rhetoric within composition by reminding readers of “the cognitive and social factors in writing development, and even more important, the relationship between them [because] there are such things as [rhetorical] discourse conventions” (392, 390). By highlighting this *need* for rhetorical instruction, both Bartholomae and Bizzell would concur with Berlin’s notion that rhetoric is pluralistically constructed by both the historical “discursive conventions,” and by contemporary “cognitive and social” contexts in which those historical conventions are located. All three of these theorists regard rhetoric as something innately organic and inexplicably hard to define in the composition course because of the theoretical underpinnings, which begin dismantling meager definitions as quickly as they are uttered. However, even though both Bartholomae and Bizzell agree on the problematic slipperiness of rhetorics’ definition, they have quite contrasting conceptions about how instructors should approach the composition-rhetoric endeavor in the fyw classroom.

Bizzell argues that fyw instructors need to make “connection to the social context afforded by recognition of the dialogistical relationship between thoughts and language” (395). In this sense, rhetoric instruction in composition is a pedagogical approach to teaching writing that focuses on the dialogistical quality of rhetoric (as designed by Aristotle) between not only students and teachers, but also the students and

their cultural discursive communities. The rationale for such a focus enables students to create “new” languages in which to identify and respond to the hegemonic constructs they discover operating within their specific communities. Bizzell urges instructors to work *with* students to craft a new language that draws connections between themselves and the appropriate social contexts in which students are located. By creating a new language, that does not merely replicate the old language of the hegemony, students and instructors can challenge oppressive features of our culture that inhibit democracy in this country. However, in contrast to Bizzell’s application of rhetoric in composition, Bartholomae, in his “Inventing the University,” argues Bizzell’s approach naïvely neglects a comprehensive view of the classroom and the social conditions, which inform and inevitably shape it. He argues that

the right to speak is seldom conferred on us—on any of us, teachers or students—by virtue of the fact that we have invented or discovered an original idea. Leading students to believe that they are responsible for something new or original, unless they understand what those words mean with regard to writing, is a dangerous and counter productive practice.  
(631-632)

Bartholomae concludes his argument by using almost the exact wording Bizzell uses when she advocates the creation of a new language by simply reordering her syntax: “it is not a matter of inventing a language that is new” (632). Fissures between popular composition-rhetoric theorists begin to exhibit some of the dissension among critical pedagogues and rhetorical theorists who attempt to establish functional definitions of rhetorics and working applications for theoretical approaches to the field after definitions have been agreed upon.

Bear in mind however, as James Berlin does, the shared “notion of rhetoric as a political act involving a dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social, and the individual writer, with language as the agency of mediation” (730). This sentiment exemplifies the belief that language produced by a rhetorically-focused composition pedagogy could, or more appropriately, should be used as a resource for facilitating students’ political engagements within their social settings; once language is utilized in this fashion students can begin dismantling hegemonic constructs operating in their lives. By writing of “rhetoric as a political act” and “language as the agency of mediation” (730), Berlin urges instructors to consider a very intentional use of rhetoric in the construction of language in order to accomplish political action. Berlin regards rhetoric as a utility used to create or destroy depending on the social conditions; similarly, his reference to *rhetorics*, as a political agency, establishes the discipline as something far greater than simply a classroom activity or an English department history lesson. Berlin reminds fyw instructors to confirm to their classes the powerful political nature of rhetoric(s) in the composing process, and not naïvely reduce it to simply a “tool” to be utilized by shifting cultural whims. Similarly, Bartholomae cautions against singular application of rhetoric in composition when he argues “[it] is a failure of teachers and curriculum designers, who speak of writing as a mode of learning, but all too often represent writing as a ‘tool’ to be used by an (hopefully) educated mind” (633). Both Berlin and Bartholomae’s apprehensions here echo older Platonic critiques of the sophists by encouraging composition-rhetoric instructors to guard against rhetoric’s use for debased purposes while simultaneously acknowledging the effectiveness rhetoric can command in political spheres—debased or otherwise.

