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Literature in Composition: A Mixed Methods Analysis

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Literature in Composition: A Mixed Methods Analysis

by

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Abstract

Literature in Composition: A Mixed Methods Analysis

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This dissertation intervenes in a long-simmering debate about whether literature belongs in composition classes. Using a combination of empirical and textual methods, my scholarship proceeds inductively from analyzing artifacts of teaching, providing a better sense of what is happening in writing classrooms rather than simply speculating about it. In doing so, I revisit arguments made against using literature in composition and argue that the 21st century English department provides a different context within which literature and composition co-exist. One of the charges leveled against using literature to teach writing is that it is a “humanist” practice and therefore elitist. I trace the genealogy of this term and demonstrate the wide range of meanings this term has carried within the last century alone, arguing that those who raise the alarm against humanism need to clarify what they mean. Taking off from the humanistic concern with style, I analyze composition anthologies to see how the questions following the literary selections deal with stylistic concerns. By and large, I find that the literary selections reinforce the themes of the primarily nonfiction chapters, but are not presented as prose from which students can derive stylistic lesson. I then turn to analyzing syllabi, testing the accusation that those coming from literature backgrounds will teach literature in their composition classes at the expense of working on student writing. I find that literature specialists do not necessarily

spend an excessive number of class days on literature, but do spend more class days on readings generally, with fewer days devoted to student writing than rhetoric specialists. Finally, I argue that the validity of student evaluations of teaching needs to be assessed by composition scholars because concerns specific to our courses--the small sizes, the frequent feedback teachers give students, the difficulty of assessing student work, and the fact that ours is a female dominated field--mean that research conducted by educational psychologists may not apply to composition. My research reinforces the idea that our course readings, assignments, pedagogy, and assessment methods should align purposively with each other.

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Introduction

When I became interested in the history of English departments in graduate school and especially how composition pedagogy was a significant part of that history, I read several histories of the discipline: Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature*, Robert Connors's *Composition-Rhetoric*, Nan Johnson's *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America*, Jim Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*, Richard Ohmann's *English in America*, Albert Kitzhaber's *Rhetoric in American Colleges*, Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University*, and Tom Miller's *The Formation of College English*. I noticed that many histories were told in a fairly traditional narrative style, with good guys and bad guys featuring largely in the story. But the strong polemical tone of Crowley's *Composition in the University* and Miller's *The Formation of College English* stuck out to me above the more measured and conciliatory tone of many of the other histories. Both Crowley and Miller had strong opinions about what ailed English departments in their historical moment (the 1990s), and they all blamed literary studies in large part for those ailments.

Crowley argues that the dominance of literature scholars in the formation of English departments, and their continued dominance today, has meant that literary texts are venerated and style has been the paramount concern of first-year composition for most of its existence. Literary texts are read in the "disinterested" way that Matthew Arnold recommended, and this way of reading has influenced the reading of any texts in composition, whether or not literary texts themselves are included in the course. She decries this distanced way of reading because it prevents composition students from engaging rhetorically with current political issues. Thomas Miller makes his argument by tracing the problem back to the eighteenth century, when he believes literary texts and literary criticism became more widely used in rhetorical education than they had been before, as seen in rhetorics by Hugh Blair and others in Britain and America. He says that we continue to feel the effects of this shift today, when literary study precludes attending to civic issues: "The belletristic

emphases of English studies have prevented criticism from becoming more productively engaged with literacy, political debates, and popular values ever since rhetoric was first subordinated to belletristic criticism” (276).¹ Expressing a preference similar to Crowley’s (even though Crowley would really like to see first-year composition abolished), Miller would exclude literary texts in composition classrooms so that texts dealing with popular values and political controversies could instead be the class’s content.

In a similar way, the polemical tone employed by Erika Lindemann in “No Place for Literature in Freshman Composition” surprised me, a composition scholar with a background in literature. In 1993 and 1995 Gary Tate and Erika Lindemann engaged in a now-famous debate in *College English* concerning the place of literature in composition classes. Tate’s position was, as his title suggests, that there was “A Place for Literature in Freshman Composition” because literature allowed for discussions of imagination, style, and, above all, humanistic content that would resonate with students after their college careers had been completed. He objects to the notion that freshman composition should strive only to prepare students for academic writing, and prefers to see his students “as people whose most important conversations will take place *outside the academy*, as they struggle to figure out how to live their lives—that is, how to vote and love and survive, how to respond to change and diversity and death and oppression and freedom” (320, emphasis his). Acknowledging that teachers who used literature to teach composition had resulted in literature courses masquerading as composition classes, he nevertheless maintains that an entire body of texts should not have been barred from composition classes by “The Rhetoric Police” just because a few teachers who “were desperate to teach literature” practiced bad pedagogy (317).

¹ Like Miller, Winifred Bryan Horner sees literary texts as obstacles to discussion of public debates. She advocates for a return to classical rhetoric’s concern with public deliberation in the composition classroom instead of expressivist emphasis on personal exploration.

Lindemann's position in "No Place for Literature in Freshman Composition" is that literature-based writing courses are needlessly in service of humanism, ineffective at preparing students for work in other disciplines, and pedagogically outdated. Against Tate's advocacy that students read literature in order to connect with larger issues, she points out that students are required to take literature and other humanities courses, and the composition class is not their only opportunity to encounter humanistic content. Secondly, she argues that the lessons of style that Tate claimed might be learned from literature did not apply to the kind of writing students need to learn for success in other academic disciplines.² Instead, she maintains that students are better served by using "texts they encounter in the academy" as models of style (314). Using literature doesn't make sense as a model of style because we don't ask students to write literature, and it doesn't make sense even if it's not used as a model of style, but rather, "language to appreciate" because appreciating it takes time away from students creating their own texts (314). Her third basic argument is that composition teachers should practice student-centered pedagogy, but using literature usually makes the teacher or the text the center of the class. She says "A pedagogy derived from teaching literature looks and sounds different from one that encourages students to produce texts," and that teachers talk 75 to 80 percent of the time in literature-based classes (313).³

² In the early 1990s, popular media outlets were condemning what they saw as a move away from traditional instruction in composition, meaning "great literature or matters of grammar and mechanical correctness," as described in Lester Faigley's *Fragments of Rationality*. Though Faigley briefly mentions some flashpoints between literature and composition programs, the focus of that work lies mostly in other politicized issues surrounding composition, and not the conflict I am discussing.

³ For more on the institutional reasons why literature teachers historically taught composition and why the current-traditional paradigm was linked to this phenomenon, see Robert Connors's *Composition-Rhetoric*. See also Albert Kitzhaber's *Rhetoric in American Colleges, 1850-1900* (esp. 86-94) for more on the roots of the prestige battle that continues to affect composition instructors like Lindemann. According to his historiography, "as rhetoric steadily became more isolated in the curriculum [in the late nineteenth century], more restricted to a single narrow purpose, literary criticism moved in and took away from it its terminology, its methods of analysis, even its legitimate aims" (94).

Their arguments sparked a flurry of responses, culminating in an issue of *College English* devoted to it in February 1995. In that issue, Lindemann fleshed out her argument by painting the picture of a classroom where literature was the text, current-traditionalism shaped the assignments and assessment methods, and the teacher's pedagogy was mostly lecture. Tate's 1995 contribution to the debate was "Notes on the Dying of a Conversation," a retrospective look at how and why the conversation about this topic had died away from the official venues of debate in composition—our journals—and even in CCCC workshops. As Tate says in his 1995 article, "[A]lthough literature certainly did not disappear from the classrooms of many composition teachers, it did disappear from the conversation of our discipline," referring to the years before the 1993 exchange. (304) "In other words, although we might still be using literature, we weren't talking about it," Tate observes (304).

Overwhelmingly, the direct responses side with Tate and leapt to the defense of literature in composition. Whether these published responses were proportional to the total number of responses submitted or were chosen for other reasons by the editors of *College English*, we cannot know. The recurring topos in the 1993 and 1995 was that literary texts were valuable for a number of reasons along the lines of Tate's humanistic praise for them: that literature allows students to reflect on "human growth and change" (Latosi-Sawin 676), can encourage respect for diversity (Knight 676), helps bridge between academe and "real life" (Crain 679), and "hold multiple points of view and are by nature multidisciplinary" (Gamer 282). Those who didn't side with Tate were not exactly strong supporters of Lindemann's position. Kate Chanock didn't see a sharp divide between WAC and using literature to teach style and personal expression. Edwin Steinberg agreed lukewarmly that literature was not very appropriate for first-year composition but could have its uses in advanced composition courses. Jane Peterson argued that how texts are taught, not what texts are taught, makes a class literature- or composition-based. My impression after reading these responses was that either that Lindemann was indeed in the minority—a voice crying in the wilderness—or that the literature supporters were, and had

assembled a defense in the pages of *College English* to push back against what they saw as an oncoming shift in the discipline.

In more recent years, the debate has persisted, with some recurring topoi related to the teachers' goals for first-year composition and how literature allows them to accomplish those goals. The recurring topoi in favor of using literature are that it is good for teaching argumentation, critical thinking, style, provides opportunities to discuss enduring issues, and that the pedagogy can be student-centered.

Some give examples from their classrooms about employing close reading of literary texts to teach argumentation. In "Who Killed Annabel Lee?", Mark Richardson relates an experience in his writing-about-literature class in which he encourages a group of reticent students to see the Poe poem "Annabel Lee" as a murder mystery and to use textual evidence as they might in prosecuting an accused murderer. While writing their papers, they develop the skills of making arguments, supporting them with evidence by close reading, and putting their arguments in relation to others. Richard Raymond also writes about using a literary work to encourage close reading and argumentation. Demonstrating the need for textual evidence gleaned from reading a David Mamet play, Raymond praises students who "matched inferences with textual evidence. When the support for their views seemed thin, I coaxed them with gentle questions to help them find grounds and backing for their claims: 'Why do you say that John seems arrogant?' 'Why do you believe that Carol is a serious student?'" (57). Faye Halpern, a fellow in the Harvard Expository Writing Program, argues that teaching writing using the texts she is most familiar (literature) achieves the aims of the writing program because she uses literature to teach argumentation.

It is because literary texts can sustain multiple readings and that some are better than others that they offer such good means to launch an argumentative essay (and also why they provide good training for arguing in non-literature-based disciplines). They allow a student to show why one interpretation, despite another's seeming power, is better. (141)

Close reading provides her students with the evidence they need to sustain an argument, something that every student is in need of learning.⁴

Michael Gamer makes the case for literature's power to promote critical thinking by making the "everything's an argument" argument.

[F]iction, poetry, and drama may do subtly what essays do more overtly, but both are partial (in all senses of the word), both have agendas, and both seek to persuade readers. And our students, furthermore, do not live in a world free of compelling and interesting stories to which they must respond. Consequently, imaginative texts provide students with material that they must learn to analyze and respond to if they are to prosper outside the academy. (283)

Gamer presents the stakes of such critical thinking skills in no uncertain terms—students "must" learn to discern what argument a story is making; the students' prosperity rests on it. He goes on to say that literature can be ideal for discussing abstract issues because it gives students "particularized material" that shows abstract ideas in action, rather than simply telling about them" (284). Ed Kearns makes the critical thinking argument in a different way, saying that students should become attuned to the moral and political overtones our aesthetic values carry (65-6), making the literary canon an important object of criticism. Edith Baker maintains that students can have the valuable opportunity to think through ethical questions prompted by reading literature (183). Helen Whall says that learning to close read sonnets ensures students' success in critical reading and writing when they take classes in other departments (119), because they learn the importance of grammar, logic, verbal precision, the benefits of rigorous training, the need for evidence in argumentation, and the superiority of arguments that are better supported by evidence than others.⁵

In addition to Tate's 1993 article, scholars such as Peter Elbow, John Briggs, Frank Farmer, and Helen Whall have argued that literature can serve as a good model of style for students. Peter Elbow makes the most sustained argument for using

⁴ See also Kastely, Vandenburg, Whall for additional examples of using close reading of literary works to teach argumentation.

⁵ See also Emmitt et al, George, Heyda, and Raymond.

literature to teach style, and the strongest, because he concedes all the ways the pro-literature argument can appeal to falsehoods, yet still maintains that just because the argument has been conducted badly doesn't mean literature has nothing to offer pedagogies of style. He says that in composition, teachers tend to overlook metaphorical and more imaginative uses of language. This is a shame, because "Imaginative languages touches people most deeply; sometimes it's the only language use that gets through" (537). However, he does not want to be misunderstood as defending the "toxically false" statement that "We can't teach students to write unless we give them models of good writing by good authors to imitate" (535). Elbow attempts to make the case for valuing "imaginative language" in composition classes more than is currently the norm, without relapsing back into the intellectual elitism that literature departments are trying to move away from. I cover the arguments for using literature to teach style much more thoroughly in chapter two; suffice it here to say that while this topos the one I encounter less frequently than the others, it has persisted for centuries.

Another common benefit that scholars attribute to using literature is that discussing it can help students grow as humans and citizens in a democracy. Literature provides opportunities to discuss enduring issues—"how to vote and love and survive, how to respond to change and diversity and death and oppression and freedom" as Tate illustrated ("A Place" 320). Edith Baker argues that reflecting on the ethical questions in literary texts can create a "better individual" (183). Gordon Thompson says that students are honored to be challenged by the canonical literary texts on the common syllabus of the first-year writing class: "their minds are every big as important as William Shakespeare's, Edward Gibbon's, and Toni Morrison's" (83). Others write from a more explicitly civic position. Dennis Ciesielski subscribes to Burke's view of literature as "equipment for living" (132), and thinks literature could be used to prepare students for civic participation. Dominic DelliCarpini's goal is returning literature to its place "in the rich rhetorical tradition of civic education" via the composition classroom (17). He argues that literature (broadly defined, not

privileging traditionally “literary” genres) should be read in its historical and civic context, which would require historical and political knowledge on the part of the student and discussion would be about “efficacy, about ethics, and, ultimately, about ways that figurative language can be used to assume their place in the civic conversation” (32). Ed Kearns says that the emotional content of literature can help train students’ sensitivity to such language, so that they are able to discern false from true sentiments (67). All of these arguments have in common the belief that literature is uniquely qualified to help students understand others and how to get along in society.

Several respondents in the debate argued against Lindemann’s pointed charge that when literature was assigned in a class, the teacher would use too much class time lecturing about it. Jeanie Crain contends that “We should not allow the misuse of literature to discourse us from ‘right use’” (679). Jane Peterson points out that literary texts are not the only types of texts that can be misused in composition, since it is possible “possible for teachers to use expository prose to transform classrooms into group therapy sessions, into training camps for political correctness, or into rhetorical history or theory courses” (312). Mariolina Salvatori lists other undesirable pedagogical methods: reading for discrete elements (plot, argument, point of view, etc.), reading for models of style, and reading for rhetorical strategies. Peterson and Salvatori are both making the point that how texts are taught has no defined relationship to the types of texts taught, and their critiques also highlight the lack of consensus in our field about which pedagogical techniques are appropriate for first-year composition, since instructors in a rhetoric-based program like UT-Austin’s frequently direct students to apply rhetorical theory and identify rhetorical strategies in expository texts. Even if one grants that at the time that Lindemann was writing, it was easier or more common to lecture about formal features when using a literary text, Peter Elbow makes a similar point to Emily Isaacs’ that improved and more widespread pedagogical training for graduate students has improved their teaching in writing *and* in literature classes. He is happy to give credit to the field of composition

for developing and spreading student-centered teaching methods that work in composition or literature classes (“Two Cultures” 535). To find out whether students connect literary or nonfiction texts to different teaching methods, Mary Segall conducted a study of students’ opinions about these types of texts in their composition classes. She found that 24% preferred nonfiction in composition class, 53% preferred literature, and 30% preferred some of both. Segall says her survey results call into question the charge that teachers are tempted to lecture instead of attend to student writing when using literary texts (196).

There are much fewer supporters of Lindemann’s arguments, though some of them have written book-length arguments about the place of literature and literary criticism in composition, particularly Sharon Crowley and Thomas Miller. James Berlin also comments on the relationship of literature and composition historically in English departments in *Rhetoric and Reality* and *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Culture*. Crowley and Miller both argue that to focus on literary texts in first-year writing courses perpetuates a disengaged intellectual culture that works against creating social change. James Berlin agrees that the New Critical and current-traditional methods that have historically been common in such classes are damaging to students and teachers alike, and also adds that these outdated pedagogical methods don’t help prepare students for the “post-Fordist” workplace, which increasingly requires critical thinking and cross-cultural communication (*Rhetorics* 48). However, Berlin does part ways with Lindemann, Crowley, and Miller when he lays out his curriculum incorporating a cultural studies approach to texts, including literary texts, which he maintains will help students become aware of hegemony and cultural myth-making through reading narratives. Other responses siding with Lindemann in the debate have included the recurring claims that first-year writing should prepare students for academic and career writing (Steinberg, Maid, Smith) and that teaching literature can increase the likelihood of teacher-centered classes (Fulkerson, Elbow). Two important respondents are open to the idea that using literature might not be as effective as other types of texts, but we need evidence of this (Tate “Notes,” Hesse).

Miles McCrimmon observes in 2006 that it appeared that Tate won the rhetorical battle but that Lindemann won the institutional one, since more four-year institutions are moving away from the traditional writing-about-literature course. Indeed, by my rough estimate tracing Google Scholar citations, including journal articles, monographs, and essays in edited collections, I count 15 responses in favor of Lindemann's position and 39 in favor of Tate's. Still, what's clear is that despite this flurry of articles and responses about the issue in the early 1990s, the issue was never settled and seemed to return backchannels of communication. In Mark Richardson's 2004 article, he says that the Tate/Lindemann debate continues "in the minutes of committee meetings, in dramatically revised standard syllabi, in heated listserv exchanges, in strident departmental meetings and shouting matches in academic hallways" (279). Russell Durst says as much in a massive review article first published in Peter Smagorinsky's *Research on Composition* and then anthologized in *The Norton Book of Composition Studies*, "Writing at the Postsecondary Level." Durst does not mention the Tate/Lindemann debate explicitly and none of his subsections about important controversies over the 20 years are about literature in composition. But in his conclusion, he states that "The perennial debates over such matters as the use of literature and the value of personal writing in the composition class still spark occasional discussion in professional journals, but the debate has lingered too long to be called a controversy" (1677). This statement is oddly inexplicable, mostly because of the differences he intimates between what constitutes a "debate" versus what constitutes a "controversy," and the idea that an unanswered and continually revisited question could be regarded as something other than controversial. Perhaps Durst means that while published output about literature in composition may not be substantial, but conversations about it are ongoing. Or perhaps the almost total lack of empirical articles about it rendered it less interesting to Durst, who seems to show a preference for empirical articles in his review. Whatever his exact meaning, Durst's statement is further indication that in 2006, there was still not much more than a low simmer about the issue in our publication venues.

That is, until 2006 and 2007, with the publication of two collections of articles about using literature to teach composition. NCTE published Linda Bergmann and Edith Baker's *Composition and/or Literature* in 2006, and the MLA published Judith Anderson and Christine Farris's *Integrating Literature and Writing Instruction* in 2007. It is interesting that both of these collections cropped up at around the same time, and indicates that there is a need in the fields of composition and literature to revisit the issue. As Linda S. Bergmann says in her collection, since the lines between composition and literature need to be continually re-examined and redrawn, especially in response to the rise of rhetoric and composition departments over the last few decades, this needs to be "an ongoing, recursive" conversation (10). This dissertation intervenes in this ongoing conversation, and does so in at least four important ways. First, I closely analyze critics' usage of the term "humanism" to show its slippages and misuses, and argue that these inconsistencies promote misunderstanding and divisiveness among compositions and literature scholars. Secondly, I contribute textual data to the debate by examining composition anthologies that include literature to show the extent to which they are held up as textual models for students to emulate or appreciate. Thirdly, I provide empirical data about the proportion of graduate student instructors who use literature in their composition classes when given the opportunity and look in more detail at what they ask students to do with the readings assigned in their classes. Finally, I conclude by opening questions of writing assessment and conducting a pilot study investigating what student evaluations of teaching might be able to tell us.

Why is such a contribution to this ongoing discussion needed? Or more generally, why are we still having this discussion? We are still having it because of the sheer number of people who have mainly studied literature in their post-graduate education but are teaching composition. Most sections of first-year composition are taught by instructors whose background is in literature (Janetta, Isaacs, Bizarro, McCrimmon). Melissa Iannetta calls this the "professional reality" about which *CCC* articles have been curiously silent for the past ten years (55). And the conversation

needs to be updated because of several factors that have changed our institutional context since the Tate/Lindemann debate—the last time there was a sustained and visible debate about the divide. The first factor is the increased visibility and prestige of rhetoric and composition as a field, relative to where it stood nearly 20 years ago and even relative to the field of literary studies. The second is the impact more (and better) systematic training of literature graduate students is having on their feelings toward composition and the way they teach composition when hired to do so. The third factor is the shift in literary (and to some degree, rhetorical) studies to a cultural studies paradigm. The first two of these factors are explained below in a relatively straightforward way. The third takes much longer and comprises the bulk of this introduction. My intent in discussing these shifting intellectual currents is not only to provide exigence for my arguments, but to set the stage for how to interpret the more recent arguments about what “literature” is and whether it belongs in composition classes.

CHANGES IN CONTEXT

The first factor that has changed the institutional context for this debate has to do with composition’s fraught history in the academy, especially as it gained in power and prestige as a research field in the 1980s and 1990s. Lindemann, Crowley, and Miller had professionally come of age during this period and seen compositionists’ research interests belittled, their heroic teaching efforts unappreciated, and their careers stalled because of the assumption that teaching writing was easier and less prestigious than teaching literature. The prestige of literature study in their departments and the institutional (and sometimes personal) conflicts between literature and writing faculty formed part of the context of these anti-literature

arguments.⁶ In 2012, these situations still exist. As a graduate student in a top-ranked semi-autonomous rhetoric program at a research university, it's easy to see only within this bubble and forget that my program is exceptional, in that we experience very little of these slights. But they were worse in the years immediately preceding the era when these authors wrote their anti-literature arguments. Thankfully, the prevalence and rancor of institutional conflicts is on the wane—a development, while certainly not true at all institutions, for which we can find some evidence in scholarship about our field.

One indicator that times have changed is that there are more undergraduate degrees in writing offered than there were twenty years ago. Deborah Balzhiser and Susan McLeod report that there were at least 68 in 2010 (416), and Peggy O'Neill and Ellen Schendel report that there were 60 doctoral programs in writing in 2002 (187). This is only 2% of the 2,722 departments of English across the country, but the number is growing. In other institutions, independent writing programs are being formed, either having split off from English departments, combining previously unrelated units, or arising out of the ether from some institutional mandate, as described in the 2002 collection, *A Field of Dreams*. Estimates about the number of independent writing programs range from around 60 to double or triple that, according to Barry Maid, if freestanding writing centers and writing across the curriculum programs are to be included (Ianetta 70). The formation of new departments, programs, and majors is one sign that the context for the debate over literature and composition has changed.⁷

A second sign is the wider prevalence of graduate student training in composition pedagogy, which Emily Isaacs argues has improved the pedagogy of literature PhDs. Isaacs' 2009 article describes the movement her program made,

⁶ See Maxine Hairston's "Breaking our Bonds and Reaffirming our Connections" and Susan Miller's *Textual Carnivals*.

