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Rhetoric and Poetics in the English Department: Our Nineteenth-Century Inheritance

During most of this century, Departments of English in America have paid little attention to the relationship between rhetoric and poetics. With the notable exception of Kenneth Burke, I. A. Richards, and some members of the Chicago School, those who have addressed the issue at all have usually looked upon rhetoric as a subordinate discipline, relegating it to the domain of language in the scientific or rational realms. Poetics is declared the primary business of English studies, constituting the central concern (or even the sole concern) of the department.1 Literary texts thus enjoy a privileged status while rhetorical texts are regarded as meriting little or no attention. This diminution of rhetoric as a discipline worthy of serious study is, however, a historical anomaly of the late nineteenth century. Prior to that period rhetoric was almost invariably considered at least as important as poetics in the education of the young, at all levels of formal training. In this essay I shall explore the process that led to the mutual isolation of rhetoric and poetics, an isolation resulting in the sanctification of poetics and a corresponding denigration of rhetoric.

Recognizing the singularity of the contemporary conception of the rhetoric-poetics distinction requires a glance at the relation of the two disciplines in the past. In this case it is best to begin at the beginning, considering the two as they were conceived in the Greece of Aristotle and the Rome of Cicero and Quintilian. I realize that the description to be offered is a simplification, a model of complete balance and harmony more desired than attained at any historical moment, even during the time of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian. Still this conceptual scheme will provide useful distinctions in considering rhetoric and poetics in nineteenth-century America.

In ancient Greece and Rome rhetoric and poetics were commonly defined in relation to each other. As Charles Sears Baldwin indicates in Ancient Rhetoric

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1. The most accessible and influential statement of this position is found in American New Criticism. For a discussion, see Norris, chap. 1.

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521
and Poetic, "each technic, defined within its own scope, helps to define the other by contrast" (5). Rhetoric provided the contrasting term that gave meaning to poetics, as did poetics for rhetoric. While the relative importance of each was never totally stable, both were considered essential to the sustenance of society and the cultivation of the individual.

Kenneth Burke’s distinction between rhetoric and poetics offers a rich conceptual scheme for explaining the ancient division between the two. Rhetoric was concerned with the uses of language in carrying on the practical affairs of society in law, politics, and other essential social functions. As Michael Halloran has so ably reminded us in "Rhetoric in the American College Curriculum: The Decline of Public Discourse," rhetoric was primarily concerned with public discourse. The principles of rhetoric provided direction in producing—and to a lesser extent criticizing—spoken and written language, with a view to making the highest ideals of a society prevail. The principles of poetics were closely related to rhetoric. These provided direction in criticizing—and to a lesser extent producing—texts that likewise embodied the best values of a society. The important difference was that rhetoric was concerned with language designed to bring about action in the material world. Poetics, on the other hand, was concerned with language that existed as an object of contemplation, apart from any practical consequences, and poetic discourse was studied for its intrinsic merits, as an object of interest in itself. It was to be concerned with truth and goodness, but its distinguishing feature was beauty. Rhetorical texts, in contrast, were created for extrinsic purposes. They too were concerned with beauty, but making truth and virtue prevail through specific directives was more important.

This scheme allowed for the blurring of boundaries. A speech by Demosthenes or Cicero, for example, can be treated as a poetic object if it is studied for its intrinsic beauty, apart from its effect on a particular historical audience. Similarly, an important poem such as the Iliad or Aeneid can be required reading for students because it provides implicit directives for the kind of behavior a society values. Both examples were commonplace in the ancient classroom, but there is no confusion about the category to which each text ultimately belongs.

As I said at the outset, this simplified model of rhetoric and poetics in the ancient world was never completely realized at any historical moment. It is all the more remarkable then to discover that during most of the nineteenth century the relation between rhetoric and poetics taught in the American college was strikingly close to this scheme. To be sure there were significant departures, but the two disciplines continued to be accorded preferential—if not always entirely equal—status in the curriculum. I will consider these departures in a moment. First, however, I would like to describe the radical transformation of the rhetoric-poetics relationship that appeared at the end of the last century.

By 1880 rhetoric as a formal discipline was dramatically transformed. Its sole concern in principle and practice was with knowledge defined exclusively in positivistic terms. Rhetoric had become the province of scientific discourse.