It seems rhetoric has always fluctuated in this precarious position between extreme political prowess and lowly manipulative vocation, but regardless of which pole rhetoric has operated from, its prominence in facilitating change has rarely been argued. Think back to our discussion of the changing nature of the discipline in the mid-1800s. The MLGCA affected not only how rhetoric and English studies were taught, but more broadly it “was instrumental in breaking the hegemony of classical studies at [...] many of the new universities, [and] creat[ed] a new sort of populist education in America” (Connors 79-80). This almost conclusive change occurred not apart from but in tandem with rhetorical instruction at these sites of “new” education: “The new professionals needed to communicate in writing, and from being essentially based in orality, rhetoric—which was increasingly called composition—was becoming a writing based discipline [...] new occasions taught new duties” (Connors 80). As the universities transformed so did composition; recall, however, that universities changed less in response to the evolving nature of rhetoric instruction and more due to the deliberate attempts of educators and leaders like Morrill to challenge hegemonic structures that limited enrollment in universities to only a wealthy select few. I illustrate these examples only to further my claim that a rhetorically-focused composition class is one that constantly explores academic *and* cultural conditions to expose and dismantle hegemonies operating against democracy in our culture.

Surely such considerations should increase fyw instruction on the rhetorical endeavor, but sometimes it is difficult for instructors to know how or where to make connections between rhetoric and composition if not as a “tool” or as in “the creation of a new language.” I have illustrated only a few of the evident disparities in the

discipline, which do not end in mere semantic contradictions but present real problems for hopeful educators, because I do not want to flippantly or naively suggest a classroom practice that is altogether a simple endeavor. I think Bartholomae's argument is valid when he cautions instructors from leading students to believe they are "inventing" or "discovering" something "new" or "original" unless they understand what those words mean. It is difficult for rhetorically-minded composition instructors to begin to dissect such apprehensions because, in fact, what do those words mean— inventing or original? How are these words not used as merely ideological or rhetorical constructions similar to the way rhetoric itself is often used? How would greater definition of these specific terms assist students in understanding or using rhetoric as political agency—socially or academically? If rhetoric should not be taught and used as a tool, then what mode of writing should be taught so that productivity is achieved in light of Bartholomae's caveat against rhetorical language production as detrimentally simple and therefore counter-productive?

Such endless misgivings and disagreements among theorists can be debilitating to fyw instructors when they approach rhetoric from a standpoint that fancies classical as well as contemporary conceptions of the discipline. John Dewey writes that unless educators establish a "philosophy of education" for themselves they will constantly be "at the mercy of every intellectual breeze that happens to blow" (*Experience* 51). It must often seem to beginning fyw instructors, who attempt to incorporate rhetoric into their teaching purposes and methods, that with every step taken forward in the way of defining and working with theorists, they must simultaneously search increasingly lower in the layers of discourse to establish any sort of demarcation points that may be

relevant in their classroom. After fyw instructors establish a philosophy of education for themselves by which to approach and incorporate rhetoric into their classes they must then account for the environments in which they and the class operate. The fyw course is commonly comprised of apathetic students who are widely uninterested in rhetoric or in utilizing education to liberate anything, including themselves. It can be an even more daunting realization for instructors once they admit that a vast majority of fyw students can actually retard the advancement of their education and democratic participation in society, more than university strictures or authoritative educators do, by their resistance to “liberal” or “inventive” teaching practices. Students’ resistance to education might be the most unexplored areas of this essay, and surely one of the most unexplored features of the discipline. Dewey is one of the few who recognizes students’ resistance to liberal education as a primary factor to consider when assessing hegemony at work in the university. Dewey recalls that “Plato once defined a slave as the person who executes the purposes of another [...] and a person is also a slave who is enslaved to his own blind desires [...] which is why an] emphasis [must be placed] upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of purposes” (*Experience* 67). If students are not participating in their own liberation, then the entire venture is doomed from the outset: “Unless one [thinks] for one’s self, it isn’t thinking [...] and as a result] [o]riginality is gradually destroyed, confidence in one’s own quality of mental operation is undermined, and a docile subjection to the opinions of others is inculcated” (*Democracy* 303). I mention such concerns not to discourage, but, rather, to encourage fyw instructors by acknowledging that their fears are not unfounded or unfamiliar. That rhetoric has been, and I argue always will be, intimately connected

with education should be evident in every examination of the past, beginning with the ancients and continuing into the fyw course today. This notion alone should encourage hopeful educators to continue their work amongst the discrepancies because they are not debilitating; rather, they showcase an ancient debate always seeking new participants.