⁷ We should also consider it a victory in disciplinary visibility that a recent CCCC taskforce secured a place for rhetoric and composition programs in two federal databases that allow the awarding of research grants and tracking the number of graduates from our programs (Phelps and Ackerman).

counter to trends in composition curricula over the past 20 years, to redesign one of their required semesters of first-year composition as a class in writing about literature. Her reasoning is not only that the first-year composition instructors at her institution have “experience, training, and abilities in teaching revision-based expository writing” (101), but that they are also increasingly better prepared to teach writing than literature specialists have been in the past (102). The improved preparation stems from the ever-growing body of research in composition and the increased status and access to resources enjoyed by many writing programs across the country. As a result, Isaacs claims that “The assumption that newly minted literature PhDs, MFAs, and MAs are unfamiliar with current theories and practices of teaching writing is simply no longer accurate. Today literature graduate students have benefited from the institutionalization of composition, as have the universities that have hired them” (102). Isaacs argues that because literature graduate students are often responsible for teaching composition during their graduate careers and are being trained to do so by researchers and experienced writing program administrators, they can be expected to do a better job of drawing on their expertise to fulfill the goals of the writing programs that hire them than could graduate students who did not have the benefit of being trained by rhetoric and composition scholars.

The third factor is a shift in literary and rhetorical theory, namely the increasing influence of cultural studies. Articles responding to Tate and Lindemann in 1995 by Michael Gamer and Jane Peterson were accounting for this shift by saying that distinctions between literary and non-literary texts were becoming increasingly blurry—all were just “texts.” But neither Tate nor Lindemann seemed to share this assumption about texts. It is important to go into more depth about how and why their assumptions differed from what is the more dominant paradigm today.

LINDEMANN'S ASSUMPTIONS

In "Three Views of English 101," Lindemann describes in more depth how she imagines a literature-based writing course operates, as opposed to classes that see writing as a process or a social construction. Though she maintains that this kind of course, "Writing as Product" is "the oldest and most prevalent" (in 1995). First of all, she describes the practitioners of this kind of class: they received no pedagogical training in either literature or composition, and they do not keep up with developments in the field of writing (290). Like comedians who joke about the Amish in their televised stand-up routines, Lindemann assumes that product-centered teachers will never hear her since they "do not read *College English*" (290). She says that these teachers are "oriented toward texts," which means two things to her. One is that they mainly ask students to read and write about literature in a formalistic way, hence her characterization of this type of class as "Writing as Product."

The purpose of including literature in these courses is two-fold: one purpose is for invention, the other is for style. Thinking about literature and the messages it conveys is the one invention method in this course, says Lindemann. "[S]tudents in a product-centered English 101 course typically plan their responses to an assignment by reading a text and then thinking about it" (291). That is, the approach assumed here is a New Critical one, where no external information is needed to develop a critical reading of a literary text. Leaving aside the fact that this descriptions contradicts her previous characterization of product-centered teachers as tending to be "biographical or philosophical critics," the fact that she describes the invention process as involving only literature and thinking about literature is the point I want to emphasize. Presumably, what students would be thinking about as they attempt to complete their assignments in this course would be the content of the teacher's lectures: "knowledge about texts, ways of reading them, and principles governing their form and style" (291). These are what the teacher is an expert in, and these are what the teacher imparts. Lindemann is describing a formalist approach to texts,

which is commonly understood as New Criticism in the U.S. Literary formalism is an approach through which students are taught to read literary texts according to principles of style and form, and then to write critical essays about the literary texts absent any connection to historical context or external arguments about their interpretation.

The fact that Lindemann never uses that term “New Criticism” is understandable. In 1995, as she says, this approach to teaching writing dominated other theoretical frameworks, and we often don’t name what we see as “normal.” But by reading her depiction of this class, “Writing as Product,” it is easy to see that she assumes when literature is used in a class, it will be read New Critically, that is, closely, with attention to form and style and no attention to the text’s historical context. We can see this from the popular writing textbooks of the late 1980s and early 1990s. One of the most successful writing textbooks of this period, Axelrod and Cooper’s *St. Martin’s Guide to Writing* (1988) included a section on writing about literature that featured James Joyce’s short story “Araby” and a formal explication of it by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, New Critics par excellence. Both of these texts were more than 50 years old in 1988. Axelrod and Cooper suggest topics for an formalistic interpretive essay about the short story, including building an interpretation around surprising or puzzling statements, patterns of words and images, character and character change, point of view, ironies or contradictions, literary motifs, setting, and structure (335-337). Only one suggestion is to consider historical, social, and economic context (338). The editorial apparatus suggesting these approaches to essay writing are thoroughly New Critical because of their attention to the literary form and lack of attention to the text’s context. But is close attention to form necessarily accompanied by lack of care for context in classrooms today?

Formalism, a term sometimes used synonymously with New Criticism, can be understood as the simple practice of close reading, the cornerstone of modern literary study. As Peter Elbow says in “The Cultures of Literature and Composition: What Could Each Learn from the Other?”, “[N]o one in literature would be caught dead

identifying as a New Critic, but the profession has permanently digested that essential methodological contribution of close reading” (536). In fact, Elbow asserts that close reading is as fully integrated into the methodology of literary criticism as the belief in writing as a process is in composition theory, a summation echoed by Heather Love in “Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn,” when she says “the opacity and ineffability of the text and the ethical demand to attend to it remain central to practices of literary interpretation today” (371). In other words, though modern literary critics would never call themselves New Critics, the formal method of close reading is essential to the way literary texts are read and taught today. It is this close attention to language that forms the historical root of textual studies, from which grew the various fields subsumed in English departments even today: literature, rhetoric and composition, and linguistics. There is nothing about close reading that makes it inherently detrimental to use in composition classes, though what Lindemann objects to is the idea that more class time will be spent on analyzing texts than students producing their own.

However, the total removal of the literary text from its historical and social context could potentially undermine the rhetorical approach in a composition class. Such separation of the text from its context is a vestige of New Criticism as a literary movement that dominated universities in the 20th century, and becoming less and less an approach used today. As Gerald Graff has chronicled in *Professing Literature*, historically, New Critics’ method of reading literature was a drastic departure from the historical methods of their forebears. Because the New Critics were reading for form and relating it to interpretation, they were seen as upstarts by the historians, who spent relatively little time on the text itself and more on the period that the text reflected. Purely formalistic New Criticism provides a rigorous, systematic (some, like influential New Critic John Crowe Ransom, would even say scientific) approach to literary study that is easily taught and requires little engagement with other disciplines. Ransom, in his seminal 1937 essay, “Criticism, Inc.,” arrives at a definition of criticism by first carving it out from what it is not: personal opinions,

synopsis, historical study, linguistic study, moral study, or “Any other special studies which deal with some abstract or prose content taken out of the work.” In a purely formal New Critical reading, the reader’s eyes can remain on the page, and, once formal terms are mastered, analyze the literary work with no need to historicize it or use it to comment on contemporary life. But I discuss below how the decontextualized reading of texts was becoming passé during the time when Lindemann was attacking that way of reading, and how it is even less common today with the rise of cultural studies. This is a positive development for those of us who teach rhetoric, since context is paramount.

Lindemann makes a second assumption about how literature will be taught when she describes the teachers who create this sort of class: “They believe that poetry, fiction, and drama convey important messages to readers about how to live well” (290), almost like a secular scripture. This way of reading literature amounts to “that old humanist thing” that Tate admits he gets teased about, and which Lindemann argues in “No Place” gets its due in other general education courses and does not have to occupy composition courses as well. When she fuses together teachers who are humanists (who read for universal truths) with teachers who are New Critics (who read for formal qualities), she conflates humanists and New Critics. This conflation does not help her argument hold together logically, but it does illustrate how her image of the approach she describes is outdated because in addition to assuming a New Critical approach to literature, it assumes that those who teach it follow in the tradition of Arnoldian humanism.

ARNOLD’S INFLUENCE

As Stefan Collini says in his introduction to Arnold’s collected writings, Matthew Arnold has been “retrospectively recruited as one of the founding fathers of the academic study of English literature” (xv). We see an example of this positioning in the headnote to Arnold’s essays in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*,

in which the editors coolly express commonplaces about Arnold's influence on literary criticism. In the nineteenth century, his essays "paved the way for [literary criticism's] 'institutionalization' in the academy," and even now, "Arnold continues today to represent an ideal of literary and cultural humanism that many critics honor" (Leitch et al. 691). The reason why Arnold remains such an important figure, the Norton editors tell us, is that he regarded poetry as inhabiting a special place in culture, and that great poets were capable of providing answers to the enduring question: "How to live" (691). Though Arnold did write such things about poetry and poets in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," Arnold scholars protest that his range of concerns was unfairly narrowed by those who interpreted his ideas in the context of academic institutions. Collini, one of the foremost authorities on Arnold, points out that while "The Function of Criticism" is often taken to be about literary criticism, "closer inspection reveals that Arnold was discussing a much broader notion, an ideal which embraced social and political as well as literary criticism" (xv). But that is not how his works have been received.

In particular, there are two phrases attributed to him that have had an major impact on the evolution of literary criticism. Especially important in this tradition are the ideas of literature as "the best that is known and thought" and the concept of "disinterestedness," both originating from Arnold's 1865 essay, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time." Arnold scholar Wendell Harris argues that it is the survival of these "slogans" that makes Arnold the go-to humanist (123). Indeed, it is the persistence of these "slogans" that has cemented Arnold to the history of English departments, which is somewhat of an oddity since Arnold's purpose in his essays had nothing to do with post-secondary education, but rather was to urge already-educated elite readers in England to become more sophisticated social and cultural critics. Cultural criticism, in Arnold's view, could fill the void left by religion's diminished hold on society in Victorian Britain. Arnold discusses the similar aims of religion and culture in his essay from *Culture and Anarchy*, "Sweetness and Light," where he argues that culture "believes in making reason and the will of God prevail,"

and like religion, can help humans achieve perfection (61). The difference between them is in their scope: in defining what human perfection consists of, culture seeks answers from “*all* the voices of human experience which have been heard upon it, of art, science, poetry, philosophy, history, as well as religion, in order to give a greater fulness and certainty to its solution” (61). In other words, culture encompasses and extends beyond religion in the pursuit of perfection. Within the Arnoldian humanist system of thought, cultural artifacts deserve intense study because through studying the best that is known and thought, we can make reason and the will of God prevail, and live better lives as a result.

THE RISE OF CULTURAL STUDIES

Cultural studies can be seen as a reaction against this orientation toward texts and whether they point toward a better life.⁸ Instead of reading a collection of revered texts because they provide guidance for how to live, cultural studies scholars read texts to expose the ways hegemonic forces prevent people from acting in their own best interests. In David Bartholomae’s words, cultural studies have helped professionals in composition and literature “articulate a common set of concerns” (“Literacy” 1277). In the last 20 to 30 years cultural studies has held sway over both literature scholars and rhet/comp scholars and thus has influenced their approaches to teaching composition. In fact, Richard Fulkerson’s article about the status of composition in the 21st century lists the cultural studies approach as “the major movement” of the last decade (659).⁹ He sees the major work of cultural studies as “having students read about systemic cultural injustices inflicted by dominant societal groups and dominant discourses on those with less power, and upon the empowering

⁸ *Blackwell’s Guide to Literary Theory* says in its entry for cultural studies that the movement began specifically as a corrective against the Arnoldian concept of culture.

⁹ Fulkerson disapproves of the cultural studies approach to composition, saying that it fulfills only two of the WPA outcomes for first-year composition classes (670).

possibilities of rhetoric if students are educated to ‘read’ carefully and ‘resist’ the social texts that help keep some groups subordinated” (659). Abrams’ *Glossary of Literary Terms* similarly lists concern with power relations as a key part of cultural studies: “A chief concern is to specify the functioning of the social, economic, and political forces and power-structures that produce all forms of cultural phenomena” (53). When interpreting cultural phenomena in such a way, relating it to the context in which it was produced and circulated is an essential part of the interpretive work. The centrality of cultural context is in stark contrast to the interpretive practice of the New Critics, who, rightly or wrongly, disavowed the relevance of a text’s context, or the context of the person reading the text. This is a major shift in literary and rhetorical studies, and an important one, since it means literature scholars who have been trained more recently think it is completely natural to read a text, even a work of “literature” and consider its context—a way of reading that is much more in sync with rhetorical principles than an older New Critical method.

In addition to considering context in order to scrutinize power relations, the expansiveness of what constitutes a text is another hallmark of cultural studies. As Abrams’ definition of cultural studies says, “literature is accounted as merely one of many forms of cultural ‘signifying practices’” (53). As a result, the cultural artifacts that culture studies scholars work with may go by the name “literature” or just “text,” but even if the cultural studies scholar calls her material “literature,” she may imply a broad definition that Lindemann and Tate did not share—they thought of literature as poetry, drama, or fiction. The broadening of the term “literature” is actually a return to a pre-Romantic understanding of textuality, and a phenomenon that is important to trace in establishing the intellectual history relevant to this dissertation.

As historians of English as a discipline have noted, the word “literature” only came to designate the narrow body of texts we now call “literary” in the nineteenth century; from the classical era until that time, “literature” referred to many modes of discourse, including history, philosophy, biography, poetry, and drama (Ferreira-Buckly and Halloran xxxvii, Graff 11). In one of his very few mentions of humanism,

Arnold himself writes in his essay “Literature and Science” that an understanding of the best that has been thought and said should not be limited to only *belles lettres*, but should include scientific writing as well. A quick look at classical rhetorical treatises confirms that Greek and Roman rhetoricians drew their examples of eloquence from what we would call both “literary” sources in the modern narrow sense, such as Homer and Virgil, and “non-literary” sources, such as historians and orators arguing in public arenas. The line between writing that was rhetorical (to persuade) or poetic (to delight) simply was not as definite as it has become in our age, as scholars like Jeffrey Walker have argued. For example, Longinus’ treatise, *On the Sublime*, is addressed to “public men” (347), yet the author says it is about “literature” (347), and takes his examples from “the very greatest poets and prose writers” (347). These include not only Homer and the lyric poet Sappho, but also Moses (a prophet), Demosthenes (an orator), Plato (a philosopher), and Cicero (a legislator and orator). We could look at further examples in Cicero’s *De Oratore*, Dionysius of Helicarnass’s *On Composition*, Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*, or Erasmus’s *Copia*. In these classical, medieval, and Renaissance texts, the more specific terms “poetry” and “verse” are closer to the more narrow definition of “literature” now in currency, since these terms in their respective contexts refer to imaginative and stylized texts.

“LITERATURE” NARROWS

Terry Eagleton’s account of the shift in this definition in the introduction to *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, a modern classic work, is engaging and thorough. He observes that in the seventeenth century, as in classical and medieval usage, “literature” encompassed sermons, non-fiction essays and “whatever it was that Sir Thomas Browne wrote” (1). The definitions from Samuel Johnson’s 1755 dictionary and the OED confirm this. Johnson includes this simple entry: “Literature: Learning; skill in letters.” The OED definition defines “literature” as “Acquaintance with ‘letters’ or books; polite or humane learning; literary culture. Now *rare* and

obsolescent. (The only sense in Johnson and in Todd 1818.)” (def. 1), and “Literary productions as a whole; the body of writings produced in a particular country or period, or in the world in general. Now also in a more restricted sense, applied to writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect.” (def. 3.a). Influential Enlightenment rhetorician Hugh Blair also used the term “literature” in this broad, classical sense; he also tended to use the French term “belles lettres” (as did Arnold). The (primarily eighteenth- and nineteenth-century) term “belles lettres” meant generally the same thing as this older definition of “literature”: these texts were literally “beautiful writing” that polite educated people read, encompassing a variety of written genres (Ferreira-Buckly and Halloran xxxvii). As in earlier texts, Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* does not break rhetoric and literature down into discrete sections; they are intertwined and wrapped up in each other. His lectures are meant to generally improve taste and eloquence, and he draws his models from literary critical essays by Addison, speeches by Demosthenes and Cicero, a sermon by Bishop Atterbury, histories by Thucydides and Livy, philosophical treatises by Locke, and poetic verse by Pope and Thomson, to name but a few. Clearly, Blair and other rhetoricians of this period saw a variety of genres as examples of eloquence and fine writing.

Eagleton traces the narrowing the term “literature” to the Romantic period, since before the French Revolution and Industrialization, “literature” referred to “the whole body of valued writing in society: philosophy, history, essays and letters as well as poems” (17). Eagleton attributes the change to cultural and economic reasons. The Romantic period saw the rise of Utilitarianism and a repressive English state, against which Romantic authors rebelled and retreated into a literary enclave “in which the creative values expunged from the face of English society by industrial capitalism can be celebrated and affirmed” (19). Another explanation is that the power of religion to hold the social fabric together declined throughout the nineteenth century, leaving literature as an alternative vehicle of ideology to do the job. Eagleton reproduces the inaugural address of George Gordon, early Professor of English

Literature at Oxford, since it resonated with the Victorians so profoundly: “England is sick, and...English literature must save it. The Churches (as I understand) having failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature has now a triple function: still, I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the State” (quoted in Eagleton 23; from Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism [London, 1983]*). Robert Scholes notes in *Textual Power* that “this notion of literature as a secular scripture extends roughly from Matthew Arnold to Northrup Frye in Anglo-American academic life” (13).

SECULAR SCRIPTURE

In “The Function of Criticism,” Arnold argues that practicing criticism is “spiritual” work, which, at its best, can “keep a man from a self-satisfaction which is retarding and vulgarising, to lead him towards perfection, by making his mind dwell upon what is excellent in itself, and the absolute beauty and fitness of things” (38). It is not difficult to see the resemblances between using religious texts for this kind of spiritual uplift and the criticism of secular texts, as Arnold is describing.¹⁰ Literary texts can be regarded, after all, as “secular scripture,” to quote Scholes again. Religion and literature can have similar effects on people, which, Eagleton argues, makes literature a good replacement when religion is losing its power to hold the social classes together. He argues that they both work by experience and emotion (26). The experiential aspect of literature enabled non-elite readers to feel as though they were experiencing other places or how life felt for people different from them. The emotional aspect helped enlarge their sympathies and feel a great national pride in their cultural heritage (27).

¹⁰ Criticism can be practiced in this uplifting way only when it is kept in the “pure intellectual sphere,” which Arnold argues throughout the essay, has not been the case in England. This cool detachment of the critic from practical affairs will be revisited in chapter one.

Scholes maintains that this cultural glue held until the mid-20th century, when a debate over which texts counted as “literature” and were worthy of intellectual criticism reopened. Scholes attributes this change to post-structuralists of the 1960s, who left English professors without a secular scripture, and as a result, Scholes quips that “we have been losing our congregations” ever since (13). Scholes explains the cause for this loss of devotion: “What went wrong with the idea of literature as secular scripture can be described simply as the loss of faith in the universality of human nature and a corresponding loss of faith in the universal wisdom of the authors of literary texts” (13). Scholes’ skepticism is rooted in belief that humans are diverse and that they express their different truths in a variety of media. The “textual power” of Scholes’s title is the critical power of readers to understand and criticize texts that attempt to manipulate us in a variety of ways, whether they are deemed “literary” or not. Speaking primarily to literature scholars, he implores that we “stop ‘teaching literature’ and start ‘studying texts’...All kinds of texts, visual as well as verbal, polemical as well as seductive, must be taken as occasions for further textuality” (16).¹¹ Thus, his answer to the question of what “literature” means is to stop using the term, which creates unneeded and even harmful reverence before that category of text, and to substitute the term “text,” a move that many in the fields of literature and rhetoric have made, though certainly not solely because of Scholes’ efforts.

Ultimately, Eagleton uses an analogy from John M. Ellis to work out a definition of literature. “Ellis has argued that the term of ‘literature’ operates rather like the word ‘weed:’ weeds are not particular kinds of plant, but just any kind of plant a gardener does not want around. Perhaps ‘literature’ means something like the opposite: any kind of writing which for some reason or another somebody values

¹¹ Lynn Z. Bloom’s 1999 article “The Essay Canon” shows that even non-fiction essays and works from many genres can also be studied in a passive way like literary works, finding that among influential composition essay anthologies, the questions and other editorial apparatuses encouraged just the sort of passivity that Scholes railed against: “For the most part, these questions have throughout the fifty-year period of this study embedded a philosophy of reading and writing that encourages students to be passive, obedient, and reverent; they read to unlock the meaning of the text and write to understand and appreciate its meaning or replicate its matter, mode, or manner” (962).

highly” (9). He stresses that this definition is functional, not ontological, having to do with a text’s role and not its essence (9). Thus, Eagleton’s functional category of “literature” coincides with and returns to the classical category: good writing of any genre. And this broader category is gaining traction among compositionists as they argue for the usefulness of studying all kinds of texts in rhetoric and composition classes in order to serve both civic and academic ends.

Writing in the recent volume *Composition and/or Literature*, Dominic DelliCarpini is skeptical that literary discourse is fundamentally different from texts “found in political philosophy, the rhetorical tradition, film, media studies, visual and electronic rhetorics, world cultures, political science, history, or science” (32). Arguing from a Deweyian pragmatic perspective, DelliCarpini concludes that texts from any of these categories could be helpful in preparing students “[to understand] the civic environment within which rhetoric functions” (32). Likewise, in the same volume, Ed Kearns observes that many literature anthologies already include “philosophical tracts, personal letters, sermons, journalistic pieces, and diary excerpts along with fiction, poetry and scripts” (62). He proposes to end debates over what constitutes “literature” by positing a definition very similar to Eagleton’s: “*Literature is the language societies decide to keep*” (62, italics in original). And Faye Halpern, while not overtly trying to expand the definition of the word, uses a definition which could be flexible enough to encompass a variety of texts: for Halpern, the hallmark of a literary text is its ability to sustain multiple readings (141). Therefore, any text that readers could interpret many different ways could be termed “literary.” As Scholes says, “all texts have secret-hidden-deeper meanings, and none more so than the supposedly obvious and straightforward productions of journalists, historians, and philosophers” (8). So, the texts now increasingly being read in literature classes are not strictly from the genres of fiction, poetry, or drama, and the popular texts being assigned in rhetoric classes are easily read with the kind of literary precision that the New Critics pursued. As Richard Rorty puts it, “[I]nstead of changing the term

'literary criticism' to something like 'culture criticism,' we have instead stretched the word 'literature to cover whatever the literary critics criticize" (*Contingency* 81).

By bringing attention the historical changes in the texts that "literature" has signified, obviously I must clarify how I intend to use it in this dissertation. Although it is common to add the adjective "imaginative" to the word as Tate does to signify the narrow definition, I agree with Eagleton that that designation discounts the imaginative properties of other cultural and academic writing. The other common usage is to just say "literature" and imply the narrow definition; that is the tack most of the writers I discuss take, and will be mine as well. When the broader definition is intended, I will specify it.

So, cultural studies changes the paradigm of literary studies in two important ways: the method of reading is different since a text's cultural context is extremely important to interpretation, as opposed to the previous reading paradigm under New Criticism, in which the text's context would have distracted from sustained attention to the internal formal features of a text. The other key difference cultural studies brings to literary studies is related to humanism, especially the legacy of Arnoldian humanism. Arnoldian humanists follow Arnold's admonition to critics to discover "the best that is known and thought in the world," creating a canon of revered literary texts. In its reaction against this orientation, cultural studies expands not only the makeup of the literary canon, but the entire purview of literary studies, since within the cultural studies paradigm, anything can be considered a text.