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2. Burke’s most recent statement is "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy." Kennedy also uses Burke’s scheme in considering the rhetoric-poetics distinction (384-87).
state this another way, scientific discourse was all that was left to rhetoric. This is not to say that rhetoric lost all concern for beauty. Beauty itself, however, was defined as extraneous, something trivial added to an empirically verifiable reality. Most significantly, the traditional role of ethics in rhetoric was lost. Rhetoric was devoted to recording knowledge, not judging it, and all the ethical concerns of rhetoric were reduced to a question of transcribing accurately what empirical investigation revealed. The consequence was that a rhetoric of public discourse was lost: persuasion in the public domain committed to making prevail the highest standards of a society was taken away from rhetoric. Poetics, on the other hand, retained its historical purview and continued to develop and change as rhetoric became petrified, losing touch with poetics altogether.

This historically aberrant dichotomy of poetics and rhetoric is the result of the loss of a mutually shared epistemology. As I said before, rhetoric and poetics have traditionally been defined in terms of each other. This necessitates a common epistemology—shared assumptions about what can be known and the ways in which the knowable can be known. It is possible—in fact normal—for several competing rhetorics, each based on a different epistemology, to exist together at a given historical moment. Each rhetoric is ordinarily accompanied by a corresponding poetics based on a compatible epistemology. In the nineteenth century three important rhetorics emerge, each matched with a corresponding poetics. The first, classical rhetoric, is joined with what John W. Rathbun calls Judicial Criticism. The second, psychological-epistemological rhetoric (what I will call eighteenth-century rhetoric), appears with, to use Rathbun’s term, Rhetorical Criticism. The last is romantic rhetoric, accompanied by a corresponding romantic poetics. For my purposes the most important are the latter two. By the end of the last century, an attenuated eighteenth-century rhetoric based on a positivistic epistemology ruled in the composition classroom. Meanwhile, romantic poetics, embracing a completely different epistemology, began to hold precedence in the literature class.

The primary spokespersons of eighteenth-century poetics in America are the Scottish rhetoricians George Campbell and Hugh Blair. The dominant representative of the romantic point of view is Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was as interested in rhetoric as he was in poetics (although this is hard for us to see given our rhetorical tradition). All three were highly visible in American thought in the last century.

I will begin with George Campbell, a cleric in the Church of Scotland who served as teacher and principal of Aberdeen’s Marischal College. His *Philosophy of Rhetoric* was published in Scotland in 1776 and became a standard text in American colleges throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Campbell’s popularity in American colleges stems from his reliance on Scottish Common Sense Realism, the dominant philosophy in America during this time (Charvat 33-36).

4. Rathbun does not make the connection between poetics and rhetoric claimed here. I will not consider classical rhetoric and poetics here because they were not a major force in the nineteenth century.
Campbell was attempting a new rhetoric that was to be the counterpart of the new scientific logic, following the implications of Locke and Hume as they are interpreted in Scottish Common Sense Realism. The scholastic world view, which saw deduction as the only method for arriving at truth, is replaced by the Newtonian, inductive scheme. As a result a new rhetoric is needed. For Campbell nature is an orderly mechanism, following ineluctable laws discoverable through the appropriate use of the mind. Reality ceases to be a rational construct revealing itself through the application of syllogistic logic. Whereas the old logic was concerned with words, the new logic is concerned with things—the examination of nature through the inductive method. This is possible because the mind is made up of a set of faculties that corresponds perfectly to the experience provided by the material and spiritual world. These faculties enable the individual to use the inductive method to arrive at the immediate perception of self-evident truths, truths that are always external to the individual, located in an exterior object, and available to the individual through the faculties.

In looking at Campbell’s conception of rhetoric and poetics, it is necessary to put aside our twentieth-century predisposition to view poetics as a privileged form of discourse and rhetoric as unimportant and even suspect. For Campbell each of the various forms of discourse—whether poetic or rhetorical—affects a particular faculty. In fact, the distinguishing feature of a text that enables us to classify it as poetical or rhetorical is the faculty that is called into play in responding to it. But this approach is not reader-centered. The text contains within itself a particular set of qualities that invariably activates a faculty or a set of faculties in the mind of the perceiver. Meaning is in the text, not in the perceiver.