### Shoving Off

In light of these many considerations, I want to reassert the amassed evidence that supports the idea that a rhetorically-centered composition class, focused on change that promotes students' participation in broader social and political contexts other than the university, is the most effective and relevant way in which to teach writing principally because this framework operates where students are by working with available resources. The most obvious consideration rhetoric and composition theorists often neglect to inform their readers is that of their principal task, which seeks to perpetuate the relevance of the discipline in the university; theorists are forever interested in garnering interest and support for rhetoric because of their vested interests in it. Without rhetoric, most theorists and instructors would be without employment, and without pedagogy, all would be talking incessantly to themselves. Even when Crowley proposes abandoning the "required" fyw course altogether, she simultaneously maintains that non-required, introductory-level writing classes may be a seductive proposition to the university, instructors, and students alike, because within this framework all participants in the course are *willing* participants (241-248 et. al.).

Similarly, I believe compositional theorist Lad Tobin is writing out of frustration with the discipline when he observes that “the differences in theory are less clear and less significant in the classroom where most [...] practitioners borrow liberally from research of various kinds at various times in the course for various purposes” (10). Such an observation possibly should be regarded as one of the few truths that most composition theorists could agree upon: *borrowing liberally from various kinds of research*. However, in pointing out Tobin’s lament, I am not simply advocating a study of rhetoric that resembles process pedagogy in which a student is “encouraged to attempt any form of writing which may help him discover and communicate what he has to say [...] which produces ‘creative’ and ‘functional’ writing” (Murray 6); rather, I am advocating that composition instructors borrow liberally from rhetoric’s rich history and the subsequent changes that have occurred throughout history, so it can be molded into appropriate classroom pedagogies today. Critical education always maintains rhetorical considerations by situating speakers with their audiences (or teachers with their students) within specific times, places, and contexts in order to utilize any “available means of persuasion.” Similarly, rhetorically-focused composition classrooms situate students in specific times and places in the hope that students become encouraged not merely to write, read or study as singular acts in themselves, but rather as acts always a part of larger goals and intended purposes, which will directly or indirectly benefit them and their respective communities.

However difficult it may be for instructors to deliberate between oppositions within the discipline (either from theorists or students) it is essential for hopeful educators to discern between the importance they place on critiques, revisions, and

counter-arguments, which are always in flux, and their own deliberately developed philosophies of education that stem from classical to modern approaches to rhetoric. In this manner, fyw instructors should be able to more fully comprehend why changes have occurred in the past, as is the case when revisiting the effects of the MLGCA, and how those changes not only affect but are an integral part of how instructors teach and use rhetoric today (e.g., if it had not been for the MLGCA opening colleges to the laboring classes, how different would universities and indeed this country be today?). By establishing rhetoric as the primary focal point of first year composition classes, critical pedagogues establish their research and instruction as points of departure for their students as opposed to simply a staked camp on either side of an argument. These original theories become sites of invention which can have dramatic effects on the ways in which instructors reshape the entire structure of fyw courses as well as the university's conception of the course by working toward change and not simply adding rhetoric to a discipline already inundated with it.