SEEING THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL STUDIES

A study by Laura Wilder illustrates the shift from New Criticism to cultural studies as expressed in academic literary criticism. In her article "'The Rhetoric of Literary Criticism' Revisited: Mistaken Critics, Complex Contexts, and Social Justice," Wilder analyzes literary journal articles to find the underlying topoi that form common warrants of literary criticism. Building on the work of Fahnestock and

Secor from their 1991 article, “The Rhetoric of Literary Criticism,” Wilder finds that some of the older *topoi* identified by Fahnestock and Secor are still present in her newer sample of literary critical articles, but newer *topoi* have emerged that signify new directions in the field of literary criticism. While the older *topoi* established in the 1991 study are indicative of “isolated meditation on textual particulars,” a New Critical way of reading texts, the newer *topoi* identified by Wilder form a shift away from this solitary and disengaged activity (111). Wilder argues that the newer *topoi* engage more with other critics, historical context, and portray criticism as an avenue for effecting social justice. All of these certainly constitute a bridge from the pages of the text to “the real world,” a movement that all three varieties of New Criticism described above would not have allowed. And the social justice *topos* identified by Wilder is directly in line with the cultural studies model of reading texts, in that the literary text is assumed to have a relationship with life, and a careful reading of the text can translate to cultural critique.

Many composition scholars see a natural connection between using a cultural studies approach to literature and teaching composition. In “Teaching General Education Writing: Is There a Place for Literature?” Emily Isaacs argues for teaching writing using literature on the grounds that English studies has been positively transformed by the mainstreaming of composition, pedagogy, and cultural studies. Although her writing program had done away with basing their second-semester general education course on literature, Isaacs, as WPA, advocated reinstating literary texts in the course because of the staffing realities they were faced with. Namely, because so many adjuncts who had experience teaching composition had done their graduate work in literary studies, she was able to shift the curriculum to take advantage of the teachers’ strengths. Additionally, she recognized that the cultural studies background of those teachers was a different and more composition-friendly preparation than had been the case several decades ago. About the more recent approaches to literary study that the newer generation of scholars are being brought up on, she observes that “aesthetic appreciation à la New Criticism [has] been in large

part set aside, or at least coaxed to one side, asked to at least share the stage with study of a literary text in cultural context” (110). Specifically, students are asked to write “about texts as texts that are embedded in the rich context of writers' and readers' cultural, political, and historical experiences” (111). Whereas New Critical approaches to literature did not account for context, newer ways of reading texts that have developed out of cultural studies must in part be based on a knowledge of the cultural context in which the text was produced, and often consider the current context in which the text is being read. It is the attention to cultural context that connects the textual work students do in both semesters of the general education writing sequence.

Isaacs deflects accusations that instructors with training in literature will teach composition as a literature class. Attention to context being a key element in both cultural studies approaches to literature and to rhetorical studies, Isaacs argues that her carefully designed writing-about-literature course accomplishes what it needs to in the composition sequence. Additionally, the course has been successful since it “has been well received by students (as judged by student evaluations) and is fairly popular among all faculty” (111). While I will question the utility of student evaluations in my fourth chapter, they are certainly one measure of the satisfaction with a writing class.

In addition to relying on a swiftly dying paradigm in her attack on the literature-based composition course, Lindemann also makes the logical mistake of asserting that teachers who teach New Critical approaches also share one epistemology, one pedagogical method, one theory of invention, one theory of style, and one method of evaluating student writing. If literary texts are read, they will be read, analyzed, and discussed at the expense of spending time producing student texts. She conflates people who use New Critical reading methods with people who have a humanist belief in the universality of texts. There are examples throughout the 20th and 21st centuries of scholars who read New Critically but held widely varying political beliefs. One can read New Critically and be a Marxist or one can read New

Critically and be an ivory-tower elitist; the reading method is not tied to a political philosophy or orientation toward texts.¹² I will show in chapter one how many different meanings “humanism” can assume.

¹² See descriptions of New Critics and their political leanings in Applebee, Ohmann, Graff (*Professing Literature*), Lentricchia, Nussbaum (“Form and Content, Philosophy and Literature”), Bartholomae (“The Argument”), and Williams (“A Life in Criticism”).

Chapter 1: Humanism

“From Isocrates through Cicero, civic humanism justified the humanities as a broad preparation for public life, and rhetoric as the means for putting a liberal education into political action” (Miller *The Formation of College English* 183).

“[H]umanism—at least in its Arnoldian version—has more in common with metaphysics than it has with rhetoric...Indeed, Arnoldian humanism is hostile to rhetoric, and it is suspicious of composition as well” (Crowley *Composition in the University* 14).

I attended a small liberal arts college—Austin College in Sherman, Texas. Grappling with the Western canon, finding commonalities between these texts and non-Western or non-canonical texts, and emphasizing writing were key to the educational philosophy of this college. The word “humanism” wasn’t one that I remember being used much in classes or college-wide convocations, but the continuous undercurrent of my experience was exploration of what it meant to be a global citizen, a well-rounded individual, and an inquisitive human being. I associated these ideas with humanism. When I did encounter thoughts about humanism in the popular press, I assumed that it was the dominant intellectual tradition of Western civilization and that it was a positive one, more or less. Conceived as inquiry about what it means to be a human in the world instead of speculating about our souls and our destinations after death—humanism seemed to be an obviously useful belief system, especially since I believed in the liberal arts educational tradition.

I have described how I became interested in the history of English departments and found it puzzling that Sharon Crowley and Tom Millers so stridently blamed literary studies for keeping rhetoric and composition down. However,

Crowley and Miller seemed to have very different ways of telling the same story. The villain in both their stories was Literary Studies, but he was called Arnoldian Humanism in Crowley's book and Belletrism in Miller's. Defeating the villain could be achieved by abolishing the freshman composition requirement in Crowley's book, and by returning to an ideal of Civic Humanism in Miller's. I wondered how humanism could be so reviled by Crowley and so admired by Miller when both authors had similar commitments to lower-division writing programs and the rhetorical tradition. And I wondered how humanism, which I had assumed was the intellectual underpinning of the modern university, could be so despicable to Crowley, a composition scholar I admired.

In order to investigate the background for these seemingly conflicting arguments, we should first turn to the OED. The relevant definitions for "humanism" and the related derivation, "humanity" (and its plural variant), seem to fall into two categories. One describes a belief system that is secular, not religious: "one which is predominantly concerned with human interests and welfare" as opposed to the divine ("humanism" def. 5.a.). The other relevant definitions are about the interests, welfare, and culture of humans. "Literary" studies as well as "classical scholarship" are mentioned as being part of both humanism (def. 3.a.) and the humanities (def. 2.a.). Additionally, discrete academic subjects are listed as comprising the humanities. The first list of subjects dates from the fifteenth century and includes "the study of ancient Latin and Greek language, literature, and intellectual culture (as grammar, rhetoric, history, and philosophy)" ("humanity" def. 2.a.). The second group of subjects dates from a usage of "humanities" dating from the mid-nineteenth century and includes "history, literature, ancient and modern languages, law, philosophy, art, and music" ("humanity" def. 2.b.). Looking at these definitions, it wasn't clear to me why Crowley, a classical rhetoric scholar, would object to the term so strenuously. It didn't seem to me that there was anything objectionable in the idea of a belief system centered on humans or either list of academic subjects—this all accorded with my liberal arts background and with the idea of the well-rounded rhetor as described by

Isocrates and Cicero. The fact that Crowley often specified that the kind of humanism she criticized was “Arnoldian” humanism became pertinent, and it is trying to ascertain what she and other mean by “Arnoldian humanism” that will be my concern in this chapter. My definition will be provisional, but suffice it to say here that Arnoldian humanism has been taken to mean different things to different scholars since the publication of his essays in the mid-nineteenth century. My task in this chapter will be to explore some of those meanings in an attempt to understand and contextualize Crowley’s grievances with it, not to arrive at an understanding of Arnold’s own ideas, since I’m concerned with what people have taken “humanism” to mean rather than what Arnold himself meant.

Though Arnold himself rarely uses the term “humanism,” his concept that culture should fill the void left by religion’s diminished hold on society is consistent with the understanding of humanism as a non-religious belief system. In my introduction I mentioned how it was not Arnold’s own writing that substituted “culture” for “literature” (narrowly defined), elevating the reading and criticism of fiction, poetry, and drama to a higher plane than reading and criticism of nonfiction texts. Collini points out that Arnold was writing about a wide range of texts, but for reasons that are outside the scope of this chapter, scholars in nascent English departments did use Arnold’s writing to elevate literary texts. Thus, we might say that the effect that Arnold’s essays had on the humanist tradition was to have narrowed its concerns to just the literary, and especially just those literary works that someone deemed to be among “the best.” Studying literary works that had been designated as the best has been understood to be a good method for improving one’s writing and one’s character. It is this shift from a broad understanding of humanism to a narrower literary one that constitutes the basis for Crowley’s objections.

The notion that literature contains qualities that are particularly “human,” that as compared to other kinds of texts it is higher, finer, better, and that studying it improves writing are ones that persist today. Carl Lovitt conducted a survey of English departments belonging to the ADE in 2002. He wanted to hear from

departments that offered degrees in English that included a concentration in writing. Specifically, Lovitt wanted to find out the justifications for requiring writing majors to take literature classes, having determined that 84% of such bachelor's degree programs had a literature requirement (16).¹ The faculty members responding on behalf of their departments gave a variety of justifications for why this was so, and their responses make it clear why the place of literature in composition still has relevance for compositionists today.²

The contention that reading literature improves writing was the most common response Lovitt collected. Respondents (answering open-ended questions, not a multiple-choice survey) maintained that reading literature improved both writing style and writers' "perspectives on discourse and rhetoric" (Lovitt 18). The second most common answer was that literature study inherently benefited students. Reasons for this were that literature "humanizes students and contributes to their liberal education," that it "is necessary to develop students' critical and analytical skills," and that "it cultivates skills that prepare students for future employment" (18). These justifications are squarely within the received Arnoldian humanist tradition—that literature improves writing style and the content improves the readers' characters. Lovitt and others argue that composition classes incorporating literature for these reasons used to be much more common than they are today (Ciesielski, Steinburg). However, Lovitt makes the point that some senior faculty in English departments are likely to believe that writing is still best taught with literary texts since their attitudes about writing pedagogy were shaped in earlier decades when that approach prevailed (25). Such an approach is on the wane, but these faculty members still exercise "considerable influence in many English departments" (25). This fact, along with the "professional reality" highlighted by Ianetta that most sections of first-year

¹ His survey also showed that 65% of MA degrees and 37.5% of PhD degrees in Writing required literature coursework (16).

² For MA writing programs, the percentage that required a literature component was 65%, and for PhD programs, it was 37.5% (Lovitt 14).

composition are taught by instructors from literature backgrounds and who are also likely to teach literature classes, means that it is important to include the voices of literature scholars when discussing this issue in composition pedagogy.³

Another collection of voices that should be included are those in the popular press, because teaching composition with literary texts is an important part of the conversation about first-year composition in the public mind.⁴ This is clear from reading the recurring opinion articles in newspapers and magazines about the decline in students' writing skills and the need for a return to studying literature as the best way to improve ones' style and character. A collection of colorful examples appears in Andrew Sullivan's column in *The Atlantic*, in response to his telling question: "One wonders what book or poem freshmen writing professors least want to read about" ("English 101"). Among the responses he collected were *The Great Gatsby* (plus the themes of the American Dream, color imagery or homosexuality; *Huckleberry Finn* and racism, or "anything at all about vampires" ("English 101 Ctd"). These two informal blog posts show the close link that writing classes and canonical literary texts have in the popular imagination. Many of the pieces connecting literature to writing classes are written by English professors, either former or present. Since their venue of argument reaches a much wider swath of readers than professional journals, their arguments are worth the attention of academics in rhet/comp if we want to maintain communication with the wider world about what we do and how they understand what we do.

Therefore, while all the voices represented in this chapter may not be from rhet/comp specialists, they are in fact part of the debate over literature in composition. They have either wielded influence over how literature scholars think about literature

³ Dennis Ciesielski claims that teachers who are more likely to use literature in composition in Arnoldian humanistic ways are less likely to participate in the scholarly discussions about it within composition, and that they therefore "all too often enter the composition classroom with good intentions but unsupported by practical research" (130). He offers no evidence for this claim, and it is beyond the scope of my project to confirm or deny it based on empirical methods.

⁴ See, for example, Epstein, Bloom, Chace, Pippin.

and writing in the general curriculum, live and teach with a foot in both worlds even if their numbers are not visible in professional conversations, or have appealed to a broader public sense about literature and writing that I feel we must be aware of if not directly engaged with. In Raymond Williams's terms, it could be argued that the Arnoldian humanistic approach is residual within composition studies but is actually dominant in the public sphere, while the more dominant post-Arnoldian humanist view within composition is much weaker outside our professional conferences and journals. One goal I have for this dissertation is to mediate between literature specialists and composition specialists, and between academics and non-academics. This impulse is probably rooted in my feeling that I am simultaneously part of all those communities, or at the very least, I have loved ones in each of them and I want everyone to get along! So the first step in figuring out how to resolve our problems is to listen respectfully to each other. "Humanism" is a massive term within the debate over literature in composition, a term that deserves unpacking. What it is, what it isn't, what it means for literary study, and especially what it means for composition are questions that need clarification in order to have a productive conversation about literature in composition. In this chapter I will try to provide clarification for these questions by unraveling what people mean when they use the word "humanism," and how much of their criticism is historical versus rooted in today's debate over literature in composition.

CROWLEY'S ATTACKS ON LITERATURE AND ARNOLDIAN HUMANISM

Perhaps the most vehement arguments against using literature in composition come from Sharon Crowley. She suggests that using literature to teach composition is a long, harmful tradition that is rooted in Arnoldian humanism. She argues throughout *Composition in the University* that the humanist approach is not the best approach for composition, and is not even a good approach. She goes as far as to say that Arnoldian humanism is a direct odds with rhetoric. If Crowley is right, and humanism is inherently hostile to rhetoric, then allowing humanist approaches to writing and

literature into rhetoric classes is self-destructive. But if we are to protect our students from humanism, we have to know what it is and what harm it does.

When we look closely at Crowley's arguments about the influence Arnoldian humanists had on the development of English departments in the 19th and 20th centuries, her habit of using "humanism" in mostly muddled ways illustrates the shortcomings of this conversation. As seems to be the case with most contemporary scholars from both literature and composition, "humanism" is almost always shorthand for Arnoldian humanism, that is, the tradition growing out of Matthew Arnold's essays, which had a tremendous impact on the formation of English departments. Keeping in mind that the slogans of Arnold that have been taken up are more important than his actual writings, let's look at the complaints Sharon Crowley has about Arnoldian humanism, a term she never defines.

She maintains that when the first-year composition course was invented, "the regime used in the required course was meant to produce an educated person, as this was defined within Arnoldian humanism," that is, someone who "displayed the tastes and habits of educated persons" (9). In Arnold's terms, "taste" would be acquaintance with "the best that is known and thought," and "habits" would mean the habit of reading critically and disinterestedly. Crowley's assertion means that students who did not fit the Arnoldian humanist definition of an educated person would be made to fit that definition by the time they left the first-year composition course. She explains that humanistic composition teachers who use literature believe that that literature needs to be the text at the center of a writing class so that students can learn about style, values, and be acquainted with the best that is thought and said (13). Elsewhere, she mentions that humanists believe in the universality of literature, which makes it difficult for them to separate it from the universally required first-year composition course (25). In other words, humanists want every student in the university to learn to read and write in the ways they see fit.

She also sees the pernicious humanist influence in composition courses that do not use literature, but instead focus on correcting students' grammar. These courses

are now referred to in composition scholarship as “current-traditional,” and many colleges required them before students could take a second semester of writing instruction that did include literature (the types of courses Lindemann objected to). Since humanists did not deem these students to be ready for literature, “What could be taught, and what was obviously needed by less capable students, according to the logic of humanism, was explicit instructions in grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling. For those less well bred, correct expression could become the sign of an educated character” (96).⁵ That is, humanists wanted some students to first become acquainted with clear expression, and then with the superior style and values of literature in their composition classes. However, these humanists’ desire for students to *become* educated is in conflict with how Crowley depicts them elsewhere in the book.

Later in the book, she discusses how humanists dislike instruction in composition to improve expression, whether it is to improve style in the manner of literary authors or to achieve clear expression as current-traditional rhetoric classes aim to teach. Humanists at elite universities look down on these ladders to improved eloquence because they believe that only the cultural elite (those with money and leisure time) should be able to talk and write eloquently—thus they saw composition instruction as distasteful social climbing (86). She argues that the reason why nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century teachers of English disapproved of explicit writing instruction is that “the point of humanistic composition is not to create better writers but to display the cultivated character that is the sign of an educate person. In the humanist dispensation, the only way to develop an appropriate character is to spend a lifetime of reading the right texts” (86). In other words, demonstrating that one has the right taste is more important than learning to communicate more effectively.

⁵ James Berlin in *Rhetoric and Reality* attributes the prominence of current-traditionalism to science and business interests’ influence over first-year composition, two groups that he sees as the opposite of humanists. So, for Berlin, humanists are not the villains that they are for Crowley.

Crowley contradicts herself when she argues that, on the one hand, humanists attribute too much power to literary study and they force it and instruction in correctness upon students, but on the other hand, humanists dislike educating anyone but elite students who already know about great authors and clear expression anyway.⁶ So do humanists educate students or do exclude they students? If humanists were only interested in addressing those already well on their way to fitting the Arnoldian humanist definition of an educated person, did they intend to teach them anything about composition or just stamp their passports through college? Furthermore, if humanists were interested in educating students who could not yet meet Arnold's definition of an educated person, how could that interest be motivated by elitism or exclusivity if the effect was to enlarge the pool of educated people? It seems that Crowley is attributing conflicting evils to humanism. The effect of her inconsistent usage is to make a scapegoat out of anyone who might have ever been associated, or associated themselves, with the label "humanist." Scapegoating in this manner has the potential to alienate compositionists who subscribe to certain tenets of humanism but not others, and makes a civil and informed discussion of how or how not to use literature in composition more difficult. And though Crowley is discussing humanist figures in the early 20th century, she lets the residue of their misdeeds rest on current English departments. Most of her evidence is historical, but her claims are about how English should be taught in the present.

In the interest of clarifying what humanism is and why it is bad for composition, it will be helpful to examine in detail the four main charges leveled against it by Crowley, whose slippery usage of the term is representative of the many

⁶ Sometimes she attributes belief in a fixed mindset to humanists, sometimes a growth mindset, to use the terms of Carolyn Dweck's ground-breaking book, *Mindset*. A fixed mindset is the belief that people are born with a certain intellect and cannot be expected to improve their capacity. A growth mindset is the belief that everyone has the capacity to grow in intellect and skills. When Crowley describes humanists as believing that students could become educated, she attributes a growth mindset to them. But when she says that humanists were only interested in educating students whose breeding already displayed a cultivated character, she is imagining the fixed mindset.

ways it gets used in this debate. She maintains that it is made of up these four characteristics:

- It privileges reading over writing.
- Is it an exclusive educational tradition.
- Is is hostile to rhetoric because of its emphasis on objectivity.
- It is respectful only towards already-written texts because of their superior literary style.

But her arguments are based mostly on historical sources, with little contemporary evidence from those interested in either literary theory or composition pedagogy. What are current teachers who use literature to teach composition saying about their methods? And if they subscribe to one tenet of humanism, do they subscribe whole cloth to Arnoldian humanism in the way that Crowley has portrayed it?

HUMANISM AS METHOD

First of all, humanism can be understood as a methodology: “reading a text and then thinking about it” as Lindemann described the method of invention in writing-as-product classes (“Three Views” 291). Crowley says that the humanist method of learning about the world, reading texts, is problematic for writing classes because a humanist-oriented class will privilege reading over writing. She sees pragmatism as a superior alternative to humanism, which “suggests that people who want to learn to do something should actually practice doing it” (17). Of course, if the class is a writing class, the practice should be in writing, which is why she objects to a humanist pedagogy that would substitute practice in writing for practice in reading.

Reading, or, not doing science

What are some claims made for the humanist method of reading texts and thinking about them? A starting place is to look at how the humanist method differs

from other ways of creating knowledge. There stands the simple division of humanism from the sciences in the way that “humanist” is distinguished from “mathematician” or “physicist.” In *Criticism and Social Change*, Frank Lentricchia says that what unites humanists working in the academy is that they work with texts. They are “people who read, analyze, and produce what advanced criticism calls ‘representations’ and ‘interpretations’” (6). We could say that one way of seeing texts is that they are records of the past, and knowledge is created out of reviewing what has been said before. This is what Bruce Bashford means when he says that “humanists typically try to see possibilities in concepts from the past for the present” (204).

The method of building knowledge by reading stands opposed to the scientific method of conducting experiments to discover what is presently true, and it is this meaning expressed in the note to OED definition 2.b.of “humanities”: “The humanities are typically distinguished from the social sciences in having a significant historical element, in the use of interpretation of texts and artefacts rather than experimental and quantitative methods, and in having an idiographic rather than nomothetic character.” This is also the meaning implied by many contemporary writers writing about the “crisis of the humanities.” These writers assume that humanities departments are where textual humanistic methods are employed and taught. Louis Menand advances this view in a recent essay about the future of English departments when he describes scientific disciplines as relying primarily on empirical methods, methods that humanists are often opposed to. “Humanists reject the idea that measurement can do the work of interpretation. They have questions about the assumptions made in the science disciplines, and they want to be sure that colleagues in those disciplines hear those questions” (“Imagined” 15). Menand contends that what sets humanists apart from scientists is their methods and their aims. Humanists use hermeneutic methods and investigate meaning and values, while scientists use empirical methods and investigate the nature of our world (“Imagined”).

Relevance of the humanist method to current debate

There have been many humanists who argued that the humanist method of knowing the world was superior to the methods used by scientists, because they believed meaning and values to be more timeless and therefore more important than the material world (we hear from some such humanists in the “Objective Stance” section of this chapter). Contemporary humanists may not make the claim that gaining knowledge through reading is inherently better than through science, but they do make claims about the benefits of reading that are relevant to the debate over literature in comp. Proponents of literature claim that reading literature provides students with analytical skills.⁷ One such proponent is Margaret Vandenburg, who, along with many others in Anderson and Farris’ MLA-published collection, argues that the benefit of using literary texts instead of say, scientific treatises, is that students gain greater analytical expertise, especially with regard to the relation of content and form. This power of literature to enhance critical thinking is the reason her department discarded a curriculum that was more focused on rhetoric, especially aims and modes of exposition, and chose to ground the course in canonical literature. Because literature is more formally complex and nuanced, studying it in a composition class produces more layered and sophisticated writing than composition courses that used a more purely rhetorical approach. The analysis skills that studying literature imparts better equips students to write across the curriculum, she argues.

These types of claims about effectiveness are difficult to prove, however. Vandenburg offers the feedback from faculty outside the English department as evidence that their change from studying mainly expository texts to literary texts was a movement in the right direction. She says, “Since the inauguration of this new first-year English program colleagues throughout the college have remarked that our

⁷ See also Halpern, Gamer, Whall, Emmit et al, George, Heyda, and Raymond.

students are more analytically circumspect than those previously trained more exclusively in rhetorical and research skills” (64-65). This statement is puzzling to me, since it’s hard to imagine “analytically circumspect,” that is, not being open to risk-taking, is a virtue. Perhaps Vandenberg misrepresented the praise of her colleagues, or perhaps I am misunderstanding her meaning, but the fact remains that there is not very compelling proof that their new literature-centered approach resulted in improved writing skills. Vandenberg states that “The pedagogical premise of the first-year English programs represented in this volume [the Anderson and Farris collection] is that teaching students to appreciate well-wrought literature enhances their ability to write well” (65). We have seen other renditions of this claim in my introduction and later in this dissertation, so it appears that Crowley’s condemnation that humanism is bad for composition because it privileges reading over writing still maintains relevance in this debate.