This conclusion enables Campbell to arrive at a taxonomy of discourse forms, based on the nature and the number of the faculties that are called into play. In his introduction to the Philosophy of Rhetoric Campbell divides all discourse into the elegant and the useful. Elegant discourse, of which poetry is the purest form, is that which attempts to please through an appeal to the faculties of imagination and taste by a presentation of the beautiful. Useful discourse promotes “the preservation of the individual or the species” rather than mere “mental taste,” and includes logic (which appeals to the understanding), ethics (will), and grammar (association of ideas). Campbell uses this scheme to conclude that oral rhetoric—eloquence—is the highest form of discourse because it is both elegant and useful and appeals to all the faculties. It therefore includes the traditional concerns of rhetoric and poetics. Spoken rhetoric then becomes the largest class, including as a less important subdivision the area of poetic discourse.

This scheme underlies Campbell’s definition of rhetoric and his taxonomy of its parts. Thus he says: “The word eloquence in its greatest latitude denotes, ‘that art or talent by which the discourse is adapted to its end.’ All the ends of speaking are reducible to four: every speech being intended to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions, or to influence the will” (Bitzer 1). He goes on to establish the basis for the forms of discursive prose (our own four forms of discourse) and the various kinds of poetry—epic, tragedy, comedy—according to the faculties to which they appeal. The highest
form of discourse remains persuasive oratory, including as it does the appeal to all the faculties at once.

It is important to note that although Campbell’s enthronement of oral rhetoric is a departure from tradition, he manages to retain the traditional relationship of rhetoric and poetics in other ways. Poetics is still a matter of symbolic action considered for itself while rhetoric is symbolic action considered for its practical purposes. Sharing a common epistemology, both are essential to the continued existence of a society.

It should now be obvious that Campbell is functioning within the tradition that sees spoken language as primary and originitative, and written discourse as secondary and derivative. As Walter Ong has emphasized, this position is, prior to the last century, dominant. The nineteenth century, however, witnesses the shift in reliance from spoken language to the printed word for carrying out the essential functions of the culture. It is this development that eventually makes Hugh Blair’s Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres an even more important influence in American colleges. Campbell’s Philosophy of Rhetoric went through forty-two printings, the last in America in 1844, but Blair’s Lectures was reprinted 130 times, the first in 1783 and the last in 1911.

Like Campbell, Blair was a Scottish cleric and teacher. He served as Regius Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at Edinburgh University from 1762 until his retirement in 1783, during which time he developed his Lectures. (The name given to Blair’s professorial chair—founded by George III in 1762—is an important indication of the traditional conception of rhetoric and poetics in British universities in the eighteenth century.) Blair shares Campbell’s epistemology, his thoughts likewise being a product of Common Sense Realism. He too sees the universe as an orderly mechanism providing knowledge to a corresponding set of mental faculties. Blair, however, maintains the traditional version of the relation of rhetoric to poetics: the two are separate but equal in his system (2:312-13). Despite this historical loyalty Blair’s presentation of the two disciplines in his Lectures gives rise to a completely different reading of their relative status. In modern terms his manner of treating rhetoric and poetics deconstructs his explicit statements on their relationship.

Of Blair’s forty-seven lectures, ten are given to the realm of public discourse—rhetoric in the traditional sense (including, however, pulpit eloquence). Blair treats this area of rhetoric as an exclusively oral activity. The remaining lectures are more or less equally divided between rhetoric and poetics. In these lectures, however, both are regarded as written arts, with Blair repeatedly deriving examples for each from poetic discourse.