Composition-rhetoric instructors and theorists must understand that responding either positively or negatively to the already established body of theoretical work is not synonymous with invention at all; instead, a renewed focus on rhetoric in the fyw classroom becomes a foundation for interaction that more appropriately utilizes "the various discourses of our community" (Bartholomae 623). Hoping to reach a consensus between the array of composition-rhetoric theorists is a dangerous and somewhat fruitless undertaking because such an interest only attempts to quantify English and rhetorical studies into easily categorical activities that do not appreciate the complex richness of either. Fyw instructors must stop continually looking for answers

only from theorists by beginning to create answers from within, amongst, and in relation to their students and the political and social contexts they bring into the classroom. Instructors must recognize, as George Kennedy proposes, “[r]hetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action [...]. [It] is so engaged that it becomes the mediator of change. [R]hetoric is always persuasive” (Qtd. in Covino 47). In this sense, fyw instructors must deliberately utilize rhetoric and its history as a way of altering material reality because it is an educator’s most powerful means of changing oppressive conditions that always surround the academic enterprise. Once composition instructors make use of rhetoric in this way they will begin to understand the relationship between “rhetoric and writing to critical thinking and political change” that William Covino reminds us of (42). Such attitudes will become invaluable reminders to composition-rhetoric instructors as they begin to experience the dramatic changes that rhetoric has always made possible.

## CHAPTER 4

## CHOOSING TO FAIL

[If] *the only certainty about the future is that the future is uncertain, if the only sure thing is that we are in for surprises, then no amount of planning, no amount of prescription, can deal with the contingencies that the future will reveal.*

--Stephen Marglin, *People's Ecology,*  
*People's Economy*

And yet, the pressing question remains: how is any of this to be done? In an ever-evolving, ever-technologizing world in which technological advancements such as iPods and Play Station 2s are quickly replacing televisions as one of America's favorite pastimes, the looming concern and oftentimes fear is that the aims of the fyw course will have increasingly less to do with students' lives and increasingly more to do with university bureaucracies if our culture continues to view higher education as primarily a way to produce more industrious citizens. What is ironic about this concern is that university bureaucracies, regarding fyw, are often managed by graduate teaching assistants, some of whom "are enthusiastic, experienced, [and] expert; [while] more are bored or resentful, lack previous teaching experience, are ill-informed on what they are supposed to teach, particularly on language and composition, and are teaching with little supervision or guidance" (Kitzhaber qtd. in Tate 14). If anything, an increased focus on rhetoric in the fyw course stems from the recognition of the circular nature of discipline, not only in our country's brief history, but also in the much longer history of

rhetoric since its beginnings. It seems, historically, rhetoric has often fallen in and out of academic favor. If the early sophists were esteemed rhetoricians within Greek society, this was the case only briefly until Plato's libelous account of them leveled the rhetorical endeavor to be regarded as a pandering after table scraps left by "real" intellectual thinkers and philosophers. Similarly, as rhetoric began to adjust to Plato's influence on the enterprise, Aristotle, and later Quintilian and Cicero, reexamined rhetoric's worthwhileness in cultural affairs and helped restore some of the discipline's notoriety that was challenge by Platonic schools of thought; however, it seems as quickly as rhetoric was re-elevated by Aristotle, only a short time passed before the Roman general Octavian burned the library at Alexandria in which *On Rhetoric*, and many other similar texts, were destroyed and thought to be lost forever.<sup>10</sup> But *On Rhetoric* was not lost, nor has its influence on the discipline.

This essay is, of course, an abbreviated recollection of the history of rhetoric, as it existed in classical times, until it first visited our shores when its rise and fall in popularity would continue to shift dramatically in our educational systems as well. This study, while focusing largely on only a brief moment in rhetoric's history (the dramatic changes between 1840-1890), has glossed over most of the early part of the twentieth century because much outstanding work has already been compiled concerning this period.<sup>11</sup> I have chosen to focus on rhetoric during the mid-1800s, and specifically the MLGCA's affect on the discipline, because 1) so little scholarship

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed account of rhetoric in antiquity see Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee's *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*.