ELITISM

Crowley calls humanism “an exclusive educational tradition, insofar as the humanist impulse is to impart instruction to a select few who are considered able to inhabit a humanist subjectivity” (Crowley 14). The time period she writes about, the late 19th century, was a time of flux for American universities and the populations they were supposed to educate. Ideas about what being “educated” meant were also in flux. But the sheer number of students from non-genteel backgrounds who were heading predominately to newly formed public universities and normal schools presented problems for Arnoldian humanists who wanted to both control who was educated and what that education looked like. Crowley says that they disapproved of composition classes because they would extend the gift of eloquence to students who did not have the cultured background that such eloquence usually denoted, even if students’ families could afford the tuition at elite colleges. “Nineteenth- and early-

twentieth-century teachers of English at a few elite universities and colleges eschewed explicit instruction in composition. The reason for this is that the point of humanistic composition is not to create better writers but to display the cultivated character that is the sign of an educated person. In the humanist dispensation, the only way to develop an appropriate character is to spend a lifetime of reading the right texts” (86). Writing instruction would allow nouveau riche (and even non-riche) students to sound like they came from quality families and spent their leisure time reading classic texts, and Arnoldian humanists looked with disdain on this social climbing.

The humanists involved in the formation of the English departments at American colleges had goals that are easy to label as “elitist.” One such goal was political. Their ideal social structure tended toward meritocracy or even aristocracy instead of democracy, as is apparent in humanist Irving Babbitt’s *Literature and the American College*. “In once sense the purpose of the college is not to encourage the democratic spirit, but on the contrary to check the drift toward a pure democracy. If our definition of humanism has any value, what is needed is not democracy alone, nor again an unmixed aristocracy, but a blending of the two—an aristocratic and selective democracy” (80). He draws a distinction between humanists and “humanitarians” and favors the humanists. According to his definition, humanists see the purpose of college education as “thorough training of the few,” but those he deems “humanitarians” see the purpose as “uplift for the many” (78). Politically, Babbitt did not approve of educating a large portion of citizens for equal participation in a democracy, but “thorough training of the few,” a philosophy more akin to aristocracy.

Similarly, noted humanist Charles Eliot Norton (and Harvard president) denounced the “barbarism and vulgarity” of modern society (qtd. in Graff 83). And as Graff says of humanists’ elitist stance, “the same reactionary outlook that scorned the vulgarity of the masses scorned also the vulgarity of organized business and the assimilation of higher education by the values of the industrial marketplace” (83). According to Graff, humanists saw their mission as educating a small coterie for

political power and also to shield this elite group against the “the crass materialism of American business life” (85).

Relevance of humanist elitism to the current debate

Vestiges of elitism still remain in the crossover between literature and composition, though in different ways from the early days of the English department. Peter Elbow made his name in composition, but comes from a literature background. In his article, “The Cultures of Literature and Composition: What Could Each Learn from the Other?”, he admits to feeling uncomfortable with the aura of sophistication that he perceives in literature departments, which derives from a “noxious tradition of condescension, snobbery, and elitism” (540), a tradition it’s safe to assume is Arnoldian humanism. Though he concedes that this elitism was more palpable decades ago when he was still pursuing his PhD, he still perceives it to a higher degree in the literary world than in the composition world he more often inhabits. “Perhaps I can be convinced that this aura is no longer in the air, but I still feel in many departments and seminar rooms today that old feeling: that training in literary study is not just learning knowledge and skills but learning to stop being ‘ordinary’ or ‘regular’ and instead be more sophisticated and even oblique” (540). Needless to say, this is one aspect of literary culture that Elbow does not want imported into the culture of composition. He enjoys feeling that his work in composition is more “useful” than his work with literature (536), and wishes that the democratic egalitarianism of composition would rub off on literature scholars.

Barry Maid gets the same sense from his colleagues in literature, and it is because of this elitism that he disapproves of literature in composition. He makes the argument that literature should not be used to teach composition because teachers tend to choose literature that reflects their personal taste and their “humanistic” values (100). He points out that the values of the teachers, apparent from which texts they

value as well as what they value about them, are subjective and “aristocratic,” though they would not claim to be. He believes that composition is not a humanistic discipline, but an applied discipline, and it is damaging to writing curriculum when literature faculty controls it and continually reassert their “aristocratic notions of privilege” (105-6).

The elitism present in English departments today, though, seems to be qualitatively different from the elitism from early in the twentieth century because the elitists are rejecting different things. Earlier humanists were opposed to certain kinds of students taking their classes, but current elitists are defined by their rejection of what is utilitarian and could potentially be used for monetary gain (writing skills). This more prevalent elitist air stems more from the literature scholars’ sense of objectivity and critical distance rather than their disdain for social climbers. Certainly, there are some people who argue today that some underprepared students should not be enrolling on college classes. Often this perspective comes from voices outside the academy and is warranted by economic concerns. Patrick Sullivan acknowledges this in his article, “What is ‘college-level’ writing?”

On a national level, an increasing number of taxpayers and politicians have looked with alarm on the modest success rates of underprepared students and have set out to limit the amount of money spent on developmental courses and programs, especially in state colleges. Some of these taxpayers and political leaders have argued that by funding developmental programs we are, in effect, ‘rewarding incompetence.’ (380)

Especially for teachers in two-year and open-admission colleges, the debate over who “deserves” to be there is a very real one. To an even higher degree than at four-year institutions, these teachers are gatekeepers for students pursuing higher education, and those who argue that some students are not ready for or are not capable of college-level writing may rightfully be called elitists. But open-admissions policies are meant to let the students themselves decide whether they are able to write at the college level (though as Sullivan argues, what that even means is an open question without clear answers). At four-year institutions with competitive admissions policies, the question

of who deserves to be there is less of an issue. At any rate, in the venues representing our field's professional conversations, journals and other published works, there is not a very visible contingent of academics arguing that certain populations should not be in college. Furthermore, within the debate over literature in composition, this is certainly true—in no source have I encountered claims that students who are having difficulties with college writing should quit college or shouldn't have been admitted in the first place. Of course there are students who struggle. But we regard it as their job to try to learn how to write at the college level, and it is our job to try to teach them these skills. For these reasons, this part of the humanist tradition, the elitist stance toward students, is not relevant to the debate over literature in composition.

THE OBJECTIVE STANCE

Crowley and others are critical of humanists who desire to limit the kind and number of students they want to teach. This wish to separate one's self from the certain aspects of the world is related to a central desire of many humanists over the centuries: the desire for objectivity, or "disinterestedness." Crowley argues that "disinterestedness" is "a rejection of the rhetorical impulse" since rhetoric seeks to find practical answers to real-world problems (83). For this reason, Crowley makes the bold claim that "[H]umanism—at least in its Arnoldian version—has more in common with metaphysics than it has with rhetoric...Indeed, Arnoldian humanism is hostile to rhetoric, and it is suspicious of composition as well" (Crowley 14). What she means is that humanists would rather engage in abstract contemplation than try to solve problems in the real world as rhetors.

In "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," Arnold does define "disinterested" as meaning removed from political and practical concerns (35). Critics must not take practical considerations into their purview, but only free themselves to be curious about ideas, not maintaining interest in the application or

political leanings of those ideas. In his words, criticism must “[keep] aloof from what is called ‘the practical view of things’” (37), a stance that Crowley vehemently rejects. She maintains that humanists prefer literary texts over popular texts “because they address the current, the common, and the practical. That is, such texts are interested (and interesting, to boot)” (Crowley 106). The “interested” here is of course the opposite of “disinterested.” Crowley is saying that the humanist desire to maintain objectivity makes it a dangerous philosophy on which to base rhet/comp classes, because students in those classes should be learning writing skills with which they can deliberate on issues in the public sphere.

The quest for objectivity is especially pronounced in the strain of humanism that is often called “liberal humanism.” The idea of liberal humanism often produces a knee-jerk negative reaction in many academics, but it’s worthwhile to explore the roots of this philosophy for a bit before determining how much power it still holds over scholars in literature and in composition.

The term “humanism,” referring to the movement originating during the Italian Renaissance, originally “emphasized human powers to know and change the world and insisted on scholars’ rights to pursue knowledge without being constrained by Church dogma” (Bizzell and Herzberg 555). This movement was characterized by its difference from Christian-centered political philosophy and scholasticism, which was a narrow pre-professional training conducted in esoteric Latin and having no use for civic engagement. The term “liberal” carries several meanings, but the one pertinent to liberal humanism is: “Free from bias, prejudice, or bigotry; open-minded, tolerant; governing or governed by relaxed principles or rules; not strict” (OED def. 4a). So at its base, “liberal humanism” can refer to a philosophy that strives for freedom from religious or hegemonic dogma.

This sense of distance from society is important, in that it assumes that individuals are or can be morally and intellectually autonomous, that is, free from the constraints of their culture and history. Intellectual autonomy is an state to strive for even if it is impossible to achieve. Liberal humanist literary critics have found the

idea of autonomous disinterestedness to be compelling as a justification for reading literature in a certain way. Their pronouncements of a text's universal appeal or a correct interpretation are enabled by a critical posture that rests on objectivity. This is typically referred to as *disinterestedness* within liberal humanist literary criticism, though it may receive other names as well, such as "transcendence" or "aloofness."⁸ Though I'm mainly concerned with the notion of objectivity within composition scholarship, it is worth taking a short detour into literary studies to illustrate the claims about objectivity that Crowley denounces so that we can determine if such views are really present in composition studies.

The Objective Stance of Liberal Humanist Literary Critics

The objective stance enables liberal humanists to see through appearances to the truth of things, and from that stance, located outside of bias or partisanship, they are able to judge which works are truly great. Because a liberal humanist's objectivity affords him the ability to see beyond the temporary and the material, he is able to justify the greatness of certain literary works by saying that the content of the work resonates with universal human experience. "What counts for the humanist are eternal ideas and the unchanging character of humanity expressed in the 'normally or typically human'" (Shumway 144). Liberal⁹ humanists believe that certain experiences and attitudes link modern civilizations with ancient civilizations, and that depictions of these experiences and attitudes preserved in certain texts have appealed to scholars for generations and will continue to do so.²

⁸ For example, Lionel Trilling, famous for his liberal philosophy and literary criticism, admits that what he (and he suspects other critics) seeks in great literature is a sense of "transcendence," or a distance from contemporary society (*The Liberal Imagination* 300).

⁹ In *Literary Theory*, Terry Eagleton understands humanism to mean that literature deals with universal human values instead of daily, particular ones, such as "civil wars, the oppression of women or the dispossession of the English peasantry" (25). In other words, humanists' diversion of attention away from the everyday suffering of the economically oppressed accomplishes a political aim while being disguised as an aesthetic one. Crowley and Thomas Miller make this same point, though it's the belletrists that Miller holds accountable.

We can see this stance from Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, whose New Critical textbook, *Understanding Poetry*, frequently makes universal claims about the effects of literature on readers. For them, the value of poetry is determined by the extent to which it “fulfills a basic human interest” and “springs from the most fundamental interests which human beings have” (25). This statement implies that humans are basically the same across cultures and situations and will all value poetry in the same ways. For example, the passage from *Macbeth* in which Macbeth is shocked at the sight of King Duncan’s blood on his hands has a single effect: “The passage does not disgust us. Rather, it stirs our imagination so that we really grasp Macbeth’s own feeling that nothing in the world can remove the guilt from him” (170). In their introduction, they explain matter-of-factly that a poem gives “us” a “certain effect”; this one effect is consistent across readers and is determined by correct readings of the poem.

Wayne Booth recounts an instance that seems to reflect the liberal humanist orientation of mid-twentieth century literature departments in his introduction to *The Company We Keep*. He recalls that he, like nearly all of his colleagues in the English department of the University of Chicago in the early 1960s, unquestioningly believed that *Huckleberry Finn* was a “great classic” (3). However, his eyes were opened to the fact that his opinion was not a universal one when his colleague, Paul Moses, admitted that he was offended by the portrayal of Jim in the novel and refused to teach it (3). Booth and the rest of his department were shocked at Moses’s reaction: “obviously Moses was violating academic norms of objectivity” (3). This anecdote is illustrative of the mistaken universalizing often done by privileged white academics, since Moses was the only black literature teacher.

Though Booth’s realization that “great” works might not have universal appeal occurred with more and more frequency as the 20th century progressed, those who hung on to the liberal humanist stance continued to argue that critics who are truly objective operate outside of ideology. This was a common refrain during the culture wars of the late 1980s and early 1990s, one given by those who were outraged

by the decline of the humanist canon because they believed the canon consisted of works that were objectively and enduringly great. In his preface to *Tenured Radicals*, one of the most popular and polemical books to come out of the culture wars of the late 1980s, Roger Kimball decries the politicization of the humanities by feminists, Marxists, and deconstructionists (and, we might speculate, rhetoricians like Crowley) as a falling away from rigorous objective standards. “Who could have predicted that the ideals of objectivity and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge would not only be abandoned but pilloried as products of a repressive bourgeois society?” (xv). Instead of studying the great authors who have been the backbone of the liberal arts tradition, students in the humanities “find that they are ignorant of the tradition and that their college education was largely a form of ideological indoctrination” (xvii). Kimball’s opposition of the word “tradition” to “ideological indoctrination” illuminates the argument that the liberal arts tradition and the great works it rests on are seen by liberal humanists as being free of ideology; to them, it is simply objective.

More contemporary humanists continue to make claims for literature’s universality, especially the universal appeal of certain authors. Harold Bloom’s 1997 preface to the second edition of his classic *The Anxiety of Influence* includes repeated declarations of Shakespeare’s universal appeal.

Shakespeare...quite simply not only is the Western canon, he is also the world canon. That his appeal is equal to audiences of all continents, races, and languages (always excluding the French) seems to me an absolute refutation of our currently fashionable views, prevalent particularly in Britain and America, that insists upon a Shakespeare culture-bound by history and society. (xv)

These fashionable views prevailing over Bloom’s are held by “Neo-Marxists, New Feminists, New Historians, [and] French-influenced theorists” (xv). Theorists from these schools, lumped together by Bloom under the appellation “School of Resentment,” attempt to contextualize Shakespeare’s meaning and cultural milieu when interpreting his works, a method that Bloom obviously scorns. Although he claims that he is “not speaking as an essentialist humanist,” he argues throughout his preface that Shakespeare’s appeal is essential and universal, claiming for example that

“Shakespeare’s plays constitute the Book and School of the Ages” (xviii). Anyone could read Shakespeare’s plays and objectively know this to be true.

The objective stance in contemporary literature studies

Within contemporary literary studies, those who Bloom calls the “School of Resentment” have continued to gain ground as part of the turn to cultural studies. For example, *The Cambridge History of the American Novel* considers the following to be worthy of study by scholars: “science fiction, eco-fiction, crime and mystery novels, Jewish novels, Asian-American novels, African-American novels, war novels, postmodern novels, feminist novels, suburban novels, children's novels, non-fiction novels, graphic novels and novels of disability” (Epstein). Humanist essayist, editor, and lecturer Joseph Epstein decries this decline from objective standards of taste, extending Kimball’s lament into the 21st century. “In today's university, no one is any longer in a position to say which books are or aren't fit to teach; no one any longer has the authority to decide what is the best in American writing. Too bad, for even now there is no consensus about who are the best American novelists of the past century.” Though he believes that Willa Cather and Theodore Dreiser deserve to be counted among the best, he knows that his adherence to (what he believes to be) objective standards of quality place him outside the main current of literary scholarship. Indeed, as Frank Farmer says, “It is common in much recent theory that literary texts do not inhabit an autonomous realm distinct from other texts” (“On Style” 344). The days when the mainstream literary theorists and critics reified a narrowly defined body of literary texts as being intrinsically superior are on the wane.

However, even literature scholars who don’t defend a canon can still maintain that their field is objective, relative to the world of business and capitalism. Such a defense of objectivity was prompted by attacks on the funding for humanities disciplines in Britain, a situation that induced Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton, an unlikely defender of humanism, to make a case for a liberal humanist stance in a 2010 *Guardian* article.

When they first emerged in their present shape around the turn of the 18th century, the so-called humane disciplines had a crucial social role. It was to foster and protect the kind of values for which a philistine social order had precious little time. The modern humanities and industrial capitalism were more or less twinned at birth. To preserve a set of values and ideas under siege, you needed among other things institutions known as universities set somewhat apart from everyday social life. This remoteness meant that humane study could be lamentably ineffectual. But it also allowed the humanities to launch a critique of conventional wisdom. (Eagleton “Death”)

Eagleton is saying that the rise of industrial capitalism shaped a reactionary humanism in eighteenth-century British universities, a humanism that prided itself on remaining above the fray of business and day-to-day culture. He understands the charge that this remote posture rendered humanism “ineffectual,” but he still maintains that the remove was useful in facilitating cultural critique.¹⁰

The objective stance in composition today

As I wrote in the introduction to this dissertation, Tate’s position assumed that literature provided the best opportunity for students to discuss enduring issues and his sentiments were echoed by several scholars since his writing (Latosi-Sawin, Knight, Crain, Edith Baker, Thompson). Of course, making the judgment about which issues are “enduring” and “universal” implies some objectivity, but I see very few compositionists defending a stable canon of texts that exhibit these qualities, with one exception. In John C. Briggs’ 2001 self-published article, “Writing Without Reading: The Decline of Literature in the Composition Classroom,” he recommends that more literature be taught in composition classes, including newer literature that has “stood the test of generation” and “admirable non-fiction” (22). He surveyed schools in California and found that literature was used in composition at half of the four-year institutions and almost all the two-year institutions. However, he laments the fact that “Almost no one thought that composition instructors should turn their attention to

¹⁰ And yet others urge more engagement between literary scholars and the public; see Mangum for one example.

teaching more literature in their classes" (15). To remedy this turn away from literature, he recommends that older textbooks be used as sources for ways to teach literature using a mimetic approach. It's unlikely that his argument has made much of an impact in the field since it has never been cited according to Google Scholar and its publication venue is unclear--he owns the copyright to it but the document is hosted on a site called www.nationalgreatbooks.com. However, Briggs is in a position of some influence at his institution, UC - Riverside, where he currently serves as Director of the University Writing Program. This shows that even though his is a minority stance, it has not gone away.

Leaving aside the idea that a stable canon of literary texts is desirable in a composition class, the possibility of maintaining an objective stance is a topic of contention among some more mainstream composition scholars. Some say that the Arnoldian pretense of objectivity and superior judgment can still be felt, and that it is detrimental to the goals of composition classes. As described earlier on the topic of elitism, Maid and Elbow are reacting against the still palpable remnants of an Arnoldian humanist objective stance. They both contend that teaching writing is more useful and applicable to real world problems, but come down in different places within the debate over literature in composition. Maid argues against including it because even though literature teachers who do use it believe their taste to be objective, he points out that taste is always subjective and to claim otherwise is "aristocratic." Elbow sees a use for literature, especially in teaching style (which I will discuss below), and believes that certain texts and ways of writing are "transcendent" (535). Of course, in addition to carrying the meaning of an intensely pleasurable experience, "transcendent" also connotes an escape into a higher realm, one that is superior or more true.

Other compositionists are not interested in transcendence. Like Maid, many in composition see their field as being something of an "applied" discipline, one that prepares students for success in college and in the workplace. Some of these compositionists believe that to encourage a detached and objective stance toward the

worlds of science, politics, and business would put their students at a disadvantage. Jeff Smith argues in his 1997 *College English* article, "Students' Goals, Gatekeeping, and Some Questions of Ethics," that for teachers to pride themselves on their disinterestedness or the disinterestedness of their subject matter is disrespectful of the students. Students have goals, often careerist goals, for their college classes, and he argues that to ignore those goals infantilizes them. But his critique of teachers who assume an objective stance is not directed toward humanists of Kimball's, Bloom's, Epstein's, Brigg's stripe. Instead, it is directed toward teachers who use a cultural studies approach in their classes and encourage their students to see their repressive culture *as it really is*—a gift that early 20th century liberal humanists claimed to have by virtue of studying literature.

The use of literary texts is not the issue in Smith's article; today, the cultural studies approach, as I argued earlier, is more dominant among literature scholars than the New Critical approach. A cultural studies approach can just as easily be enacted in a writing classroom that does not include literary texts, and it is these classes that Smith is criticizing. In *Collision Course*, Russell Durst agrees with Smith that students' careerism is a valid motivator and should be taken seriously. Cultural studies approaches that emphasize "ideological matters" can detract from what he believes to be the real *raison d'être* of writing classes: teaching writing. He says, "Though I believe in and teach a critical literacy approach that locates students in a larger cultural and historical context, my goal as a teacher and program director is not to turn first-year students into critical intellectuals and political activists" (6). Instead it is to focus on "the more traditional concern in the field with the teaching of writing, as in strategies, approaches, and techniques that students can use in producing texts" (4). Smith and Durst are arguing that writing teachers' one common task is to teach writing, not transform students into cultural critics by enabling them to assume a more objective stance from which they can attack hegemony.

But in this critique of the cultural studies approach, one that emphasizes "ideological matters," Smith and Durst, like Maid, seem to be saying that their way of

teaching writing stands outside of ideology; in other words, their approach is more objective. In their case, the objectivity doesn't pertain to the selection of texts, but rather the skills students need to develop as writers. The lack of deliberate engagement with politics can be read as supporting the status quo, a politically conservative stance. For example, a Marxist critic might retort that an instrumentalist, careerist pedagogical approach remains rooted in capitalist ideology. A feminist critic might object that not talking about patriarchy reinforces that ideology. And so on. This question of which pedagogical approaches are more or less inflected by ideology seems to be where the question of objectivity has shifted to within the debate over literature in composition—again, not necessarily about which texts are objectively superior because of their supposed universal appeal, but rather whether using certain types of texts makes the class ideological or not. Below I discuss how beliefs about what constitutes admirable content and good style also rely on an objective posture.

STYLE

The Arnoldian phrase “the best that is known and thought” branches into two parts when considering what makes texts “the best”: superiority in style and superiority in content. Associating literary texts with good style has been an enduring claim offered by those who teach literature in composition in order to teach eloquence, or style (Crowley 21). This is because humanists associate refined expression with learning. Every student who graduates from college should have refined expression or humanists would call their learning into question (61). In other words, the achievement of eloquence by studying literary texts is not just a side effect, it is the desired outcome. More than eloquent expression, furthermore, studying stylistically superior literary texts is meant to improve a person's taste, a faculty that exists merely to signify one's social position. According to Crowley, for Arnoldian humanists, “the point of acquiring skill in the use of language is to demonstrate the quality of one's cultural and educational attainments” (64). Crowley's chief condemnation of this practice is that it is shallow and elitist. As Crowley says, “effective expression is

important, note, but it no longer has a civic or public use as it did in ancient thought; indeed it is put to no use at all. Rather, the ability to express oneself is the *sign* of the quality of one's reading" (84).

A similar critique comes from Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine in *From Humanism to the Humanities*. In this book, they examine archival records of Italian humanist teachers to see how revolutionary (or not) this form of education was as opposed to the scholastic model. They argue that humanistic education focused almost exclusively on literacy and language skills, that is, students were completely engrossed in the minutiae of Greek and Latin texts, rather than imparting or discussing larger issues that might be raised out of the texts. For graduates of this sort of humanistic education, they contend that familiarity with classical texts was (and probably still is) taken to mean training in ethics and having a well-rounded character, but it was likely that for many students it only signified linguistic or literacy skills.