Blair’s reason for calling on poetic texts to demonstrate the principles of both poetics and rhetoric is simple but significant. He is convinced that one can learn the rhetorical principles necessary to produce a text only through studying literary models—the belletristic method, emphasizing the principles of style. Blair specifically denies in Lecture XXXII that rhetoric can be concerned with invention—with teaching the discovery of the content of discourse—and he thus restricts rhetoric to considerations of arrangement and style. Since arrangement
is largely determined by shaping the discourse so that it appeals to the appropriate faculty or faculties, the main concern of rhetoric is with style. And since the principles of style are learned through imitation, the good writer is the good reader. Before writing, the student must thus become a skillful reader, internalizing effective stylistic techniques. Thus, while Blair argues that poetics and rhetoric are equally worthy of attention, his treatment elevates poetic discourse to a privileged status. Poetics becomes more important than rhetoric because it is in studying literature that one learns to write, and the rhetoric course turns away from public discourse—from persuasion in the practical realm—and toward the study of poetics. It should be noted, however, that Blair's poetics is an eighteenth-century construction, and that for him poetry is simply prose ornamented by figures and tropes—"what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed."

In turning to Emerson we enter a completely different epistemological realm. As his private journals indicate, Emerson as a young man consciously searched for an alternative to Blair (Liebman), whom he mentions by name, and Campbell. What is equally noteworthy is that despite a radical departure from his two influential predecessors he retains their allegiance to the traditional distinction between rhetoric and poetics.

For Emerson knowledge is not discovered through a careful use of the faculties in responding to an external reality because reality is not situated "out there" in the material world. Nor does Emerson locate knowledge in a Platonic heaven of ideas existing independently of the material world. Emerson's epistemology is instead close to the contemporary view of such figures as Ernst Cassirer, Susanne Langer, and I. A. Richards. Knowledge is the product of the interaction of the perceiving subject and the external object. The agency of mediation between the outside and inside is language—more specifically, the metaphor. Words by themselves refer to material objects, but ideas transcend the physical world. Still, until ideas are expressed in concrete language, they are meaningless abstractions. It is necessary then to use metaphor, the unifying symbol relying on the signs of the material realm to express that which transcends the material. Metaphor fuses the material and ideal, unifying and giving meaning to experience. The use of metaphor is, moreover, not the exclusive province of the poet. All human beings are metaphor-makers: it is the norm of human discourse rather than the exception. Knowledge is thus an act of creation, calling on metaphor to express what can be known in no other way. Language constitutes and creates reality through the dialectical interplay of subject and object, perceiver and perceived.5

Although Emerson's epistemology is a departure from the dominant thought of his day, he reflects the traditional concern for the place of rhetoric and poetics in any systematic treatment of language. Emerson's contribution to a new American poetics is voluminously documented. His concern with rhetoric has received much less attention. From his student days Emerson was a serious student of rhetorical theory, and on more than one occasion he regretted that no

5. For a discussion of Emerson's theory of language, see Feidelson, chap. 4.
college had seen fit to offer him a professorship of rhetoric (Ray 215). In "Nature" (1836), the earliest and most comprehensive single statement of his thought, Emerson rarely mentions the poet without immediately adding "the orator." Moreover, in two essays entitled "Eloquence" (published 1847 and 1867), Emerson sets forth a democratic rhetoric of public discourse. The scant attention paid to Emerson's rhetorical system in the twentieth century is partly the result of the focus of English departments on poetics. And yet, as will be seen later, there are other reasons for overlooking Emerson's statements on rhetoric.

Emerson's epistemology leads him to see the best products of rhetoric and poetics as indistinguishable, even as he continues to separate the two theoretically. This merger is inevitable since both rhetoric and poetics use metaphor to set forth the highest knowledge. F. O. Matthiessen, in American Renaissance, comments on this feature of Emerson's thought: "In declaring that the best prose becomes poetic, that the sublimest speech is a poem, Emerson was voicing the special desire of the transcendentalists to break through all restricting divisions." This conflation of poetics and rhetoric is also partially attributable to Emerson's commitment to the oral tradition. As Matthiessen goes on to explain, "in his tendency to link poets and orators wherever he listed the various arts, he was responding to a more common and widespread belief of his time. . . . To a degree that we have lost sight of, oratory was then the basis for other forms of writing, and its modes of expression left a mark on theirs" (22). Emerson's tendency to see oral language as primary (most of his essays were first presented as lectures) and his identification of the highest products of rhetoric and poetic with each other have obscured his original contribution to rhetorical theory.