<sup>11</sup> For a historical account of rhetoric in the 1900s see James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* et. al.

exists explicitly detailing the impact the Morrill Act has had on the field of rhetoric (although much work has been compiled, more generally, on the Act's influences on nineteenth century universities), 2) because the MLGCA is one of the earliest examples of legislation that advocated connections to be draw between composition and rhetoric, and 3) because those connections reinforced the Morrill Act's outward promotion of establishing a system of education that would increase democratic opportunities for (most) of this countries citizens by utilizing the composition-rhetoric classroom as a cite for facilitating this goal. With these purposes in mind, I would like to conclude this heuristic essay by continuing to examine contemporary rhetoric and fyw classrooms in light of the MLGCA's direct influence on the first example our country has of such a course. This exploration, although begun in 1862, will be most useful to those who carry on the fyw tradition because without a practical application of the information heretofore presented it stands to be forgotten just as all the literature was when the library at Alexandria burned.

To answer the question I posed at the outset of this chapter, this quandary can only be solved by encouraging students and teachers of rhetoric to embrace the chaotic nature of the field. Fyw instructors must once again return to the tenets of the past in order to more fully understand the present and have hope for a future, which is popularly regarded as increasingly bleak. A fundamental contradiction, or so it seems, of the rhetorical endeavor in fyw courses is the "great—but fallacious—dichotomy: composition *versus* literature, or rhetoric *versus* criticism" (Eschbacher qtd. in Tate 94). This paradigm has become the butt of more jokes than it has the source of violent conflict, yet the implications of such stigmas continue to plague fyw courses. Of

contemporary English studies, as stated, it is popularly believed that rhetoric exists merely to give literature something to define itself against, which is exactly why fyw classes are often prevented from utilizing rhetoric's fullest potential in students' lives. In response, I must offer valuable insight into this misconception, from Crowley and Hawhee's excellent text on the fyw course, in which they argue, "[t]he aim of ancient rhetorics was to distribute the power that resides in language among all of its students. This power is available to anyone who is willing to study the principles of rhetoric [...] thus the critical capacity conferred by rhetoric can free its students from the manipulative rhetoric of others" (4). Crowley and Hawhee's text presents a detailed history of classical scholarship as well as many contemporary practices that draw ancient rhetors into fyw classrooms in appropriate and constructive ways. But while such narrowed focus offers instructors pragmatic ways to approach the subject, this esoteric approach may in the same breath limit composition-rhetoric courses more than need be. That ancient rhetoric should be revisited in the fyw class should be evident from this essay, but I have yet to discuss the degree to which such an application should be implemented.

In her essay, "Is Teaching Still Possible? Writing, Meaning, and Higher Order Reasoning," Ann Berthoff compellingly illustrates the dichotomous relationship between persuasion and argumentation. "Persausion," Berthoff writes, is a form of natural "[a]bstraction: it is the way we make sense of the world in perception [...] it] is the work of the active mind. [W]e do not have to teach it: it is the work of our Creator" (337). In contrast to persuasion she states that argument, on the other hand, "move[s] from abstraction in the non-discursive mode to discursive abstraction, to

*generalization*” (337). Berthoff concludes her essay by highlighting “generalization’s” superiority over “abstraction” with the sobering observation of “how well students do with persuasion, and how poorly they do with argument [... because] [p]ersuasion is the air we breath; it is the mode of advertisement. But where do our students hear argument?” (341). Berthoff has seized upon, I think, a fundamental contradiction between how our culture views and uses rhetoric. The distinctions she illustrates here, between persuasion and argument, are quite similar to the differences between Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric* and Plato’s dialogues versus earlier sophistic modes of discourse. Berthoff has merely revisited this ancient quarrel by pointing out that at once our culture regards rhetoric as a manipulative political enterprise as well as a highly informed and educated mode of persuasion employed in job interviews or general education classes.