What Crowley, Grafton and Jardine all take exception to is the thought that gaining stylistic skills and the correct bourgeois taste through reading stylistically superior texts is a sufficient sign of having become educated. Crowley objects because this sign serves no civic purpose, as she claims it did when eloquence was prized in the classical era. Grafton and Jardine object because the sign is an empty one—merely eloquence for its own sake without concomitant mastery of ideas and familiarity with ethical concerns raised in the texts.

Roots of the stylistic topos

Perhaps even more than the other common topoi about humanism, the topos that reading good style can improve one's own style, has roots that stretch back to the origins of rhetorical theory. Greek and Roman rhetorical pedagogues like Isocrates and Quintilian used lines from Homer, Sappho, and other poets to teach students how to select words that would be most beautiful and pleasing to their audiences. Following in this tradition, eighteenth-century professors of rhetoric and belles lettres

like Hugh Blair lectured explicitly about taste, pointing out the stylistic features of esteemed authors so that students could appreciate what was eloquent about these authors' use of language and use similar techniques in their own speaking and writing. The authors Blair lectured on included writers of literature like Homer and Shakespeare as well as writers of non-fiction, like Addison and Swift. With the shift in emphasis from speaking to writing in the late nineteenth century, American humanist professors like Barrett Wendell and Adams Sherman Hill aimed to show students examples of admirable writing, and they took these examples from both literary and non-literary sources. For instance, Hill lists exemplary quotations from *Gulliver's Travels* and a novel by Sir Walter Scott alongside quotations from the U.S. Constitution and *The Wealth of Nations*. (*Principles* 37-38) . In fact, style was so much of the focus in composition classes from the late nineteenth- to the mid-twentieth century that attention to the generation of ideas withered in contrast (see Crowley's *Methodical Memory*). When critics of current-traditionalism talk about its obsession with correctness, they are talking about style.

Relevance of the humanist stylistic topos within the current debate

Unlike other criticisms of the humanist tradition in composition, the objections regarding style are still very relevant to the debate over literature in composition, since many current proponents of the practice argue that reading superior texts can improve students' writing style. Tate touched on the enduring claim that style could be taught best with literature in his 1993 article, when he says that literary texts provide "the linguistic possibilities that just might elevate [students'] prose above mediocrity" (318). John Briggs articulates this traditional connection of literature and style when he proposes "reforms" in writing curricula. Briggs advocates the close usage of models, using "particular lines, sentences, and excerpted passages that repay students' attention, helping them -- in ways that other readings cannot do so well -- become independent writers" (22). The purposes of improving one's eloquence

include the abilities to “find expression, reach understanding, and secure assent” (22). Though he doesn’t expressly say so, “securing assent” could fulfill a civic purpose, something Crowley found lacking in humanists’ approach to teaching eloquence with literature. However, Briggs’ argument centers on his idea that literary works, particularly ones that pre-date the twentieth century and have therefore “stood the test of time,” are good models for learning style, though he doesn’t specify for which audiences. “Properly incorporated into the composition course, literature gives students access to the precision and capaciousness of well-written English. It presents admirable and provocative ways of handling ideas. It can raise students’ expectations for their own educations even as it encourages reflection on the human condition” (4). “Well-written English” is invoked sans context, similar to Tate’s assertion that students should be focusing on becoming better writers for purposes other than succeeding in college or the workplace. These two scholars argue in favor of some vague, generalized notion of style, one that is unmoored from notions of audience or purpose.

Taking another tack, both Briggs and Barbara Lutz maintain that literary texts are more interesting. Therefore, students become more easily engaged in reading literary texts, and it is partially because of that heightened interest that their writing is better. The issue of enjoyment and interest comes up often in this conversation—whether students do indeed take more pleasure in reading literature versus non-fiction, and whether this makes a difference in the way they write. In fact, Mary Segall conducted a survey of students to gauge their opinions about what kinds of texts they enjoyed more in their composition classes and whether they thought those kinds of texts would benefit them in the future. The students she surveyed were enrolled in the second of the institution’s two-semester sequence for composition. In the first semester, English 101, student read essays from a rhetoric reader and wrote expository essays. In English 102, they read literature and wrote about it. Her survey reveals that given a choice between either literature or non-fiction, 53% of students preferred reading literature while 24% preferred non-fiction. One-third of respondents

said they preferred to use both kinds of texts in a class. Students came down equally as to which course had best helped them develop their writing skills, and when providing different factors for how they decided which class had best helped them grow as writers, students listed the quality of instruction, the types of assignments, and their own investment of time on the writing assignments ahead of the nature of the readings (193). What this study suggests is that while students may enjoy reading literature more than non-fiction in their writing classes, other factors are more important to them when they reflect on what helped them become better writers.

Some scholars maintain that reading literature helps students improve their style in more specific ways than Tate and Briggs articulate, though it's not always clear which stylistic features from literature would transition into the kind of writing students are doing. It is important to note the variety of curricular goals implied by these scholars' approaches. Helen Whall is perhaps the most specific about what "style" means to her when she says that using literary texts helps students understand clearer sentence construction, the importance of word choice, and how to identify and interpret metaphor. She spends the first several classes in the semester having students dissect Shakespearian sonnets in traditional New Critical style. Whall argues that closely analyzing late-sixteenth-century sonnets, paying particular attention to sentence construction and word choice, is a useful activity because while "the words and sentiments seem familiar, their expression is alien to twenty-first-century reader" (124), thus the students have to work hard at decoding the syntax. Her goal is to have them be able to competently analyze and write about a contemporary poem by the end of the semester—a curriculum based on form. Peter Elbow makes a stronger and more sustained case for valuing metaphor and other aspects of literary style. He forwards the argument that metaphorical literary language is primal and basic—more so than the "discursive language" usually examined in composition classes—and that "we can't harness students' strongest linguistic and even cognitive powers unless we see imaginative and metaphorical language as the norm" ("Two Cultures" 536). Studying such language can enhance students' thinking and lead them to write better essays,

argues Elbow. Appreciation for metaphorical language and imagination is a part of “the culture of literature” that he wishes could be learned in “the culture of composition.”

The presence of dialogue in literary texts is another stylistic topic that compositionists take up. In a special symposium in a 2003 issue of *Written Communication*, Charles Bazerman invited composition scholars to respond to a recently translated essay by Mikhail Bakhtin on using stylistic examples from Russian novelists Pushkin and Gogol to improve students’ own written style. One of the respondents, Frank Farmer, speculates that Bakhtin would want comp teachers to return to using literature as models of style, though not as monologic text to be passively esteemed, but as “living language to be answered” (345). “The long history of imitation in discourse instruction is a history of asking students to imitate sentences, not utterances: the former addressed to no one; the latter, as Bakhtin says, links in the chain of speech communion, words that require a response” (345). Imitating dialogue, then, is central to Bakhtin’s (and Farmer’s) idea of modeling. However, though Farmer does not elaborate on what kind of writing would be refined by imitation of dialogue, his emphasis on honoring “the everyday languages that our students bring to the classroom” (344) suggests that his goal might be to help students find their own “voice,” a goal rooted in expressivist pedagogy.

Matthew Heard offers a much clearer argument for how a particular kind of literary style, African-American dialect, can be valuable for students in thinking about how they make decisions about dialect use to connect with particular audiences. He maintains that reading texts by Zora Neale Hurston rhetorically, with an eye toward language use and audience, can help students “make the kinds of rhetorical moves Hurston makes, anticipating audience demands but not abandoning a sense of individuality and cultural distinction” (150). Such a reading method would help students write more effectively, not necessarily in academic frameworks, but in situations where they need to read audiences “outside the academic space;” in other words, reading code-switching in Hurston’s texts would enable students to code-

switch more effectively in the various rhetorical situations they encounter (130).¹¹ Dohra Ahmad and Shondel Nero make a similar point in their 2012 article, “Productive Paradoxes: Vernacular Use in the Teaching of Composition and Literature;” namely, that drawing attention to linguistic variety by using vernacular literature in composition classes can help students conceive of Standard English as “one code among many, one that students cannot succeed without mastering—as they have already mastered others” (82). Heard, Ahmad and Nero have the goal of expanding students’ linguistic knowledge and supporting their use of non-standard dialects to achieve rhetorical goals in and out of the classroom.

To sum up, although claims about literature as a model of style are much less common than claims about it being useful to inspire ideas or serve as evidence in arguments, these claims do get made. But as we have seen, the scholars making them have differing assumptions about the goals of writing classes. For some, like Tate and Briggs, the writing class should impart the general skill of “good writing,” irrespective of audience or purpose. For others, like Whall and Elbow, improving students’ facility at deploying figurative language is the goal. And for critics like Farmer, Heard, Ahmad, and Nero, helping students find their voice and use their home dialects more successfully outside of academic contexts is what they use literary texts, especially dialogic texts, to accomplish.

These are all potentially valid aims for composition classes. So are learning argument, academic writing style, exploring enduring ideas, or learning about others. But have teachers with these aims thought carefully about how their use of texts converges with them, along with the writing assignments they give, their classroom activities, and their assessment methods? For instance, if a teacher claims as her goal to prepare students for academic writing and chooses to use a literary text, she might use it to teach close reading, use of evidence, understanding an academic controversy, and argumentation. But if her assignments include the literary critical essay, the

¹¹ See also Jeanne Marie Rose’s “Standards of English: Literature as Language Standard.”

model of style she uses is either from literature or literary criticism, and she evaluates student work based on sentence variety and use of MLA citation, these aspects of the class may undermine her purpose. Or as another example, if a teacher works in a department where the first-year composition course is meant to give students chances to write about “big ideas” but he instead chooses to include texts featuring lots of dialect-inflected dialogue and encourages students to look inward and access their inner authentic voice, his students may not be learning the skills that they need, as determined by the department and the university. In both these cases, it’s not the type of texts used, but the ways they are put to use that potentially undermines the goals of the class and shortchanges students.

CONTENT

Besides the humanist orientation toward reading, Crowley also objects to what humanists read for when they read literature. Specifically, she criticizes them for advocating a particular kind of content and thus “reading literature for life” (24). That is, Crowley differs with humanists over what the content of literature is and how fitting it is for composition classes. She derisively refers to “the humanist insistence that reading great literature exposes students to universal values” (107).

Humanists have traditionally been concerned with the formation and maintenance of the canon, which is based on judgments about which texts are good enough to be read and taught from generation to generation. For many, the content of texts is the criterion by which they should be judged. But content can be important in different ways, and these different ways complicate the arguments surrounding the use of literature in composition classes. This content problem breaks down in two ways among both those who approve of using literature and those who disapprove. One group of pro-literature humanists thinks that content is important because it carries certain messages that readers will receive upon exposure to the text. Sometimes these are referred to as “themes,” familiar to many of us whose literature

teachers had a humanist orientation or anyone who has thumbed through a copy of *Cliff's Notes*. The objection to this humanist theory of content is that the teachers are imposing their values on students, and this objection is raised both by literature scholars and compositionists. Another group of pro-literature humanists don't agree that a text will carry a particular message, but they still think that content is important. The type of content this group values will give students an opportunity to discuss enduring issues and let students make connections between literature and life. This is commonly how literature is taught in modern literature classes, and those who favor using literature in composition classes tend to justify it in this way. But those who disapprove of literature in composition argue that literature classes are the venue for discussions over content, not composition classes.

It bears delving into how humanists who believe that literary texts are the source for wisdom about life have very different assumptions about the power of literature than those humanists who maintain that literature should be studied for its own sake, not for its ability to impart wisdom.

Deriving life lessons from reading the right literature

The argument that readers can learn valuable lessons about life and become better people is a common one outside of English departments, though inside English departments, this claim does not get made as explicitly, at least, not in the recent past. In the late nineteenth- and earlier twentieth centuries, this sense that life lessons were available in literary texts was more dominant than it is today. For example, in *The Company We Keep*, Wayne Booth confesses that reading Flaubert prompted him to heroically seek truth, but reading Joyce tempered that enthusiasm and taught him to be skeptical of heroism (284), and he lists similar avowals from other readers whose lives were changed by reading literature (278-279). Readers will often maintain that they received or were made to realize some universal truth about the human condition from reading literature. This sense of universalism is expressed eloquently in a classic

literature textbook, *Story and Structure*, originally written by Laurence Perrine and updated by Thomas R. Arp. According to Perrine and Arp, only some types of stories have themes, but genre fiction (horror, adventure, mysteries, etc.) have only simple purposes and not themes. “Theme exists only (1) when an author has seriously attempted to record life accurately or to reveal some truth about it or (2) when an author has deliberately introduced as a unifying element some concept or theory of life that the story illustrates” (93). Examples include: “Motherhood sometimes has more frustrations than rewards,” or “Ingrained habits can be given up if justice makes a greater demand” (97-98). Though this textbook, having been originally published in 1959, is now in its 12th edition, the moralistic way of reading encouraged in it is more characteristic of an earlier era of the discipline of literary studies.

Gerald Graff describes early twentieth-century moralistic humanists in *Professing Literature* who explicitly claimed that contact with good literature could improve character. They saw their vocation as educating future national leaders and imbuing them with ethics found in literature, philosophy, and the other humanities subjects. Lionel Trilling’s words express the faith this group had in the power of literature: ““great works of art and thought have a decisive part in shaping the life of a polity”” (qtd. in Graff *Professing* 84). But Graff illustrates how it wasn’t just contact with the work itself, but the particular readings that the professors imparted to the students that contained ethical instruction. The pedagogy of these moralistic humanists often consisted of a charismatic and personable professor rhapsodizing about a work of literature while pointing out the moral lessons to be gained from it. One such professor, Barrett Wendell at Harvard, regretted the freeing of the slaves even at the turn of the century, because it had allowed lower classes to overturn the dominance of the cultured gentry (83). We can imagine what kind of moral lessons he found to highlight in literature.

Crowley is suspicious that simply reading literature can improve character, and is also suspicious of how even discussing certain texts in particular could be morally improving. “I feel entitled to wonder what lessons teachers expected to glean

from the literary texts that were recommended during the 1950s for the required composition class. Among these were *Oedipus Rex*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *Lord Jim*, and *Light in August*” (107-8). Ironically, she attacks humanists for believing that literary texts can improve character, yet she implies that reading certain violent or racist texts might damage character or at the very least, constitute a waste of time and effort.

Using literature as an opportunity for reflection

The role of literature as a catalyst for reflection and exploration is the assumption many current teachers operate with, whether they ask students to make a personal connection with literature, to empathize with other people after gaining some insight about them from literature, or to think about “the big questions” after having read texts that touch on those questions (Tate, Edith Baker, Ciesieslski, DelliCarpini, Kearns). Wilder discusses this focus on the connections between literature and life in her description of the social justice topos. This is an assumption (made by a strong majority of the literary scholars in her sample) that social change is possible, and reading texts in the way they advocate is a step toward social activism. Much of contemporary literature pedagogy proceeds with this assumption, and thus it should be no surprise that composition teachers whose background is in literature would be likely to approach texts this way if they included literature in their composition classes. The prevalence of this notion is reflected in responses to a 2001 survey of California composition teachers. According to teachers who used literature to teach composition, its ability to “stimulate discussion of ideas” was by far the most popular reason to include it (Briggs 15).

Lindemann thinks of this as a humanistic approach to literature classes, an approach she supports, but that does not have a place in composition. As she is

arguing that literature classes provide the humanistic content that college students are required to obtain, she remarks that

[M]any literature courses are not humanistic. They present the teacher's or the critic's truths about the poetry, fiction, and drama being studied. They rarely connect literature with life. If students get to write a paper or two, they must assume the disembodied voice of some abstruse journal as they analyze the ingrown toenail motif in *Beowulf*. Such assignments silence students' voices in the conversations literature is intended to promote. (313-314)

Because her example of a New Critical topic (the ingrown toenail motif) is so laughably bad, we are to assume that the approach she sets up in opposition, the one she calls "humanistic," is the one she approves of. This means that she does not disagree with Tate on what literature is good for, just where it should be taught. Tate argues that a composition class that does not use literature is too limiting for students, and misses an opportunity to enrich their lives beyond preparing them for careers.

If I want my students to think and talk and write about human lives outside the academy—'Writing Beyond the Disciplines'—then I certainly do not want to deny them the resources found in literary works, just as I do not want to deny them the resources found elsewhere. I do not advocate having students read only literary works. But they should not be denied that privilege altogether. They should be denied no resource that can help them. (321)

His assumption here is that only literary texts deal with life outside of the university, and that they are among the kinds of texts that can *help* students. Tate reports that "A well-known rhetorician, upon hearing me utter some such words recently, scoffed, 'Oh, that old humanist thing!' Probably so" (321). Despite his colleague's snort of disapproval, Tate contends that human concerns transcend the disciplinary knowledge most commonly taught in college classes, composition or not (321). He describes the enduring issues that students must grapple with in their lives beyond the academy—"how to vote and love and survive, how to respond to change and diversity and death

and oppression and freedom” (320), and says that literary texts are one kind of resource to deal with those questions.¹²

Respondents to the Tate/Lindemann debate give similar reasons why they assign literary texts. Elizabeth Latosi-Sawin remarks that she uses it in writing class to teach students to enjoy reading and think about “human growth and change” (676). Leon Knight says that imaginative literature can function as a bridge between students’ personal experiences and abstract concepts like violence or responsibility. Michael Gamer argues that literary texts are beneficial in composition classes both because “they hold multiple points of view and are by nature multidisciplinary” (282) and because imaginative texts provide opportunities to talk about enduring interdisciplinary issues such as death, faith, violence, individual rights, etc. Lisa Eck and Mark Rumble go as far as to argue that because students are interested in these high-stakes issues, they are more engaged in composition courses that incorporate them and will therefore “patiently wait for you to teach the finer points of MLA citation or the rules of sentence subordination” (153).

Although I maintain this humanistic approach to literature (using it as a launching pad for discussion about life) underlies many literature specialists’ pedagogical approaches in the classroom, that justification is not made overtly in literary scholarship or freely admitted among colleagues. This absence is notable because using literature to navigate enduring issues in life is often what motivated literature scholars to intensify their studies in the first place, although they may now feel that admitting as much is verboten among their colleagues and even needs to be suppressed in the classroom. Such reticence is shown by Lisa Ruddick, who, in the course of researching a forthcoming book about the moral life of the discipline, has uncovered evidence of dissatisfaction among English professors and graduate students. Some of these academics came to the discipline believing in big ideas and the human experience, but find that any such notion that has “a humanist ring” is

¹² Eagleton argues that lit theory needs to return to these questions in *After Theory* (2003).

unwelcome (30). She says, “I’ve encountered many scholars who say that they find it hard to take their students where they themselves most wanted to go as undergraduates. Whenever they guide discussion toward the issue of what life itself might be about, a little voice tells them they are doing something ‘humanist’ and unprofessional” (29). While in publications and in conferences literature specialists “speak of the need to cultivate critical thinking or to prepare students for responsible citizenship,” in many cases, they “hesitate to say they also aspire to create the conditions for a richly lived life, in fear of coming across as vague, grandiose, or traditional” (29). The reluctance not to appear traditional stems from the supposed rejection of humanism in the humanities, a rejection I’m arguing is in fact only partial.

Literature and Empathy

A 2005 survey of writing program administrators asked whether students seeking degrees in writing at the B.A., M.A., or even Ph.D. level were required to take courses in writing. The findings were that literature was required in 84% of the B.A. degrees, 65% of the M.A.s, and 37.5% of the Ph.D.s (Lovitt 14). When polled as to the reasons why literature was required, one of the common answers received was that “literary study humanizes students and contributes to their liberal education” (18). What the process of “humanizing students” means is vague, but often seems to include empathy. According to literature scholar Ann Jurecic,

[T]here is a surprising level of agreement, from educators to politicians and philosophers, and even talk show hosts, that reading literature makes us more empathic. This consensus affirms the pedagogy of many teachers of college literature who assign works that broaden students’ understanding of human experience to encourage them to develop empathy for people very different from themselves. (10)

Despite this seeming consensus, Jurecic proceeds to illuminate the division among scholars over the value, ideological baggage, and teachability of empathy. She uses the term “humanist” in the context of “medical humanists,” who she says believe that

reading literature, especially patient narratives, can help medical students develop empathy. Philosophers Richard Rorty and Martha Nussbaum also fall into this camp. But the literature scholars she discusses are in the “post-humanist” camp, and believe that it is misguided to think that 1) readers can actually understand how a character representing an “Other” really feels when their experience may be so different from the reader’s, and 2) that “feeling right” is sufficient without taking political action to rectify social injustice.

Jurecic’s argument about empathy complicates these two positions. She states that there is a lack of evidence showing that empathetic skills can be improved from reading literature and agrees that empathetic feelings can arise out of a sense of false identification. But to deny the role of empathy in readers’ (read: students’) experience is unnecessary if not impossible. For instance, she argues that a novel like *Beloved* is *about* empathy and should be read as such. Her conclusion about literature and empathy is that “the lived complexity of empathy cannot be reduced to an outcome to be assessed, a feeling to be argued out of, or a neurological response” (24). The literature faculty in the survey above who hold a traditional humanist position about literature might not have conceived their position as being about “an outcome to be assessed.” Still, they see the relationship between studying literature and developing certain social skills, like empathy, as a causal one, though one whose effects are immeasurable.

Disavowing moralistic content

Though those who would use literature to teach composition would probably disavow that their purpose was to inculcate certain “messages” of the Perrine and Arp variety, I maintain that the current adherence to a social justice topos is not so far removed from the more traditional humanist pedagogy, and that some literature specialists, whether in a literature or composition class, still encourage students to

receive the “messages” in certain works: the anti-racist message of *Huckleberry Finn*, the proto-feminist message of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the democratic message of *Leaves of Grass*, etc. Though many give “the indeterminacy of meaning” as a reason to study and discuss literature (e.g. Halpern and Gamer), and specifically as a reason to use literature to teach composition, it is hard to imagine a teacher accepting the argument of a student’s paper that contradicted the messages given above. Say, for example, a student wrote a paper about “The Yellow Wallpaper” arguing that the care given to the protagonist was not overly paternalistic or insensitive, but was actually just what she needed since she was obviously mentally ill and needed to remain in a protective environment. This would be against the dominant feminist reading of the story, which is that the paternalistic actions of the protagonist’s husband and her doctor were harmful to her and demonstrative of the ways that women’s intellects and opinions were often dismissed during the time period (and still are today). Mariolina Salvatori gives just such an example from one of her classes when a student made an articulate argument in favor of the female protagonist heeding the mens’ advice. Salvatori describes her reaction:

As I tried to collect myself enough to formulate a question that might make her reflect on what she had just said and why, the book in front of her caught my attention. It was highlighted, rather sparsely. I picked it up, flipped through it, and in a rare moment of extraordinary clarity I noticed that what she had marked in the text, what she had chosen to pay attention to, was everything in the text that had to do with ‘the doctor.’ She had paid little or no attention to anything else. (447)

Salvatori’s remark that she needed to “collect herself” implies that she was caught off guard by the student’s reading, if not offended, and planned to push back against the student’s reading because of its content even before she noticed that the student had apparently read selectively. Turning the incident into a lesson about reading closely and critically probably avoided a classroom showdown about the imbalance of power between the sexes, but it’s questionable whether Salvatori or a teacher like her would

have pushed back similarly if a student had volunteered a reading that accorded with the message that feminist scholars assume arises naturally out of Gilman's short story.