Only a brief summary of Emerson's rhetoric is possible here. Emerson maintains the distinction between rhetoric as symbolic action in the practical affairs of the community and poetics as symbolic action in and for itself. The latter is most clearly enunciated in "The Poet," where Emerson distinguishes "the Knower, the Doer, and the Sayer," explaining that the poet is "the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty" (The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson 3:6-7). In the two "Eloquence" essays Emerson is concerned with "the Doer," with the use of rhetoric in public affairs. (His best known treatment of "the Knower" is, of course, "The American Scholar."). This rhetoric is specifically designed to serve the practical affairs of a democracy: "the bar, the senate, journalism, and the pulpit" (8:115), as well as town hall gatherings. For Emerson rhetoric is "that art which only flourishes in free countries" (8:112), where "every man is an orator" (7:61). It is concerned with the presentation of truth, being "the power to translate a truth into language perfectly intelligible to the person to whom you speak" (8:130). Its purpose is persuasion, "to alter in a pair of hours, perhaps in a half hour's discourse, the convictions and habits of years" (7:64).

6. For a fuller discussion, see my Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges, chap. 5.
Rhetoric, furthermore, is implicated in Emerson's basic epistemology. Since every person possesses the ability to use language to unify subject and object, perceiver and perceived, eloquence is "only the exaggeration of a talent that is universal" (8:118). Finally, Emerson's conception of language underlies his tendency to conflate rhetoric and poetics—symbolic action in the world of affairs and symbolic action for its own sake—in his repeated insistence that "Words and deeds are quite indifferent modes of the divine energy. Words are also actions, and actions are a kind of words" (3:8). The poet using words for naming and the rhetor using words for acting are ultimately engaged in the same endeavor.

We are now prepared to examine the effects of this conceptual background on the status of rhetoric and poetics in the newly established English department, a development of the last three decades of the nineteenth century. In the final outcome the two disciplines lose contact, divided by different epistemologies and different conceptions of their respective roles in the education of the young.

The English department was the result of the establishment of a new conception of American higher education. While this new ideal appeared throughout the country, its development can be observed in clearest detail at Harvard during Charles William Eliot's presidency from 1869 to 1909. The most daring development of the new American college was the introduction of the elective curriculum, designed to replace the prescribed classical curriculum articulated in the Yale Report of 1828. The main impulse for the reform was to give the scientific disciplines equal status with the literary and philosophical offerings of the classical curriculum. Eliot insisted that students should decide what courses were best suited to their personal talents and to the needs of the larger society. Indeed, the new American college was designed to serve society, providing a trained group of specialists—not the generalists of the old college—who would be prepared to address the problems of an economy built on modern technology.

It was within this framework that the new English department was established. Contrary to what William Riley Parker has argued in "Where Do College English Departments Come From?" the English department was installed to teach freshman composition. Samuel Eliot Morison, for example, is puzzled by Eliot's delay in relieving Francis J. Child of his "chore of Freshman English." Frederick Rudolph explains that Eliot finally did so only because Child received an offer from Johns Hopkins. And Robert T. Self reports that just before the turn of the century only Child and George Lyman Kittredge were excused from teaching freshman composition (Morison 350; Rudolph 130; Self 130). Courses in English—as opposed to classical—literature were later additions to the department's offerings, brought about by a number of pressures. The main impetus for initially setting up a separate department for English studies was to provide college graduates who could prosper in professions that demanded the ability to write. The new professions in government and business needed employees who could function in a chirographic culture, and college presidents like Eliot were eager to provide the kind of educational product that fared well in the marketplace.
The new American college was scientific, committed to provide training in technology. It was perhaps inevitable that the freshman composition course should emulate this orientation. After all, it was conceived as a "service" course for all other departments—a fact underscored by Eliot’s making it in 1897 the only required course in an otherwise elective curriculum. Interestingly enough, in this arrangement rhetoric maintains its commitment to practical affairs, but these affairs are now defined in narrowly conceived technological terms. This is the main reason that Campbell and Blair, rather than Emerson, were followed in determining the content of the new course. Their positivist epistemology, with its ground in Common Sense Realism, was neatly suited to the new scientific curriculum. The major codifiers of the rhetoric that was to dominate the freshman composition classroom for decades were A. S. Hill at Harvard and John F. Genung at Amherst. They were systematizers rather than original thinkers, pulling together strands of rhetorical thought that had appeared in American imitators of Campbell and Blair for the previous fifty years.