To illustrate my point, let us assume, as Plato suggests, that the sophists dwelt in the ‘lowest’ or ‘least worthy’ realm of persuasion that exists. If this is or can be the case, then Plato’s dismissal of the sophists should not come as a surprise because it was the sophistic attitude of trivializing or manipulating persuasion (e.g. Gorgias’ “plaything” in *The Encomium of Helen*) that was juxtaposed to Platonic notions of Truth, logos, and ‘higher’ or more ‘noble’ philosophic pursuits. Plato clearly demonstrates his disdain for sophistic persuasion through his character Socrates as is witnessed in his numerous dialogues, such as from the *Sophists* when Socrates argues “[I]t’s no easier [...] to distinguish that kind of person [...]. Certainly the genuine philosophers who ‘haunt our cities’—by contrast to the fake ones—take on all sorts of different appearances just because of other people’s ignorance” (1). But Plato’s pursuit

of Absolutes and logical argument is faulty because he fails to distinguish the audience's (or more aptly our students') roles in the meaning making process; Plato simply dismisses the audience (fyw students) as ignorant. Kenneth Burke accounts for this distinction between sophistic pragmatism and Platonic elitism as an "interpretation of our interpretations" (Qtd. in Berthoff 333). Idealistically, Plato believes that Absolute Truth will always triumph over sophistic persuasion, but this attitude remains extremely shortsighted where students' interests and a democratic society is of primary concern. Consider when John Stuart Mill writes in regard to such blatant conflict "[t]he dictum that truth always triumphs over persecution is one of those pleasant falsehoods which all experience refutes. History teems with instances of truth put down by persecution" (Qtd. in Rushdie 215). Mill is speaking specifically of persecution here, but, I think, one could easily identify similar historical misconceptions of all Platonic notions of big 'T' Truths. Aristotle, on the other hand, understood this disconnection between sophistic ideologies, that were disregarded by Plato because they merely attempted to refine natural "abstraction" processes, and more idealistic attitudes that over simplify popular views of Truth while citing rhetoric's inability to ever achieve such ends. Once we begin to understand historic contradictions can we then identify contemporary inconsistencies as a part of the historical struggle between reputable and despicable usages of rhetoric; only then can fyw instructors begin to revisit rhetoric in their courses in broader and more meaningful ways. It is from this understanding that Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* becomes invaluable to composition instructors for rectifying ancient conflicts, as was the case when the MLGCA first made college available to the working class.

George Kennedy reminds composition instructors of the importance of revisiting Aristotle in contemporary composition when he writes, “Aristotle was a realist, far more pragmatic [than Plato, and] fascinated with the *complexity* of nature and human life” (52; emphasis added). It is this classical Aristotelian attitude of a realistic and pragmatic view of the complex world that enables Aristotle to write so fluently on the characteristics of argumentation *and* persuasion. Aristotelian argument is a manifestation of persuasion because it incorporates sophistic audience considerations into a logical framework, which insist upon deeper perceptions of the complex world and its use of language that communicates such understandings. By logically exploring sophistic attitudes with higher intellectual aspirations, *On Rhetoric* becomes not just a “black book of secrets” but also a catalyst for expository scholarship with fyw courses.

To return then to Aristotle’s assertion, “Let rhetoric be [defined as] an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” (1.2.1) is to understand persuasion not for persuasion’s sake, but, rather, as a mode of *dialectic* for intellectual inquiry and not simply empty debate. I will not recite the distinctions Aristotle makes between rhetoric and dialectic, as when he writes, “rhetoric is a certain kind of offshoot of dialectic and of ethical studies which it is just to call politics” (1.2.7); rather, for the sake of this argument, I simply refer to dialectic as a more effective form of persuasion, which is argument. For rhetoric to be effectively introduced and utilized in fyw courses, it must be regarded, as Aristotle understood it, in a way that does not too narrowly or rigidly limit its complexity within culture. With this understanding of fyw rhetoric in mind, consider Lloyd Bitzer’s assertion that “[t]he aim of rhetorical