The truth is that content, or "message," does matter, whether the text is a traditional literary one or not. I can provide an example from my own experience that I believe to be representative of the impulse to prefer certain messages over others. When I taught my RHE 309K class, entitled "The Rhetoric of Abolition," I assigned texts from the debate over the abolition of slavery. Some of these made arguments that were pro-slavery and racist, some made arguments that were anti-slavery and racist, and some were anti-slavery and anti-racist. When we read texts by Thomas Jefferson and John C. Calhoun about the inferiority of the African race and the need for slavery, I expected my students to think of these arguments as odious. When we read texts by William Garrison and Frederick Douglass, I expected them to agree with the arguments that slavery should be abolished. When we read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, I expected them to agree with the characters who made anti-slavery arguments and to disagree with the characters who made racist or pro-slavery arguments. Is this so different from an Arnoldian humanist pedagogue who expects her students to get the message from "The Road Less Traveled By" that choosing a less popular path through life is preferable to the popular one? Or who wants students to walk away from *Romeo and Juliet* having learned that young lovers should not circumvent political alliances in order to indulge their carnal passion?

CONCLUSION

In my introduction and this chapter, I've been arguing that we need to take a nuanced look at what people in the debate over using literature in composition mean when they use the terms "New Criticism" and "Humanism." Too often, vague use of these terms obscures engagement with ideas about pedagogy because they are treated as devil terms...any pedagogical approach that bears resemblance to what the critics call New Critical or humanistic gets tossed aside without closer examination. This is

intellectually and historically sloppy since there are actually several pedagogical methods, epistemological assumptions, and commonplace arguments about reading and writing underneath these big terms. By carefully tracing out several possible meanings of both of these terms, I have intended to prove two claims. One is semantic--that not all ideological and pedagogical assumptions are shared by people identified as New Critics and humanists. In other words, not all formalistic readers are New Critics, not all New Critics are humanists (and vice versa), not all humanists believe that reading literature works well for teaching composition, and those who do don't share the same reasons.

Another claim is a historical one—that just because humanists in the early part of the 20c were elitists doesn't mean that current instructors who share some of their beliefs about the usefulness of literary texts are also elitists. Basically, I've attempted to determine which charges against humanism are still relevant to the debate about literature in composition and which are not. Elitism is not an important factor. A traditionally liberal or Arnoldian disinterested stance toward the canon has also receded in importance, though there is a similar sense that studying literature gives us a sense about what life is really about, or what people are really like, as differentiated from texts generated by scientific or social scientific methods. There is also a sense among those who are not concerned with literature that their instruction can enlighten students about what is real and true, whether that be the truth about hegemony or ideology.

Two common humanist claims that are still relevant are that literature is beneficial for first-year composition students because of its style and content. And contrary to what their Arnoldian humanist forebears extolled as the value of studying these superior texts, today's advocates of literature in composition don't make the claim that simply having good taste makes one a good person. Rather, they argue that the style of literature is superior because it is more engaging, and therefore better to capture and keep students' attention. It also can be used to enhance students' writing style. Furthermore, they argue that literary texts provide productive content for

discussing “enduring issues” faced by all people, and because they make it possible for students to imagine the experiences of Others in a way that fosters empathy, heightening awareness of oppression and discrimination.

What does this mean for composition studies? We can have a more productive discussion when the option of using a conversational cop-out is not acceptable. Tate’s ideas about enduring human issues was met with derision when his peers said “Oh, that old humanist thing.” Ruddick’s interlocutors confessed that they enjoyed talking about literature in ways that they were scared to admit to because of their fear of being slapped with the hit-and-run label, “humanist.” But the critics who lobbed (or were imagined to lob) these charges used the term as shorthand for a bundle of beliefs that are not necessarily bundled together. Such critics should be encouraged to elaborate beyond the epithet and articulate what they object to about using literature and why humanism is bad. The same could be true of many terms—expressivist, deconstructionist, current-traditional, and so on. The person making such a charge may have well developed reasons for doing so. Or they might be trying to strengthen their group identity (good composition instructors) by demonizing kinds of instruction they perceive as being outmoded. I hope the work I’ve done in this chapter serves as an example for how to open up conversations about teaching, not shut them down.

One such conversation is about literature and style in composition. As I’ve shown in this chapter, such a conversation has been ongoing for centuries and is still relevant to the debate I’m intervening in. There are some compositionists who advocate for using literature to teach various aspects of style, and one place we can look to see how literature is being imagined for this purpose is composition anthologies, some of which include literature, though not universally. For those of us who badly want to help our students control their prose more effectively, the promises of literature-in-composition advocates are intriguing. But how exactly should these promises be carried out? And how do we know that our teaching has achieved the effect we sought?

Chapter 2: Literature and Style in Composition Anthologies

In a particularly colorful review essay in the February 2012 issue of CCC, Geoffrey Sirc decries our lack of concern with style as a big problem, lamenting the “fetishization of invention” and the fact that compositionists are “more interested in savoring ideas than savoring prose” (512). Instead of feeding students a diet of “literarily thin” “middlebrow nonfiction essays” (511, 518) and being satisfied with the “thinly voiced, unimaginative prose” students churn out (518), Sirc argues forcefully in favor of returning literature to the composition classroom precisely because it is useful for teaching style. “[T]he poetic, putting language into high relief, makes it an obviously useful course material” for composition, which he says should aim to teach students “the enormously rich possibilities of language” (510). He is fed up with compositionists like Thomas Miller because they have made composition all about politics and ideology rather than stylistics.

Sirc argues for the value in reading “genius writers” in composition since students need to learn the craft of writing from those who have mastered it (516). He nominates Henry James as an exemplary literary author from whom students could learn a lot about language. “You know what’s great? Henry James is great. You want to teach students how to be more conscious writers? Show them Henry James—what he wrote, how he wrote, what he thought about writing, his technologies of composition, and how they impacted his prose. ‘Writing studies,’ you say? His is, indeed, writing worth studying” (510). Throughout his essay, Sirc quotes from James’s writing about writing—his process, his reliance on inspiration, his faithful use of a writer’s notebook to capture anecdotes that he turns into stories like *Daisy Miller*. But it is not clear from what Sirc writes about James and the qualities of his prose how exactly students would become better or even more “conscious” writers.

What is he suggesting? That reading about writing will itself help students? That James's prose should be imitated? How would this work?

Peter Elbow made a similar argument in "Two Cultures," saying that he missed style and literariness, and a certain approach to "high" that he felt was lacking among compositionists who are skittish of anything that might be considered elitist. This is the same argument that Tate made in his 1993 article, that he missed talking about style, and this was one reason why he thought literature belonged in the first-year composition classroom. Elbow and Tate say that they miss talking about style because scholarship about teaching sentence-level composition techniques all but disappeared in the 1980s (Connors "Erasure of the Sentence", MacDonald) for reasons that will be discussed below. The broader questions addressed in this chapter will be related to literature and composition pedagogies of style raised in Sirc's diatribe. Are literary texts the only or the best source of exemplary styles? What is meant by "style"? Like other loose terms we've looked at so far, it is necessary at this point to pause and consider what people mean when they talk about style.

DEFINITIONS OF STYLE

It seems that compositionists use the term style to mean a variety of different things. One kind of definition of the term relies on the intentions of the writer, the degree of thoughtfulness and intention they use when writing. Sirc's desire for "more conscious writers" might fall under this definition. Elizabeth Weiser invokes intentionality in her definition, "purposeful attention to language at the sentence level" (26). But assuming that a reader can ascertain the degree to which the writer was conscious of or intended his or her stylistic choices smacks of the intentional fallacy, making this a problematic criterion with which to proceed.

Other ways that the term is employed are reminiscent of the different ways that accents are understood to exist. That is, some people believe that not all speakers have an accent—only some whose speech is remarkable in some way or sounds

markedly different from the listener's own speech. Others (including linguists) believe that everyone possesses an accent, which they define more broadly as a particular pattern of pronunciation. Analogously, some compositionists understand style to be a positive quality that is a characteristic of some writing but not all. Elbow and Tate allude to style in positive terms, describing prose that is a pleasure to read and found especially in literary texts.¹ When Elbow laments the absence of attention to style in composition, he uses words like "sophistication," "elegance," "irony," and especially the use of metaphorical language to describe what he feels is missing in composition but present in literary texts and criticism (540). He says that these qualities help make literature transcendent and moving. In *Style: An Anti-Textbook*, Richard Lanham seems to have this definition in mind when he writes about style, though he offers no explicit definition. But we can triangulate what he means by closely reading a few statements. Lanham says that most prose style teaching disappears into a "vacuum of stylelessness" (19). If it is possible for some prose to be styleless, then style is something some prose has and some lacks. Just what stylish prose contains is elucidated later in the book, and can be both an attitude and specific subjective characteristics of sentences. When he says "Style must be taught for and as what it is--a pleasure, a grace, a joy, a delight" (20), there seems to be an element of the writer's attitude inherent in their style, as in Weiser's above. When discussing possible meanings for "clarity" (a term I'll return to below), he reveals what he imagines style to be: "If by clarity we mean euphony, rhythm, syntactical balance, shape, and grace, then we have expanded *clarity* to be synonymous with style" (27).² While there might be broad consensus (especially among English professors) about

¹ See also Steinburg, Alsup

² For Williams in *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, "style" is essentially synonymous with clarity and grace, which is illustrated in his opening sentence: "This book rests on two principles: it is good to write clearly, and anyone can do it" (2). He employs the latter two words much more frequently in *Style* than "style."

what terms like “rhythm,” “balance,” and “shape” mean, these are clearly subjective qualities.³

Other definitions are value-neutral and assume that every instance of writing possesses a style. Richard Ohmann defines it as "a way of writing" (135). Paul Butler defines style as “the deployment of rhetorical resources, in written discourse, to create and express meaning" (*Out of Style* 3). These definitions could describe any sample of writing, whether the reader found the style to be pleasant or unpleasant. Holcomb and Killingsworth define “rhetorical style” as “the set of decisions any author makes about word choice and sentence structure (such as whether to use active or passive voice, how long to make a sentence, whether to use technical jargon) while remaining within the rules of grammar” (173). Style’s relationship to grammar and correctness is a fraught one which I address below. For my immediate purpose, though, Holcomb and Killingsworth’s can be read as a value-neutral definition if we disregard the final dependent clause in that sentence. A value-neutral definition will free us from determining if some texts have style and others do not. Holcomb and Killingsworth’s delimiting of style to mean word- and sentence-level features accords with part of Weiser’s definition, “language at the sentence level,” which is a useful way of cordoning off larger rhetorical features in order to concentrate on the smallest elements writers use to convey meaning. A hybrid of Butler’s, Holcomb and Killingsworth’s, and Weiser’s definitions best represent what I believe is the most specific and value-neutral idea of style: *the way in which rhetorical resources are deployed by an author to create and express meaning at the sentence level.*

STYLE AND INVENTION

Sirc writes about style as though it is completely different from invention, and is a more important subject of study in first-year composition. “It’s beyond me why

³ See Virginia Tufte for several examples of the subjectivity and multiplicity in discussions of style (156-158).

we've decided, as a field, we are more interested in savoring ideas than savoring prose; nevertheless, stylistics and the study of rhetorical figures has given way to ideology and critique" (512). Ideas, ideology, and critique could all fall under the category of invention—coming up with things to say. Sirc is saying, quite dramatically, that style and ideas are opposed to each other and he would prefer that composition only concern itself with style. He sees composition as a "fine-art field," one in which we are free to study the artfulness of language (516). Though Sirc never uses the term "style" in this review essay, the piece is all about style and what a shame it is that we neglect it (especially the style of literary greats) in favor of invention. Sharon Crowley also writes about style as though it's separate from invention, but from her perspective, negative consequences occur when style is favored over invention. In *Methodical Memory*, she argues that overemphasis on style results in intellectual vacuousness because students may not think of ideas expressed in language as having the power to change peoples' minds; instead, they are taught to disinterestedly manipulate language for its own sake without connecting those linguistic skills to the potential for social change. A similarly dismissive attitude toward style is evident from the a postcard advertisement I recently received in the mail for the fourth edition of Richard L. Epstein's book, *The Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking*. This ad boasts that the book is "the essential supplement for every writing course—not style but content." The implication here is that style is not essential for every writing course. Though the marketing person for Epstein's book and Sharon Crowley might agree with each other but strongly disagree with Sirc about the place of style in first-year composition, they are in accordance with each other about the division between the two canons.

But style and invention, or form and content as they are also known, do not need to be thought of as separate entities. In their book, *Critical Passages*, Kristin Dombeck and Scott Herndon contend that content and form reinforce each other and should not be taught separately: "Thinking in more rigorous ways and shaping beautiful essays are best conceptualized as parts of the same project; we should

simultaneously teach students to employ forms that encourage thinking, and thinking that necessitates beautiful forms" (33-34). In their chapter on content and form, "The Grammar of Ideas," they lay out a series of activities meant to help students write cumulative, periodic, and parallel sentences, which in turn help them develop their ideas from simple ones into more complex ones. As refreshing as their perspectives on style and content are, Dombeck and Herndon seem to be in the minority among compositionists; the majority seem to think that they can teach invention or style, but definitely not both at the same time. And the decision to teach one before the other necessitates reflection on which one should come first, that is, which is more "basic" than the other. Many have concluded that invention is more basic and that they do not have time in first-year composition to teach style. If they teach it in any class, it is in advanced composition, after students have gotten more adept at developing ideas to write about and arranging them. And these teachers often operate with the assumption that "style" is always positive.

One such teacher is Erwin Steinberg, who says in his response to Tate and Lindemann that we need to make a distinction between the goals of required composition classes when thinking about whether to use literature, especially for teaching style. "Most of today's students in the composition classroom—even at 'good' colleges and universities—need to be taught first about such things as invention, organization, argument, and the concept of audience before they should be asked to deal with the niceties of style" (272). Here, Steinberg describes style as "niceties," and Allison Alsup describes it as being analogous to power windows—an attractive option in a new car but not absolutely necessary. Alsup, a practicing fiction writer as well as composition teacher, discusses her feelings of hypocrisy when she, an aspiring fiction writer with a love of literary prose style, gives up on style as a pedagogical goal in her first-year composition classes, seeing other concerns as more "basic" instead: "grammar, paragraph organization, the almighty thesis" (96). The more attractive features of writing she longs to teach include rhythm, metaphor, and detail, but she and her colleagues question whether these should be prioritized in first-year

composition. So, in addition to invention being a more urgent concern than sentence style, Alsup brings up the seemingly separate concern of grammatical correctness as also being more basic than style.

STYLE AND CORRECTNESS

By “correctness,” people typically mean that a sentence is grammatically correct, and the issue of grammar is a fraught one. The meaning of the term “grammar” has been hotly debated with composition and linguistics for decades, yet outside those circles, or even in texts written by compositionists for use by wide publics, the term seems simple. Patrick Hartwell’s landmark article, “Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar” gave compositionists five different meanings of the term to clarify the tangled ways in which the term gets used. Among the relevant insights from that article include the fact that schoolbook grammars are often insufficient at explaining the complexity of standard English usage, and that knowledge of the (insufficient and maddeningly complicated) rules of grammarians has no relationship to one’s ability to write standard edited English. Therefore, studying grammar in isolation from one’s own writing has no effect on the “correctness” of a writer’s sentences. Of course, this claim is also supported by the Braddock (1963) and Hillocks (1986) studies showing that traditional grammar instruction had a negative effect on writers’ abilities. But some teachers fall back onto explicit grammar instruction despite all the evidence that it doesn't help writing fluency, a situation described by Steven Lynn in this visually striking way: "As Harvard's entrance exam, the NAEP, the SAT, and whatever test is applied repeatedly reveal that students are poor writers, teachers strap on their grammatical helmets and run even harder at that wall, cheered on by parents and administrators" (161). In other words, the persistence of traditional grammar instruction has proven to be very difficult for compositionists, armed with research and good intentions, to dislodge from the public’s imagination of what should happen in writing classes.

Another of Hartwell's claims is that many people mean "linguistic etiquette" or "usage" when they say "grammar." Hartwell refers his readers to Williams's "The Phenomenology of Error," another landmark article on correctness, in which Williams demonstrates the fluidity of supposed "rules" of usage by embedding over 100 "errors" (as defined by grammar handbooks) in the article and challenging readers to see if they could identify them. Both Hartwell and Williams are arguing that usage is subject to context and audience, not to absolute rules. A third point of Hartwell's is that using a pedagogically expedient vocabulary for stylistic grammar may be effective for enhancing one's facility with language; he calls this "stylistic grammar," or "Grammar 5." Though he acknowledges the potential benefits of this grammar, he says that the primary way to achieve this facility is by engaging in "any kind of language activity that enhances the awareness of language as language" (125). This engagement with language needs to be accompanied by "communication in meaningful contexts" for the writer to understand the rhetorical impact of his or her stylistic choices.

The stylistic or rhetorical view of grammar seems to be where the field's scholarship has settled since the 1980s, for those who talk about grammar at all (see Bishop, Blakesly, Daniel and Murphy, Kolln, Micciche, Weaver, Amare). Constance Weaver has achieved a particularly prominent place among educators concerned with grammar, the vast majority of whom appear to be K-12 teachers. In *Teaching Grammar in Context*, she makes several recommendations to teachers wondering how to "teach grammar" in ways that are consistent with research in composition. She emphasizes reading whole texts, providing lots of opportunities for writing, exploring grammar in dialects as alternatives to standard edited English, and helping students see the rhetorical effects of different grammatical choices. But there are still difficulties in disseminating this rhetorical view of grammar and its concomitant pedagogies to a larger group of compositionists, students, administrators, parents, instructors in other fields, and the general public. These parties want traditional grammar instruction because they still believe it improves writing.

For example, in their 2004 study, Cornelius Cosgrove and Nancy Barta-Smith surveyed their colleagues from a range of disciplines about what they thought about style, correctness, and first-year composition. They found, as we might expect, that professors from other disciplines were disappointed in their students' abilities to write standard edited English, and were not sure what was being taught in first-year composition if not mechanical correctness (181-188).⁴ Similarly, Linda Bergmann and Janet Zepernick found in their 2007 survey of non-English majors that students held very conservative beliefs about correctness. Their interviewees told them that learning mechanics and usage were all they expected out of their writing classes, but some of them didn't feel that they had been adequately taught this in those classes. Furthermore, the style they were rewarded for using in their English classes was too expressive or "flowery" to be of any use in other writing contexts. By contrast, they felt that the plain style was expected and rewarded in their other classes. "Plain style" is another idea that needs unpacking, particularly where it intersects with larger understandings of style and correctness. But suffice it to say here that the conversations about correctness and style within our field and outside of it are very different, creating a lot of misunderstanding and frustration on both sides. As Tom Pace asks in *Refiguring Prose Style: Possibilities for Writing Pedagogy*, "Why is it that the one feature most popularly associated with writing is the one most ignored by writing instructors?" (3).

STYLE OUT OF STYLE IN COMPOSITION

Because of its ties to correctness, grammar, and current-traditionalism, many in our field are reluctant to talk about the pedagogy of style. This could have occurred

⁴ Cosgrove and Barta-Smith argue that we should not merely inform our colleagues about the studies showing that traditional grammar instruction actually hurts writing ability, but should discuss more effective alternatives that we provide in first-year composition and that they can provide in their own classes. They say that we should also make sure that "our colleagues' legitimate *rhetorical* concerns regarding appropriate usage are also ours" (224) by recognizing that the presence of mechanical errors does negatively impact a writer's ethos in many academic and professional contexts.

as a result of the process movement. Steven Lynn narrates the recent history of composition as a war between process and product, with style as a casualty of the process movement since it was associated with final polished products. Serious scholarship about style, including research on methods like building cumulative sentences, closely imitating models, and sentence combining died out in the 1980s (Connors “Erasure”). Connors attributes the decline to three main ascendant stances during the 1970s and 1980s: anti-formalist, anti-behaviorist, and anti-empirical. The anti-formalist objection was essentially anti-current-traditional rhetoric, a tradition that focused on forms, correctness, error-correction, and was in some ways overcome by process pedagogy and an injection of classical rhetoric.⁵ The anti-behaviorists objected to the above-mentioned sentence pedagogies on the grounds that they limited students’ expression of their own thoughts and feelings, and they were also suspicious that sentence-level exercises, especially imitation, were essentially programming students to respond unconsciously to linguistic stimuli. And the anti-empirical objection, while complex, essentially stemmed from compositionists’ discomfort with scientism and a perceived lack of theory behind sentence-level pedagogies, especially sentence combining. Connors ends by asking suggestively why compositionists were so eager to discount empirical work showing the effectiveness of style pedagogies, an answer which may be found in Susan Peck MacDonald’s 2007 answer to Connors’ article, “The Erasure of Language.”

MacDonald analyzed CCCC panels to chart the disappearance of concern with style, which revealed a steadily downward trajectory since the 1980s and a lingering sense of gloom and struggle in the sessions that did handle language-related topics. Her reading of these panels’ titles “suggest[s] that language is something we associate with problems, something we expect to occasion hurt or difficulty for students, something we feel anxious about inflicting on others, and something we express little

⁵ In *Methodical Memory*, Crowley makes the case that invention is not prioritized as highly as it should be because current-traditionalism—especially its overemphasis on style—was still entrenched, even in 1990.

pleasure in knowing about" (595). These dreadful feelings certainly help explain the flight from style pedagogies and compositionists' unwillingness to engage in public sphere conversations about it. But MacDonald is also aware of what implications this gap has for the future of the field. She warns that the lack of knowledge about language and style on the part of younger composition instructors constitutes a looming professional disaster: "We send out teachers who lack the intellectual capital about language than an older generation possessed, but who, meaning well, may then try to reinvent knowledge about language in ad hoc ways or repeat old nostrums that would horrify the scholars of the sixties who thought the old nostrums had been laid to rest" (619). She makes specific suggestions about ways composition scholars could reinvigorate language study and teaching after laying out the high stakes of language erasure, including stylistic analysis of how literary and non-literary authors achieve their rhetorical effects, attending to the history of the English language, or using (and thus knowing) just enough metalanguage to explain how sentences function without overwhelming students.

As MacDonald's analysis of more recent (2000-2005) CCCC panels shows, there has been some renewed interest in language and style, a phenomenon additionally evidenced by Paul Butler's 2010 book, *Style in Rhetoric and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*.⁶ This sourcebook compiles some of the most important work on style from classical rhetoric and the 20th and 21st centuries, plus articles that decry the lack of work in the past few decades on style, and some new work attempting to spark new interest and scholarship on the topic. Butler himself argues that rhetoric and composition scholars have an obligation to deal with style, since the public assumes that that is what we either are or should be teaching.

⁶ Jeanne Fahnestock also notes this recent uptick in interest, citing Butler's 2008 book, *Out of Style*; Downs and Wardle's 2007 textbook *Writing about Writing*; Holcomb and Killingsworth's *Performing Prose* (2010); and Stanley Fish's *How to Write a Sentence: And How to Read One* (2011) (19, note 5). See also Lockhart.

As an example, he rehearses the public and academic brouhahas that erupted after a 2005 *New York Times* column written by Stanley Fish. In this column, “Devoid of Content,” Fish strikes a chord with thousands if not millions of *Times* readers when he declares that writing classes have drifted too far from their proper purpose: teaching form (his term for grammar and mechanics). The public comments on this piece were overwhelmingly in support of Fish, a fact which angered and disturbed members of the WPA listserv. Butler pinpoints one reason for their anger as being the public circulation of these sentiments, which served as a kick to an old hornets’ nest of disagreement between compositionists and the public. Butler argues that “The problem of style and the public intellectual is thus paradoxical: the very areas that seem to be of chief concern outside the field are generally disdained or ignored inside it,” and in rejecting these ideas, composition professionals have “ceded the discussion to others outside the field” (394).