Hill and Genung combine the modes of discourse found in Campbell with the stylistic emphasis of Blair. For them the mechanistic nature of reality dictates that all rhetorical discourse naturally falls into four forms: description, narration, exposition, and argument. Each form corresponds to a different faculty. Writing is an inductive process in which the composer simply transcribes into language what the faculties have discovered. It is, moreover, learned inductively. Thus Genung claims the invention of the "laboratory" method, by which he means having students study examples of effective essays in the newly devised freshman anthology in order to learn the stylistic principles that they are to follow. This is obviously an application of Blair’s belletristic approach. Arrangement—the modes—and style are all that need be taught since the content of discourse is automatically discovered through the correct use of the faculties in exploring the external world. Indeed, Hill and Genung even deprive rhetoric of a concern for emotion—thereby departing from Campbell and Blair—because of its tendency to distort observation. Their systems are thus completely in line with the inductive method of science, depriving rhetoric of its traditional concern with the inherently probablistic: the proving of opposites in politics, law, and the public domain.

As the English department began to include more literature courses, the radical separation of rhetoric and poetics was institutionalized. It is true that these courses were instituted partly as the result of pressure exerted by students and faculty. Students wanted to study the literature of their own language, and professors were eager to satisfy this demand, especially since its potential for graduate study—as evidenced by Johns Hopkins—promised to enhance their standing in the university’s power structure. The most compelling motive for increasing literature offerings in a department designed to teach composition, however, was that, in the words of William Rudolph, "by 1900, even at Yale, English language and literature had replaced the classics as the backbone of the humanities" (140). Literature courses thus had behind them the force of tradition, serving as the modern counterpart of classical languages and literature. Morison reports that Eliot himself was somewhat surprised at this fact, discovering that the most
popular major among undergraduates was not—as he had anticipated—one of the new scientific disciplines, but English Literature (347). This identification of literature with the classical tradition meant that the historical concern of poetics with symbolic action for its own sake would remain intact. The fact that the new poetics was to be concerned with contemporary rather than classical languages, however, enabled it to turn from ancient to modern poetic thought. Thus the new literary scholars were in touch with the latest and best thought of their day, even if scientific historical criticism dominated the discipline until well into the twentieth century. Harvard, for example, numbered among its faculty the influential James Russell Lowell, a Critical Idealist in the Emersonian tradition, and Barrett Wendell, a historical critic in the manner of Taine.

While literature courses were thus operating within the context of current poetic theories, the rhetoric course—now identified with freshman composition⁷—becomes petrified in the service of an eighteenth-century positivist epistemology. Rhetoric is cut off from its classical roots in its commitment to the new scientific disciplines and severed from poetics because it no longer shares with it a common epistemology. Given these parallel developments, the literary text assumes privileged status, carrying with it the prestige of the liberal arts tradition as well as the attractions of a vital and current set of ideas. Rhetorical texts are relegated to a minor status, concerned only with that which lends itself to the inductive method.

These developments lead to the impoverishment of rhetoric and, ultimately, the diminution of public discourse. A rhetoric of public action, after all, requires an acknowledgement of probability in communal affairs, along with a mandate to the community to encourage persuasive discourse, with all of its emotional and ethical concerns. The new composition rhetoric denies the realm of probability, arguing that truths are discovered through a simple and dispassionate inductive process. Truth is in the external world, and the correct observer will discover it. The only disagreement possible is the result of bad data, an erroneous induction, which can easily be corrected. Students are thus left with an inaccurate view of the way in which symbolic action is carried out in the world of public affairs, thereby being denied the rhetorical perspective they needed to function effectively in a democracy.