discourse is persuasion; since rhetorical arguments, or enthymemes, are formed out of premises supplied by the audience [...]. [T]he audience itself helps construct the proofs by which it is persuaded” (Qtd. in Gross 26). Only once fyw instructors begin reading *On Rhetoric* as a black book of secrets *and* as an ethical appeal to logic can they fully utilize Aristotle’s framework for the production of “meaningful” arguments that can have an affect on the democratic condition of our culture. *On Rhetoric’s* insistence on meaningful argument versus meaningless persuasion encourages instructors to revisit Aristotle by considering contradictive elements, not only in his work, but also within the rhetorical endeavor in order to refocus fyw courses toward more purposeful ends than have been promoted in the past. Aristotle recognizes that regardless of how logical arguments are stated, the audience, or the students, must still interpret and give them meaning; put another way, both speaker and audience are implicated in giving meaning to the class as well as what the class produces. No longer are pathetic, essentializing, or prescriptive approaches to writing instruction sufficient in fyw courses; instead, students are instructed on how to become effective rhetors who must mediate between all interests, or sides to a problem, in order see all “available means of persuasion” and not just small parts of the writing process.

Such attitudes toward ancient rhetoric in the contemporary classroom take into account broader understandings of rhetoric, not just discrete intricacies, as well as the wholly organic nature of the discipline that tries to encompass knowledge from the past within current cultural, time, space, speaker, and audience considerations. Fyw instructors must direct course aims away from the merely remedial nature in which the class has been regarded, since it became mandatory in 1885, by, instead, refocusing

course aims on relevant vestiges of classical rhetoric so that the course can more efficiently produce “new” theories and empirical research, which will continue composition-rhetoric’s goal, begun by the MLGCA, of expanding our society’s understanding of democracy. However, fyw instructors must remain cognizant of the idealistic nature of this endeavor so as not to mythologize or oversimplify rhetoric when undertaking such goals. Hart accurately recognizes that, by its situational nature throughout history, rhetoric oftentimes performs as a somewhat mythic creation to first year composition students (322). Consequently, if we regard texts such as Connors’ *Composition-Rhetoric* or Crowley’s *Composition in the University* as tales of the rhetorical development in fyw courses, then instructors must be careful to accept such accounts as only two of many possible understandings for the course and how it has developed. Therefore, by contrasting historical trends of rhetoric since the MLGCA, instructors can only at best offer relative projections of its contemporary counterpart, which, regrettably, offers mostly topical understandings and applications of the discipline where consistency is most needed by new composition instructors. Although the MLGCA and rhetoric in the mid-1800s tells us much about the discipline during that era, it is essential that fyw instructors not only research such history but, more importantly, interpret and then apply this knowledge so that rhetoric is used appropriately within contemporary settings.

Considerations such as these continually plague fyw instructors and students because they unearth oppositional forces embedded within the contemporary classroom and within the rhetoric’s historical discourse. Unlike Platonic understandings of rhetoric in ancient Greece or the purely pragmatic ways in which the fyw course was

initially conceived in 1885, oppositional forces today highlight the course's need for transcendental, empirically-based theories *and* pragmatic applications from which to design course syllabi. To compare popular attitudes of the university in the mid-1800s with those recognizable from our vantage point today, instructors should be able to draw logical conclusions between why certain shifts occurred when and where they did as well as ascertain the importance of such shifts. As another example of an oppositional force embedded in the complicated nature of restructuring fyw courses on ancient and contemporary rhetoric, consider the shift away from a classical rhetoric after the passage of the MLGCA and then the subsequent return to "Aristotelian logic that had been long forgotten or, at any rate, ignored and despised" after the 1963 CCCC conference (Perelman 65). An examination of pre-1862 rhetoric tells instructors much about what "we call this new, or revived, branch of study devoted to the analysis of informal reasoning *The New Rhetoric*" (65). Such semantic interpretations of rhetoric within these two historical periods leads fyw instructors and students to much deeper understandings, as opposed to topical definitions, of the term that is caustically used today.