STYLE AND CLARITY

Or have they? Nate Kreuter argues that in the tradition of the Strunk and White handbook, “style” has simply been re-defined as “clarity,” a style of writing that doesn’t seem like a style. And this style is in fact taught in first-year composition classes, since it is the kind of writing that handbooks provide guidance for, often in the form of rules about grammar and usage. In “Style, Student Writing, and the Handbooks” Kreuter points out the shortcomings in both the rule-based instruction and the fact that the handbooks are often silent about different styles for different situations—a clear, plain style is assumed to be suitable for all. But just what a clear, plain style means is difficult to determine, making it another concept that is assumed to be universal but in fact has different interpretations.

Joseph Williams, perhaps the most well-known proponent of clarity, has written about it in scholarly literature and best-selling textbooks. In “Defining Complexity,” Williams relies on linguistic research as well as his own experiments to

argue that sentences are easier to process when the subjects are also agents (600, 602). "The more consistently the grammatical structure reinforces--or reflects--the semantic structure, the more easily a reader takes up that semantic structure" (603). Ease of reading is equated with clarity, and it is this definition of "clear" upon which rests his textbook, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. In this perennially successful work, Williams guides reader through revision techniques meant to remedy the unclear syntax of "bureaucratese," "legalese," "academese," and any other heavily nominalized jargon-filled prose style. These techniques include minimizing nominalizations so that flesh-and-blood "characters" may fill the subject position, using precise verbs, positioning subjects near the beginning of the sentence, and following the known-to-new arrangement to aid cohesion. The textbook's longevity (outlasting Williams himself) testifies to the agreement these lessons have been met with by writers in professional and academic settings.

Richard Lanham, another heavyweight in discussions about style and clarity, has shifted in his opinion about the nature and role of clarity over the course of his career. In his 1974 book, *Style: An Anti-Textbook*, he gives clarity a situational or operational definition. "When you say that a prose is clear, you are rewarding success, but the success may be of many kinds, the rewarding for many reasons. Thus the injunction 'Be clear!' really amounts to 'Succeed!'" (32). In other words, clarity "is the job done" (33). This view of clarity stands opposed to Williams's, which is formed from linguistic guidelines. However, Lanham's revision textbook, *Revising Prose*, which rivals Williams's, leans more heavily in the direction of the definite guidelines Williams offered. Similarly to Williams's advice, Lanham's "paramedic method" includes techniques meant to reduce nominalizations, use active verbs, and get to the meat of the sentence quickly. However, an important difference is that Lanham, even in his textbook focusing on clarity, concedes that in some situations, the Official Style is more appropriate. It can be used as a display of in-group status or it can hide the absence of ideas or responsibility. He therefore recommends that people learn to be comfortable with both styles and use them judiciously (125).

Williams gestures to this more context-dependent view of style, but only in a few sentences about “the professional voice” in a section of Chapter 4 (63). Lanham makes this point, that the effectiveness of a style depends on the reader and purpose, more consistently and fully in *Revising Prose*.

In short, a plain style, reinforced hegemonically by the ubiquitous grammar handbooks used in first-year composition classes, is one that is free of errors and unnecessarily complex syntactical structures. It is the style that does not announce itself as a style. And in this form, a focus on style has been a part of composition classes for much of the 20th and 21st centuries.

The conversation about style needs to be moved forward, both inside and outside scholarly circles. One method of doing so would be to present young compositionists and those in mentorship or training positions with methods of teaching style that have been shown to be effective. Knowing a range of these techniques and their pros and cons will enable teachers to incorporate more style pedagogy in their classes and, when selecting course materials, make a more educated decision about which textbooks will work best with their preferred methods. Here, I will provide a brief review of the sentence-level pedagogies whose effectiveness is supported by evidence.

STYLE PEDAGOGY

In his essay, “The ‘Weird AI’ Style Method: Playful Imitation as Serious Pedagogy,” Keith Rhodes simultaneously announces his intention to argue for imitation and his lack of evidence for its effectiveness. I’m going to argue that creative uses of imitation are the most promising approaches to teaching better style to first-year college students--and probably most college students. Like everyone else who wants to argue about teaching style by any means other than sentence combining, I do not have direct empirical support. Still, I hope to show that if we place creative imitation in the context of what else we know about teaching style, its prospects are

the best available" (130). Though he is overstating the case for sentence combining in his essay, by claiming that "Grammar study hurts; sentence combining helps. There are no sturdier findings in all of the research into how students learn to improve their writing" (132), Rhodes does highlight the predominance of research supporting sentence combining accrued since the 1960s.⁷ He also gives short shrift to research supporting the effectiveness of imitation.

Connors, in his aforementioned article, reviewed the research on building cumulative sentences, closely imitating models, and sentence combining and found it to still be valid. That is, interest in sentence rhetorics did not wane because later empirical studies discounted the empirically verified success of the techniques, many of these studies being published between 1966 and 1986 ("Erasure 91). The anti-formalist, anti-behaviorist, and anti-empirical movements finally caught up with stylistic research in the 1980s and, as Connors describes, "[A]s a discipline, we then peered quizzically at what we had wrought, frowned, and declared that no, this was not what we had really wanted. We had seen what [sentence rhetorics] had to offer. And after a while, we did not go back any more" (93). But for instructors interested in helping students improve their writing abilities at the sentence level, cumulative sentences, imitation, and sentence combining remain tested and proven methods of doing so. More recent empirical support for these methods is provided in Graham and Perin's 2007 meta-analysis of writing interventions for adolescents, along with methods for improving writing ability on a more global level, including writing process instruction, clear product goals, and collaboration among students.

⁷ He adds that a 2000 study by the National Center for Education Statistics showed weakly positive effects associated with keeping writing portfolios and writing multiple drafts of papers (132). Socioeconomic status had a much stronger effect on writing ability, comparatively (132).

USING MODELS FOR ANALYSIS OR IMITATION

The role of texts in a composition class is, or should be, a complicated problem for composition instructors to puzzle through in planning their curriculum. Lad Tobin presents it as the most important question for composition teachers: “should a writing course be organized around production or consumption? It is around this very basic question that (at least) two paths diverge, and how a teacher chooses usually makes all the difference” (15). When an instructor wants to use texts as exemplars of style, using imitation of that text becomes a possibility, though its reputation has waxed and waned over the centuries. Farmer and Arrington suggest that since a concern with form has fallen out of favor, and style pedagogies are seen by some as inextricably linked to formalism, then imitation, which traditionally has been seen as a particular variety of style pedagogy, has understandably fallen from its former glory as one of the main methods of rhetorical instruction. From the sophists to professors of rhetoric in 19th-century colleges and universities, imitating revered texts was one way students were taught to improve their style. For example, the *Rhetorica ad Herrenium* tells us that students can learn rhetoric by either *ars* (precepts), *exercitatio* (practice), or *imitatio* (imitation). And even a college composition anthology published in 1951 recommends imitation to help students write better. John C. Bushman and E.G. Mathews describe the readings in their book, *Readings for College English*, as being of two kinds: “models which can be more or less directly imitated, and selections which give practice in college-level reading and simultaneously offer significant facts and ideas. Many of the pieces in the book serve both these functions” (v). They tell student readers that using the selections as models will teach them “many tricks of expression” (xiii). Though the editors of this mid-century anthology say explicitly that the contents of their textbook are not literary masterpieces, it is this attitude toward texts as models that I want to look for in the literary selections of contemporary composition anthologies.

A common argument in favor of using examples of great writing to improve one's own is made by people who swear that they learned to write well by reading great authors. Responding to the claim that "good reading produces good writing," Ed Corbett acknowledges that this seems true, that English professors and other good writers "feel that they learned to write from their repeated exposure to the products of accomplished writers from early childhood on," leading them to believe that it's a natural and inevitable process that readers learn writing by exposure and osmosis ("Literature and Composition" 170). However, there is some skepticism toward this belief. Frederic Crews posits that such a learning process confuses causation and correlation. Researchers from educational psychology, composition, and other fields have tried to determine the connection between reading and writing abilities in various ways. While the bulk of such research has been conducted on K-12 students and Brian Huot rightly calls for more of such research on college-aged students, it bears our attention because of this oft-heard justification for reading.

In the field of educational psychology, the correlation between reading and writing ability in some studies has been shown to be slightly positive, meaning that skill in one domain probably predicts skill in the other, but the correlation is not perfect (Fitzgerald and Shanahan, Parodi, Shanahan, Shanahan and Lomax). There can be good readers who are bad writers, and vice versa. So it is not always true that reading lots of revered texts will automatically improve a person's writing ability. A study by Peter Smagorinsky bore this out when he compared the writing abilities of students who were given either just a model essay or a model essay plus instruction in task-specific writing procedures. Students given instruction in task-specific writing procedures in addition to studying model essays performed significantly better than students who just studied model essays on measures of critical thinking and purposeful composing, suggesting that students are not always able to absorb the relevant features of textual models for their own reproduction ("How Reading"). But a more recent study by Davida Charney and Richard Carlson suggested that giving students a model for their own writing produced better results than not giving them

one, especially with regard to knowing what topics were relevant to the genre and deserved inclusion. There is a surprising lack of research on the subject of reading/writing overlap, especially for college-aged students, so this is an area that needs continued work and attention.

When it comes to not only reading exemplary models (or “mentor texts” as they are known to K-12 teachers) but stylistically imitating them, compositionists rightly have some fears about returning to a product-oriented model. Wendy Bishop describes the place of imitation in what she calls “traditional instruction,” but what could also be termed current-traditional or product-centered. “Traditional instruction relied on reading and examining model essays that were often culturally inaccessible to these students [basic writers]; class consisted of discussion of an essayist’s exemplary text, and a command to emulate that text outside of class, and to submit student-written imitations for a close reading by the teacher who gave a one-time grade” (177-178). Rebecca Moore Howard describes such an approach as “fossil pedagogy” and adds that stylistic instruction in such a model derived its principles “from analysis of literary texts, “which thereby positions student writing in negative contrast to literary genius” (50). Whether they are nonfiction essays or literary works, when texts are not an appropriate match for students’ level of preparation or the writing they are asked to do, when the texts cannot be criticized but only admired, when it is not clear to students what exactly they should be imitating or why, and when they are not given chances to revise their imitations based on feedback from the teacher, it’s no wonder students and teachers alike would find this model of instruction frustrating and ineffective.

TEMPLATES AS STYLISTIC MODELS

An increasingly common source of model prose comes from academic writing in a variety of disciplines. Susan Myers describes how she takes models of academic prose sentences from readings and turns them into templates that students, both L1

and L2 learners, can use to express ideas from their own fields. She points out that part of the value of this exercise is that students become familiar with phrases more commonly used in writing than in their own speech. "Both first and second-language students need a repertoire of such phrases that serve discourse functions in academic writing" (614). Myers' use of this technique for both L1 and L2 learners is telling, since the idea that even native English speakers need to learn the new dialect of standard edited English. Demystifying academic rhetorical moves and sentences styles is an approach that has been popularized by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein's *They Say / I Say*, which has gone through two editions and alternate versions with readings since 2006. Based around the concept that academic discourse is an argument-driven conversation, Graff and Berkenstein include several different iterations of templates accompanying each rhetorical move they present: summarizing what has been said in the existing conversation, adding one's own argument, and forming a conclusion. For example, templates for summarizing what "they way" include "In their recent work, Y and Z have offered harsh critiques of Dr. X for _____" and "Conventional wisdom has it that _____" (21, 22). Templates for introducing what "I Say" include "I disagree with X's view that _____ because, as recent research has shown, _____" and "Although I agree with X up to a point, I cannot accept his overall conclusion that _____" (55, 60). In their preface to the book's second edition (with readings), the authors acknowledge the runaway popularity of the book after the release of the first edition, noting that "there is a widespread desire for explicit instruction that helps writers negotiate the basic moves necessary to 'enter the conversation'" (vii-viii). Instruction can hardly be more explicit than putting words in students' mouths as the templates do.

Despite its use by grateful teachers at "hundreds of colleges and universities" (vii), Graff and Berkenstein's little book has met with some sharp criticism. Amy Lynch-Binieck, on guard against the dangers of curricular standardization and skeptical that the book avoids the formalistic pitfalls of current-traditionalism, describes it as "a manifestation of a troublesome persistence of formalism, an approach to teaching that

can certainly be useful, but which, if allowed to dominate composition teaching, can reduce the complex, intellectual process of academic writing to mechanical acts.” She relates her attempt to try the book in her own composition class after hearing her colleagues’ praise of it, but reports that the students felt stifled and produced incomprehensible prose, and she was frustrated that the templates allowed no place for personal narrative or anecdotes as evidence. Overall, she maintains that the book is not helpful for compositionists, but that compositionists do not seem to be the book’s audience. Teachers who have come from other disciplines welcome the book’s clear language about academic writing and pedagogical ease, and Lynch-Binieck acknowledges that composition sections are more often taught by non-specialists than specialists. But she says that teachers trained in composition are already transparent about their writing instruction, perhaps much more so than the literature scholars who heap praise on the book and the literature scholars who authored it. Similar criticisms are lobbed at the book by Jason Arthur and Anne Case-Halferty in their *Composition Forum* review. They claim that the templates oversimplify academic discourse, inhibit student creativity, and can still result in unreadable papers.

Of course, all these criticisms are sound. No one pedagogical method is a magic bullet that can magically untangle awkward sentences or turn students into expert critical thinkers. And no method is teacher-proof: if the teacher does not believe in its value, its failure is almost pre-determined, as was likely the case with Lynch-Binieck’s class. Finally, it would be wonderful if more sections of composition were staffed with composition specialists. But they aren’t, and the arguments against the use of templates are not convincing enough to scrap this modern incarnation of imitation. The wave of testimonials by teachers and students indicate the value of embedding rhetorical moves in templates that can, yes, still be used in ineffective ways, but give perplexed students a toehold on the cliff face of academic and civic discourse, and give instructors a concrete tool to explain what they are looking for in academic essays.

USE OF LITERATURE AS MODEL

The use of literature as models for student writing is a well-known feature of 19th century writing pedagogy. Through Nan Johnson's study of 19c rhetoric textbooks and readers, she finds that they "stress more than the value of imitating exemplary models; compilers of rhetoric anthologies explicitly assumed that the critical 'perusal' of literary masterpieces develops habits that shape a writer's own skills" (223). Such perusal is mocked by Crowley in *Composition in the University* as a process of learning to write that is "unconscious" or mysterious (89-90). Lindemann also voices disapproval of using literature as model since students are not writing literature--they are writing academic papers, which carry with them very different expectations about language usage ("No Place" 314). It is because of this tradition that Farmer and Arrington point out that stylistic study in general still carries belletristic associations since style is often understood in expressive or aesthetic terms (63). The historical residue of using literature as models for students to either absorb mysteriously or imitate explicitly is still with us.⁸ Corbett is skeptical of the claim often made that reading classic literature was responsible for the writing ability of English professors and other good writers, especially as that assumption is used as grounds for teaching students to write by assigning lots of literature. [BLOCK QUOTE] "Exposure to a poem or short story can teach students some valuable lessons about, for instance, precise, concrete, lively diction, and those lessons might have some carry-over value if a section of a paper they are writing requires a vivid description of a scene, a person, or an object. But that poem or short story is not going to be a very helpful model for the student who has to write a book report for an economics class" (179).

Because the genres and the styles of literary texts and texts students need to write are so drastically different, Corbett disagrees that reading or imitating literary

⁸ Indeed, one of the criticisms of Francis Christansen's method of building cumulative sentences was that the method lent itself more to producing narrative or descriptive sentences more appropriate for fiction than expository prose (Connors "Erasure" 94).

texts is an effective way to help students learn the features of academic writing. The vast majority of composition scholarship on style has endorsed this view since Corbett's writing in 1983. However, in a recent essay that goes against the grain of scholarship (if not the practice of teaching), Scott Farrin argues that imitating authors such as Hemingway and Orwell can be an effective way to help basic writers learn academic style. In "When Their Voice Is Their Problem: Using Imitation to Teach the Classroom Dialect," Farrin narrates his experience in helping a struggling student who had previously failed first-year composition three times, being unable to produce writing in the correct "dialect" (standard edited English), and instead writing in a style that read like a bad parody of academic discourse. In order to help the student improve his sentences, Farrin gave him paragraphs from Hemingway and Orwell to imitate. His final essay was successful enough to pass the class. Farrin concedes, "This is anecdotal evidence, I admit, but combined with my own experiences [as a budding creative writer imitating novelists and essayists] and the testimony of professional writers, it certainly encourages more experimentation" (149). Farrin's larger argument is about voice and dialect, building on Bartholomae's influential essay, "Inventing the University," in which Bartholomae famously argued that novice college writers' process of learning academic writing was more akin to imitation and approximation than invention. Farrin offers this theory: "The truth is that students who fall into imitations that read as parodies of academic discourse are working largely from models that are unknown--and, I'd argue, nonexistent" (144). Their imitations sound so odd because they have no models--few have ever read one entire book. They might not even have models of speech to help them. "Their speech community doesn't include anyone who could write 'correctly,' and even if they were to find their voice, they could not use it to write a passing essay" (142-143). Farrin thus fills that gap in knowledge for one particular student by asking him to read and then imitate writing by Ernest Hemingway and George Orwell.

Farrin's justification of using imitation is derived from linguistic scholarship, which is based on the premise that "people acquire language through appropriation,

not the memorization and practice of grammar rules” (146). In order to help this student graduate from college by passing the writing class, Farrin invites him to appropriate the syntactic structures of these two often-anthologized authors. He starts with Hemingway “because of the simplicity of his style and because he had been used as a model for so many other successful writers” (147), though Farrin also acknowledges that “Hemingway’s prose is mostly the prose of a fiction writer” (148). For that reason, the second author Farrin has his student imitate is Orwell, since he is “more of an essayist” (148).⁹ Farrin’s main concerns are enabling his student to pass the exit exam for his required writing course by working on his correctness and coherence, and from the excerpts of the student’s writing Farrin includes, one from a class assignment before the imitative tutoring exercises, and one taken from the exit exam, the improvement in the student’s surface correctness and coherence is clear. The student appears to have better control over what Farrin calls “the classroom dialect”—one that resembles the journalistic or essayistic prose that Farrin asked his student to imitate. This result gives credence to Farrin’s theory that literacy-deprived students will be better able to add the classroom dialect to their repertoire if they have more experience reading texts approximating this dialect, and that imitation can accelerate their learning.

ANTHOLOGIZED LITERATURE AND STYLE

Hemingway and Orwell’s pieces are very often included in composition anthologies, also known as “readers.” Does their presence in these texts reflect a common understanding of their fitness as models of style? Does Farrin’s method

⁹ For a very different opinion on Orwell’s fitness as a model for first-year composition, see Nils Clausson’s article, “Clarity, George Orwell, and the Pedagogy of Prose Style; or, How Not to Teach ‘Shooting an Elephant.’” Clausson argues that although Orwell’s essays—particularly “Shooting an Elephant”—are used in freshman composition classes as stylistic models of clarity for students to imitate, this practice is pedagogically unsound. He maintains that Orwell’s essays are examples of the contemplative essay, whose aims are very different from those of the expository prose students learn to write in composition classes.

seem to be compatible with the anthologized texts and pedagogical apparatus in composition anthologies? Does the fact that Hemingway wrote literature and Orwell (at least in the anthologies) is more known for nonfiction essays make a difference in how the anthology addresses the authors' styles? Looking at the contents of these important pedagogical tools is one way of determining the place of literature in composition today, and how literature within these texts might be used in teaching style in first-year composition. To these ends, I want to look at currently in-print anthologies meant for use in first-year composition to see what place literature has in them and how style is treated.

These textbooks are not familiar to some composition instructors (like us at UT) since they might be given another kind of textbook to use in their classes. Teachers who are able to choose their own texts might prefer to assign whole works or find their own selection of favorite or up-to-the-minute short readings. But some composition programs adopt them for all first-year composition sections, letting each instructor choose readings from the book. Other teachers adopt them individually and rely on them as the backbone of their classes, as evidenced by the fact that some anthologies are available with a teacher's edition, containing additional notes about the readings and answers to the questions after each piece. Indeed, as Sandra Jamieson says, the books are "designed to teach classes practically by themselves" (150). In other words, these books may not be widely used in a program like ours, but they are an important part of thousands of composition classes across the country and have been for decades.

Other than being an anthology meant for first-year composition, one of my selection criteria is that the books have had a successful publishing history, as shown by having gone through at least three editions and in most cases, more than five. The editions I looked at were published between 2005-2012. The majority of anthologies I selected are very similar in form and content, though I did select some exceptional texts for comparison, which I'll discuss below. They are all paperbacks but are still quite hefty, at least 700 pages long. Their chapters are organized either by rhetorical

aims and modes or by themes, but often both in primary and secondary tables of contents.¹⁰ They often have a chapter or two about writing itself, the writing process, rhetorical aims and modes, and/or writing with sources. Most of them include visual texts such as photographs, advertisements, or graphic essays. Almost all of them include at least one sample student essay.

The selections are from a diverse range of sources, but the majority of the sources could be called journalistic. Lynn Bloom describes the typical contents in more detail in her article, “The Essay Canon.” In addition to personal essays and the (very) occasional academic article, anthologies contain “memoir and character sketch; travel narrative and natural history; cultural, social, and political analysis or advocacy; a miscellany of philosophical statements, science writing, literary criticism, editorials, research reports; and satires and speeches” (“Essay” 404). Because of her research into essay and anthologies, and her annoyance that the term “essay” so often goes undefined within these anthologies (and pretty much everywhere else in composition scholarship), Bloom is very specific about what the term means in one of her anthologies, *The Essay Connection*. In the introduction to students, she lays out the characteristics of an essay: It is prose, focuses on a central theme or subject, short, true, presents evidence from real life or research, organized into recognizable patterns even though these patterns are almost always combined and serve multiple purposes, and are written from the author’s point of view (5). Despite the seeming concreteness of this definition, she admits in another of her scholarly articles that “essay” is an operational definition, similar to “literature,” in that a text can be regarded as one of these when an editor chooses it for an anthology of essays or literature. As might be guessed from the title of her article, “The Essay Canon,” (itself canonized in the Norton Book of Composition Studies), Bloom contends that there is a de facto essay

¹⁰ The rhetorical modes are traditionally understood as exposition, description, narration, and argument. Some authors (particularly in twentieth-century textbooks) break down various methods of exposition, often including definition, classification and division, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, process analysis, and so on. James Kinneavy popularized the aims of discourse: expressive, referential, argumentative, and literary. See Connors’ “The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse.”

canon made up of essays that have been anthologized many times over the course of the last few decades.¹¹ But each anthology I examined boasts a large number of newly added pieces in their introductory material about the changes made since the previous edition. For the price that publishers charge for these anthologies, ranging from approximately \$30-\$50, having a substantial amount of new content seems necessary to justify buying a new edition.

Returning to the hybrid definition of style I proposed above, “the way in which rhetorical resources are deployed by an author to create and express meaning at the sentence level,” more detail about which features were relevant to this definition is needed. I regard questions as being about style when they touch on the following topics: types of sentences (questions, parallel construction, length, clichés, periodic construction, variety of sentences), word choice (creating tone, formality, stance, figurative language, transitions, point of view, repetition, imagery, pronouns, vivid details), punctuation, and voice. Keeping this set of elements in mind, I will qualitatively describe the pedagogical apparatus following a sampling of pieces from each of the texts that feature both nonfiction and literature. Specifically, I will compare the ways style is discussed in the questions following the nonfiction and literature selections.