It should now be clear why Campbell, Blair, and Emerson were all rejected in the formation of the rhetoric-poetics relationship in the English department. The three hold with tradition in grounding the two disciplines in a common epistemology, regarding both as worthy of equal consideration. If one of them would somehow have prevailed in the new English department, the treatment of rhetoric and poetics would have begun on a sound footing, providing historical and intellectual continuity. Instead, the three occupy separate spheres of influence, contributing to the division of rhetoric and poetics. Campbell’s commitment to a rhetoric of oral persuasion was unacceptable in composition courses concerned

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7. The extent to which rhetoric had become identified with freshman composition by the turn of the century can be seen in Mead (xix-xxxii).
with the written word and with scientific exposition. His epistemology, furthermore, was incompatible with the new romantic poetic theories. The only features of his system retained were those least important to him—the mechanical faculties leading to the forms of discourse. In a similar manner Blair's positivist epistemology recommends his belletristic approach in the rhetoric course. But this very epistemology negates his influence in poetics, even though he is regarded as a patron saint of literary studies because of his privileging of the poetic text. Finally, if Emerson had somehow prevailed, rhetoric and poetics would have shared the most promising epistemology of the time. Rhetoric programs would have provided counterparts to the new academic literary critics—producing Janet Emigs, Richard Youngs, Ann Berthoffs, and Peter Elbows at the end of the nineteenth century instead of near the end of the twentieth. But Emerson's dialectical epistemology was inaccessible to the materialist frame of mind found in the composition course. A distorted interpretation of his thought was then made to serve the separation of poetics from rhetoric, and his name was wrongly invoked in support of the privileged status of the literary text and the irrelevance of rhetorical discourse. 8

One of the corollaries of the position I have offered here is that a rhetoric always implies a corresponding poetics and a poetics a corresponding rhetoric. The evidence for this is found everywhere in the history of the English department in the twentieth century. Thus the positivist rhetoric of the composition classroom has spawned a positivist poetics, a poetics used in freshman classes to teach students to write about literature. A theoretical statement of this poetics is found today in Patrick Scott's "'Flowers in the Path of Science': Teaching Composition Through Traditional High Literature," an essay in which Campbell and Blair are specifically invoked in the interests of using literature to teach writing. And a practical statement of this notion is found in Dorothy U. Seyler and Richard A. Wilan's Introduction to Literature: Reading, Analyzing, and Writing, one of many textbooks that regard literature as "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." In such texts literature is regarded as fodder for "summary and analysis," material to be transcribed into acceptable prose. The result is the destruction of the esthetic experience, as it is reduced to a set of declarative statements.

But the process can work in the opposite direction as well. Twentieth century poetic theories have always implied corresponding rhetorics, and some of these have been fully articulated. Throughout the twentieth century, new rhetorics have indeed risen to challenge the inductive rhetoric of Hill and Genung, enjoying until recently, however, only modest success. Thus Aristotelian literary criticism has generated new Aristotelian-inspired rhetorics as seen in the work of Kenneth Burke and Wayne Booth. Literary expressionism—as found, for example, in J. E. Spingarn—has indirectly given rise to the expressionist rhetorics of Ken Macrorie, William Coles, and Donald Murray. Still another example of poetic theory giving rise to a comprehensive rhetoric can be seen in comparing the

8. See Bloom, chap. 1.
epistemological assumptions of the earlier literary criticism of Peter Elbow and Ann Berthoff with their later work for the composition classroom.

Throughout this essay I have emphasized the damage done to rhetoric by its separation from a current and progressive poetics. A number of literary critics have recently discussed the adverse effects of this same division on poetic theory. The work of Stanley Fish, Paul de Man, and Harold Bloom, for example, each in different ways addresses the traps into which literary criticism has fallen because of its failure to consider the relevance of rhetorical categories to poetic theory. Admittedly, these critics are concerned exclusively with poetics and not at all with rhetoric as a separate discipline dealing with public discourse. Still, they call upon lost rhetorical categories which remind us of the richness of an abandoned tradition. Harold Bloom, for example, is especially relevant to this discussion as he argues for a reinterpretation of Emerson—a reading which de-thrones the privileged poetic text and recognizes the Emersonian identification of rhetoric and poetics when each attains its fullness. And even more explicitly involved in the recovery of the relation of rhetoric and poetics is, of course, the work of Frank Lentricchia, Terry Eagleton, and Fredric Jameson. The significant feature of these developments in literary criticism is that a revitalized poetics conscious of its relation to rhetoric is emerging at the same time that rhetoric is again being taken seriously. The possibility that rhetoric and poetics will once again realize their dependence on one another, together addressing the total range of uses to which language is put, is imminent. It is a consummation devoutly to be desired.

Works Cited