Fyw instructors who examine the underlying forms of rhetoric seek to identify how it is used in the actual class and how the class becomes constructed culturally. A survey of any of a variety of popular fyw course readers will illustrate this point. As a solely pragmatic understanding of rhetoric that neglects larger transcendental course aims, consider *Academic Communities/ Disciplinary Conventions* (2001) which purports the necessity of making an argument and supporting it in writing, and then defines rhetoric as "the art of speaking and/or writing persuasively [which is invaluable

insofar as] learning to communicate more effectively with words in a variety of academic situations [that] will increase the probability of having your written work received enthusiastically” (3). Another example that typifies a self-expressivist use of rhetoric is seen in *The Critical Reader, Thinker, and Writer* (1992) which “teach[es] students how to evaluate argumentative and persuasive discourse by analyzing the claims an author makes [and] the evidence for the conclusions drawn [...as a] tried-and-true [...] checklist for critical thinking” (Winterowd v). This composition reader encourages students to investigate authors and their claims against the students’ own understanding of their particular environment; rhetoric, in this light, is regarded as merely a self-help tool at best, and, at worst, a bludgeoning device that strives toward no larger societal goals. As a final, although somewhat dated, example consider how *The Rhetoric of No* (1970) attempts to combine both pragmatic and transcendental themes in its use of rhetoric, but how it also neglects the teacher’s role as a factor in the process in which a “demand for ‘relevance’ in education demonstrates young people’s concern for understanding contemporary issues and for responding to these issues” (Fabrizio v). This notion encourages students to embrace their roles as cultural critics while utilizing rhetoric to vocalize their disdain for any dominant hegemonies they choose to confront without allowing any room for instructors to participate in the process. I illustrate these examples to reinforce my point that this constant conflicting and re-defining of rhetoric’s purposes and methods stems from a larger and much older conflict as a part of the evolution of the field; when properly utilized in fyw courses, rhetoric can promote democracy by encouraging students participation in society, but when improperly used it acts as a debased manipulation of students and the educational

process they thought was in place to assist them. Regardless of how one defines rhetoric in composition, any understanding will highlight the ebbing and flowing nature of the field, and the necessity to refocus on it with as broad an understanding of the discipline as can be effectively maintained.

To the players in the compositional drama, rhetoric should be viewed as both a burden and a blessing; rhetoric has acted as a linguistic dynamo that shatters the hegemonies which limit this nation's democracy, but it has also performed as simply a required general curriculum class, which was endured with all the discomfort of a Southern Baptist's hellfire and brimstone sermon. The burden of rhetoric is that instructors may choose not to utilize its potential, or, more often, do not understand how to do so effectively. Instructors can discuss classical rhetoric with their students and forget that theirs is only one version of many interpretations, or they can showcase modern rhetoric while over-emphasizing language mechanics and under-emphasizing its ability to create democratic opportunities for students. The fact that fyw courses are mandatory in almost every college and university should be a deciding factor for choosing to teach rhetoric because such a broad spectrum of students can be reached easily from this place. It is essential to remember that "[w]hen knowledge about rhetoric is available only to a few people, the power inherent in persuasive discourse is disproportionately shared" (Crowley and Hawhee 4). In order to rectify power relations within the university and our culture, the fyw course must become a rhetorical space in which teachers and students interact together with culture to achieve a more democratic nation; it is not teachers and students working against hegemony, but rather citizens

acting with democracy. The goal of a rhetorically-focused composition class is not to dismantle hegemony, but to dismantle the opposite of democracy, which often takes shape in hegemony. Misunderstanding this point has led to either listless classrooms that focus on nothing more than the menial i-dotting and t-crossing, or to charismatic classrooms with no larger purposes than to bark at the wind; since students look first to the teacher for instruction, the choice is theirs to make.

The choice I am referring to, of course, is the set of decisions every educator continuously makes throughout the academic year: to teach in a traditional or progressive style; to examine history in itself or for what we can learn from it today; to work toward change or to repeat last semester's class notes; to work with students or against them; to work with the university or against it; to understand democracy or feign it. Choosing one side of these decisions is to neglect education's purpose, whereas choosing the other side is not to achieve, but rather is to begin. What remains consistent is the educator's choice and the rhetoric he uses to express that choice; therefore, the only salient truth we can draw on as an educator's blessing is that as long as there is human interplay there will be a space for that interaction to occur.

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