The 10 composition anthologies I examine are:

- *The Writer's Presence*, 7e, edited by McQuade and Atwan
- *Models for Writers*, 7e, edited by Rosa and Escholz
- *The Arlington Reader*, 3e, edited by Lynn Bloom
- *Reading Critically, Writing Well*, 9e, edited by Axelrod, Cooper, and Warriner
- *Patterns for College Writing*, 12e, edited by Kirszner and Mandell

¹¹ The most obvious of these canonical essays is E.B. White’s “Once More to the Lake,” which appeared in nearly every anthology I looked at, and which is winkingly referenced both in Bloom’s article, “Once More to the Essay” and in Cooley’s new anthology, *Back to the Lake*.

- *The Norton Reader: An Anthology of Nonfiction*, 12e, edited by Peterson and Brereton
- *The Essay Connection*, 8e, edited by Lynn Bloom
- *Language Awareness*, 9e, edited by Escholz, Rosa, and Clark
- *The Presence of Others*, 5e, edited by Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz
- *The Longman Reader*, 8e, edited by Nadell, Langan, and Comodromos

Models, *Arlington*, *Reading Critically*, *The Longman Reader*, and *Language Awareness* contain no literature and will not be examined in detail. The others do include some literary selections, and will be examined in detail.¹²

The Writer's Presence, 7e, is edited by McQuade (UC Berkeley) and Atwan (Emerson College; Series Editor of *The Best American Essays*). The editors' institutional affiliations demonstrate the probable audience for their collection—relatively high-achieving four-year university students. Additionally, Atwan's work editing the *Best American Essays* collection no doubt plays a part in his approach to selecting texts for this college anthology and its emphasis on voice, one of a few ways that the writer's presence is established. In their preface to students, the editors explain the relationship between “tone” and “voice.” “A more specific dimension of voice is *tone*, which refers not only to the implied relationship of the writer to the reader but also to the manner the writer adopts in addressing the reader” (3). Tone “is usually a matter of diction and individual word choice,” creating particular attitudes and intensity (3). The writer's presence is also established through verbal patterns, or repeated elements such as metaphors, images, or repetition of earlier episodes (5). “We often find this type of presence in imaginative literature—especially in novels and poems—as well as in essays that possess a distinct literary flavor” (5). With the focus on the writer's presence as the editors define it, we can expect to find emphasis on word choice and repeated elements in the questions after each selection.

¹² *The Writer's Presence*, *Patterns for College Writing*, *The Norton Reader*, *The Essay Connection*, and *The Presence of Others*.

To draw fair comparisons between the short stories and nonfiction pieces in this anthology, I randomly selected four pieces from each main section of readings: Personal Writing, Expository Writing, Argumentative Writing, and Short Stories. Within my sample, the selections from the Personal Writing section contained the most frequent questions related to style. In the Hughes and Weisel narratives, there were questions related to tone. In the White narrative, there were questions about sensory words and images and their contribution to the overall effect of the essay. The Munoz piece did not receive as obvious a stylistic inquiry, but students were prompted to think about the pronunciation and Anglicization of Mexican names; this could be seen as a question of word choice. Other non-stylistic questions asked about topics like memory, identity issues, and religion, as well as rhetorical concerns like underlying patterns and structure.

The selections I sampled in Expository Writing and Argumentative Writing had less to do with style and more to do with the authors' use of evidence and the essays' content. Two of the four expository pieces had no questions about style, and the two that did included questions about tone, word choice, and the authors' use of humor. Similarly, two of the four argumentative pieces did not have questions about style, but the ones that did appear were about word choice, hyperbole, and humor. Interestingly, there was attention given to how an expository text and an argumentative text drew on the author's discipline and how the texts might appear differently when written to an academic audience. The editors point out that Jared Diamond's essay, "The Ends of the World as We Know Them," required adjustments in "vocabulary, tone of voice, organization, argument" when the same basic case was made in a science journal (648).

While questions after the nonfiction pieces occurred after half or all of the sampled essays, they occurred much less frequently after the short stories. The questions were primarily about plot, character, structure, and the relationship of the writers to their readers or the writers' lives to their fiction. As mentioned above, questions after the Carver and Kincaid stories invited readers to compare the fiction

and nonfiction by these authors. The short story in my sample that did feature questions related at least somewhat to style was the O'Connor story. The questions asked students to consider the tone of a particular section of the story and how word choices revealed the writer's position on characters and events (942). It was clear from comparing the questions following the nonfiction and fiction sections that the nonfiction selections were to be approached stylistically more often than the fiction. The questions after the short stories were more like what we would expect in a literature class, with the only reference to anything style-related being in connection with the mood of the story and the author's relationship to it. From the pedagogical apparatus they created around these texts, McQuade and Atwan do not appear to regard fiction as being stylistically relevant to concerns in a composition class as nonfiction.

Patterns for College Writing, 12e, edited by Kirsznner and Mandell, seems to be intended for students at lower reading and writing proficiency level since it boasts coverage of grammar issues, sixteen student sample essays, extensive headnotes about context, accessible introduction to each rhetorical pattern provided by visual text, comprehension and vocabulary questions, and includes frequent editorial footnotes about word meanings. The readings are grouped into chapters about a single pattern of exposition and a single argument chapter. Fiction or poetry appear at the end of each chapter; notably, imaginative fiction pieces are absent from the chapters on argument. Literary selections are marked with label in the table of contents as well as within the text ([fiction] or [poetry]). The editors announce explicitly that the selections provide students with "outstanding models for writing" (viii).

There is an extensive editorial apparatus following each nonfiction selection that includes questions of seven kinds: comprehension, purpose and audience, style and structure, vocabulary projects, journal entry, writing workshop, combining the patterns, plus suggestions for thematic groupings. However, following the literary selections, the questions are only grouped into three sections: reading literature,

journal entries, and thematic connections. In each chapter, I elected to examine the literary selection plus two other randomly selected pieces.

The stylistic topics covered in the nonfiction questions were primarily related to word choice in some way—colloquialisms, jargon, words from other languages, synonyms, formal diction, compound modifiers, and so on. The level of attention to word choice is not surprising since the two relevant groups of questions I examined were “Style and Structure” and “Vocabulary.” There were also questions about sentences—sentence length, structure, and level of concision. There were a very few questions about punctuation in the texts I examined. Word choice was the most common aspect of style these questions asked about.

The differences between the stylistic questions following nonfiction pieces and the fiction or poetry pieces are very clear: there were questions about at least one aspect of style following every nonfiction selection I looked at, but only two of the eight literary selections. After Kate Chopin’s short story, “The Storm,” one of the questions asked about the descriptive details in the story, a topic I regard as being about style because it is a pattern of word choices. After the poem “Suicide Note” by Janice Mirikitani, one question is about repetition and the effect of the repeated words on the reader. Other than these two examples, the literary selections’ questions were most often about the reader’s interpretation of meaning. Sometimes they asked students to think about the events in the story in relation to gender or race; other times they were about how the piece was structured. Overall, there were far fewer questions of any kind after the literature pieces, and comparatively few about style at all.

The Norton Reader, 12e, is edited by Linda H. Peterson and John C. Brereton, and to my knowledge, is the only composition anthology to have a book written about its provenance—*Memoir of a Book* by Gordon A. Sabine. Indeed, the book’s preface comments on its long tradition and the ideals of its founding editor, Arthur Eastman, who declared that excellence in writing would be the distinguishing feature of any essays included in the anthology (xv). Lynn Bloom calls the *Norton* “the industry point of reference,” mentioning that its editorial selections tend to be copied by other

anthology editors (“Essay Canon” 412). Reinforcing this pedigree is the fact that Peterson’s affiliation is listed as being Yale University and Brereton’s as being the Boston Athenaeum, but whose university appointments also included the University of Massachusetts, Harvard, and Brandeis.

Peterson and Brereton provide multiple ways of organizing one’s approach to the texts in this large volume. Texts are primarily arranged by theme, with the exception of generic interludes devoted to a particular prose form. The themes include “human nature,” “cultural critique,” “education,” and so on. The prose form sections include journal entries, op-ed, spoken words, fables and parables, and “an album of styles.” Alternatively, the contents can also be approached by genre, rhetorical mode, or a second thematic table of contents. The generic index lists argument, cultural analysis, historical and literacy narratives, memoirs, natural history, profiles, reports, proposals, and textual and visual analyses in addition to the forms included in each prose form section listed in the main table of contents. Though the subtitle for the collection is “An Anthology of Nonfiction,” within the “Album of Styles” section there are two selections from works of fiction—Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* and Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas*—and one written in verse—a selection from William Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Overall, the vast majority of texts in the anthology are nonfiction essays. The elaborate structure and multiple organizational options of the *Norton* complicate the question of how to sample selections for comparison, but I decided to randomly sample three pieces from each Prose Form section and an additional eight taken from the themed sections at large.

Since the section “An Album of Styles” is expressly about style, I will examine it in detail. The editors’ introduction to this section begins, as did this chapter, with “What is style?” (592). Their answer is basically that a writer’s style is his or her own voice, formed by certain stylistic choices: words, metaphors, syntax, and rhetorical techniques (592). They acknowledge that a writer’s style is in part formed by his or her historical context, mentioning the conceits of the Metaphysical poets, the balanced periodic sentences of the Augustans, and the spare direct

sentences of modern American writers (592). Styles such as the ones displayed in this section are meant to help readers develop their own style, as the editors say explicitly: “Reading the prose and studying the style of authors, both old and new, can help aspiring writers develop their own styles” (593). They close the introduction by quoting Samuel Johnson on writing, who, “[a]s usual...speaks volumes” (593). The closing sentence is Johnson’s: “What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure” (593). The phrase used to set up this quotation is interesting: “as usual.” It assumes the student reading the introduction knows who Johnson is and that his reflections usually speak volumes. This in itself speaks volumes about the assumed audience of the *Norton Reader*.

The selections in “An Album of Styles” are from Francis Bacon’s *Essays*, Ben Jonson’s *Timber*, John Donne’s *Meditation 17*, Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas*, Benjamin Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanack*, William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Ambrose Pierce’s *The Devil’s Dictionary*, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, John Henry Newman’s *The Idea of a University*, Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address,” Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, E.B. White’s “Progress and Change,” John Updike’s “Beer Can,” and Terry Tempest Williams’s *Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert*. As stated above, the Johnson and Hemingway selections are from fictional works, and the Blake selection is written in verse.

There are five groupings of questions that appear after the entire “Album” section that ask the same questions of all the selections. There are no questions after each individual piece. The lack of pedagogical apparatus in this prose form section is somewhat unusual in the *Norton*, since two other short prose form sections, “Journals,” “Op-Eds,” and “Spoken Words” feature questions after each individual selection. But just as in the “Album of Styles” section, only a group of general questions appear at the end of the “Parables and Fables” prose form section—there are no questions after each parable or fable. The lack of questions after the “Album” and “Parables” sections creates the impression that these selections are special or

unusual since readers are not invited to reflect on them as explicitly as every other piece in the anthology.

The questions at the end of “An Album of Styles” ask about word choice, sentence forms and length, figurative language, voice or tone, and the reader’s own favorite piece and what the stylistic elements are that please them most. The sustained attention to sentence style sets these questions apart from the questions after the other selections in the anthology. Only five out of the twenty other pieces I examined featured any questions about style, and the ones that did only had one question about style. These questions differed from stylistic questions in other anthologies because they were relatively vague, asking about language and sentence style without mentioning anything as specific as tone or word choice. For example, the stylistic question after excerpts from Rachel Carson’s journal entries ask if the journal entries seem “unfinished and tentative, or fully fashioned? What gives them their quality?” (118). One of the questions after “The Most Dangerous Predator” by Joseph Wood Krutch gives vague instructions: “Locate sentences in which he expresses disdain, and analyze how they work” (663). As opposed to other anthologies that include a much greater number of questions, some with repeating sections of questions focusing on style or language in some way, the *Norton* provides a relatively spare pedagogical apparatus with little attention given to sentence style.

The Essay Connection, 8e, is edited by Lynn Bloom (University of Connecticut), one of the foremost experts on composition anthologies, having published multiple research articles about them and edited at least two anthologies herself (*The Essay Connection* and *The Arlington Reader*). *The Arlington Reader* contains no literature, so I do not examine it closely in this chapter, but *The Essay Connection* includes a literary piece in nearly every section, and sometimes more than one. Bloom comments in her preface that the works of fiction in the eighth edition “resonate with the creative nonfiction and many other essays as well” (xxvii). She also describes the poems as texts that “reflect the rhetorical theme of the chapters they begin, and also serve as commentaries on the topics of the essays” (xxvii). The

consistent use and placement of the literary readings is similar to *Patterns for College Writing*, but Bloom provides much more thorough rationale for why these texts are included than do Kirsznner and Mandell—namely that they set up and thematize topics covered in the nonfiction essays.

Bloom draws lots of similarities between the nonfiction selections in the anthology and the texts students are expected to write in college. In her introduction for students, Bloom says that the essays that college students read and write are “as a rule...either literary nonfiction or a more academic essay,” two genres that share many characteristics: they are both prose, focus on a central theme, are short, true, evidence-based, follow discrete patterns of organization (the aims and mode of discourse), and express the point of view of the author (5). Bloom informs her student readers that some essays exemplify the type of writing they will be doing in their other classes. “As later chapters will illustrate, much of your writing in college will be articles in the language and conventions of the particular subjects you study—critical interpretations of literature, position papers in philosophy or political science, interpretive presentations of information in history, case histories in psychology or business or law, explanations of process in computer science or auto mechanics” (5-6). She gives examples of these from the book’s contents—a process description by Car Talk hosts Tom and Ray Magliozzi, an argument by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and a policy analysis by an academic historian. It seems clear that Bloom expects the nonfiction readings to serve as models of writing but the poems’ role is to set the tone for the nonfiction essays.

The book opens with three chapters about writing and the writing process. They are followed by seven chapters exemplifying aims and modes of discourse—narration, process analysis, cause and effect, description, division and classification, definition, comparison and contrast—plus two about argument: appealing to reason and appealing to emotion and ethics. Nearly every chapter includes a poem at the beginning; only the logical appeals chapter lacks a poetic selection (though it does include a graphic essay). In addition to examining the questions after all the poems, I

randomly selected two other pieces from each of these chapters for comparison. The questions in *The Essay Connection* occur in three types: Content, Strategies/Structures/Language, and For Writing. I focused on the Strategies/Structures/Language types of questions because the style questions were included there.

In none of the literary works I examined—including six poems, one short story, and one creative nonfiction essay—were there any questions about style. Only the short story had any questions after it at all, but these were about the characters or interpreting the meaning of the story. The nonfiction selections frequently included questions about style, which was not surprising since there was a separate grouping of questions about strategies, structures, and language, and the questions I looked at usually included questions about all three of these aspects of writing. The most common topics related to style were tone and word choice. For example, the questions after “Under the Influence: Paying the Price of My Father’s Booze” by Scott Russell Sanders ask “What is the tone of this essay?...Is he angry at his father? How can you tell?” (260). After a selection from Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, the questions ask about the connection between Darwin’s word choice and the education level of his audience (341).

The apparatus following each selection, therefore, reinforces Bloom’s editorial view about the roles of the literary and non-literary pieces. The literary ones were not meant to serve as models of writing, whereas the nonfiction pieces provided examples of many ways students could vary their word choices and tone and include stylistic elements like figurative language, rhetorical figures, or high levels of detail in their writing. Since Bloom describes the kinds of nonfiction essays in the anthology as being very close to the kinds of writing students will do in their classes, we are led to assume that the kinds of style used in the anthologized pieces resembles closely the styles required in different disciplines.

The Presence of Others, 5e, is edited by Andrea Lunsford and John Ruszkiewicz and focuses on maintaining a balance between differing political views.

In this edition, the editors have attempted to “provide a balanced set of readings that represent widely varying opinions on the ideas and topics that shape our times” (v). Following the Preface, there are long autobiographical statements from each of the editors plus four students detailing their educational backgrounds and ideological commitments. The editors and students annotate certain selections in the anthology, making comments about the form and style of these pieces as well as drawing attention to possible rhetorical techniques of the writers and sharing their own reactions as readers, sometimes clearly colored by their backgrounds. The headnotes of the selections also acknowledge the identities of the editors and their reasons for including these essays in this anthology; Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz include their initials at the end of the headnotes they write. A good example is Ruszkiewicz’s note prefacing the Michael Pollan essay, “An Animal’s Place,” in which he praises Pollan for writing the most “powerful” argumentative essay he has ever included in this anthology (204). Following the Pollan essay, one question asks students to agree or disagree with Ruszkiewicz’s appraisal (223), foregrounding the content of the essay rather than the form and encouraging discussion of the argument.

This emphasis on how different readers respond to essays about current political controversies differs from other anthologies, which instead emphasize the rhetorical aims and modes of the selections, though topical organizations are common, too. *The Presence of Others* is organized topically with only a small gesture towards aims, modes, or genres in Chapter 2, when the editors list all the possible writing assignments that students may be asked to complete using the readings in the book. These range from aims and modes like definition, rhetorical analysis, and narration to genres such as a letter to the editor, dialogue, or online forum post (21-34). The topics covered in the chapters are: education, ethics, science and technology, identities, American cultural myths, and business and labor. After most of the selections, questions are divided into three groupings: “Questioning the Text,” “Making Connections,” and “Joining the Conversation.” Unlike other anthologies, there is no group of questions dealing primarily with form, structure, or style. Instead,

these groups of questions focus on the text itself, connecting the text to others in the anthology, and writing responses—common tasks accomplished by other anthologies’ questions, but this one is unique in not including a group of questions about form.¹³

There are literary texts included in the anthology, but they are not differentiated paratextually as they are in most other anthologies, except for the absence of the three groups of questions that appear after nonfiction pieces, instead being followed by only one grouping of questions, “In Response.” They also don’t appear in every chapter or in the same location within chapters. The chapter on American cultural myths lacks a literary text, but the others include either a poem or an excerpt from a novel (*Frankenstein*). I examine the questions after all five literary texts plus two randomly selected non-literary pieces from each topical chapter.

Of the pieces I examined, there was no clear pattern of attention to particular features of style. Questions asked about tone, word choice, foreign language use, humor, and figurative language. *The Presence of Others*, as would be expected for an anthology without a group of questions devoted to form or style, contains relatively few questions about style, and many of these are vague. For example, one of the questions appearing in the “Making Connections” section after “Struggling Back from War’s Once-Deadly Wounds” by Denise Grady asks students to compare the writing features of the lengthy *New York Times* feature and a much shorter op-ed piece (342). However, other than how such texts vary according to length or their reliance on the author’s opinion, no details are given for what specific features students should compare. Another question following Margaret Atwood’s “A Letter to America” asks students to write a letter and compare it to other writing they’ve produced for the class, then reflect on whether they used a different style or tone because of the

¹³ Another feature of this anthology is the use of responses from academics in a number of disciplines who contrast and compare the journalistic essays in the anthology with how these topics would be written about in their field. For example, a public health professor comments on a Malcolm Gladwell *New Yorker* essay. This gesture towards an awareness of writing in the disciplines seems more substantial than in other anthologies, where the editors claim that the essays themselves are examples of writing in the disciplines (see Bloom).

specific audience they imagined while writing the letter (513). In both these cases, students are not supplied terms or concepts of stylistic analysis other than “tone.” This could make it difficult for students to identify stylistic features in their analysis or composition.

As in other anthologies, there are far fewer questions after the literary selections than the nonfiction selections. The exception was the selection from *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, which was followed by the same three groupings of questions that followed each nonfiction piece. The other literary selections were all poems and were followed solely by a group of questions under the heading “In Response.” True to this title, a common type of question asked students for their personal responses to the poems; questions about possible interpretations of the poems were also common. Even the three groups of questions after the Shelley excerpt relied heavily on interpretation and reflection, as opposed to the frequent questions about argument following nonfiction selections.

One interesting aspect of *The Presence of Others* is the editors’ invitations to students to write in different genres, or sometimes to revise one piece to resemble a very different genre, such as the question after “We Real Cool” prompting students to write a poem that draws on a present-day musical genre (158). In another instance, a prompt invited students to write a response either mimicking the serious tone employed by Dagoberto Gilb in “Work Union” or using a humorous tone (652-653). Such writing prompts could easily lead into classroom discussions of style and audience even though the textbook itself contains few stylistics terms for analysis.

CONCLUSION

From this data, it is clear that the literary selections are not treated like the nonfiction selections in terms of style in composition anthologies. Many of the questions following literary selections are reminiscent of a literature class, where students may be asked to articulate their personal response to literature and improve their close reading skills by comparing their interpretations with others. Thematically,

the literary selections fit with the nonfiction selections, but they are by and large fulfill a different role from the nonfiction, that is, the literature is not treated as prose the students can derive stylistic lessons from.

These findings should be reassuring to the opponents of literature in composition in one important way—students are not being encouraged (by the anthology editors, anyway) to imitate the writing style of literary authors, where such styles might be said to lack transferability into other rhetorical situations. But even if the fiction selections had received questions more similar to the nonfiction selections, the styles did not differ radically. If I was not familiar with a fictional selection and it wasn't clearly demarcated as fiction, I sometimes had trouble telling if it was fiction or nonfiction. A heavy reliance on dialogue was often the best indicator of a fictional piece, but the style of the prose written around the dialogue often closely resembled the styles used in nonfiction. So although I did not compare the styles of the fiction, poetry, and nonfiction systematically in this study, my impression is that the fiction styles closely resembled the nonfiction. That is, they were not experimental or highly literary in terms of displaying an experimental or extremely playful use of language, as we see in some prose written by Joyce, Faulkner, Nabokov, and others known for their high literary styles. Therefore, opponents of using literature in composition such as Lindemann would have a hard time arguing that studying the styles of the literary authors included in anthologies is a waste of time for students who need to learn styles that can be used in other classes or in the students' professions. However, they would have better footing for this argument when talking about the inclusion of poetry. Though the poems included in these textbooks were also not particularly experimental, the genre of poetry is farther removed from anything students typically need to write.

In addition to being included for reasons other than serving as examples of style, there is another way that opponents of literature in composition should be reassured by the results of this analysis: the poems in anthologies did not seem to inspire appreciation of a traditional literary canon. Most of the poems were written in

the 20th or 21st centuries and many were written by emergent authors I did not recognize—certainly no one like Shakespeare or T.S. Eliot. The poems mostly served as an alternative way of representing the chapter themes or the rhetorical modes being taught, instead of appearing on the anthology's pages so that the students can be exposed to an important cultural text or bow reverentially before the author's impressive style. The poems, the most recognizable and canonical one being Langston Hughes' "Theme for English B," were accessible and topical. Perhaps some of the editors had an underlying goal of encouraging students not to fear or loathe poetry, as Lynn Bloom said explicitly in her introduction, but they did not seem to prioritizing exposing students to the texts traditionally thought of as "the best that is known and thought," the texts we often find in literature classes. So, while individual teachers who include literature on their syllabus may want to perpetuate a canon in the Arnoldian vein, it does not appear that textbook editors have this goal.

It was outside the scope of this study to home in on the relationship between the nonfiction selections and the types of writing editors seemed to imagine students would be producing. This is an avenue for future research I hope to pursue. In the meantime, I have some impressions about the nonfiction texts that were formed during my analysis of the literature. I thought it was interesting that Bloom claimed that there was a close relationship between the pieces in *The Essay Connection* and the types of writing students would be doing in their other classes. I'm willing to agree with her that students will be using rhetorical strategies like process analysis and argument, and that these strategies are exemplified in texts written by Tom and Ray ("Click and Clack") Magliozzi and Dr. Martin Luther King. But are the styles of these exemplary texts appropriate for the audiences and purposes that students will encounter? Would an engineering professor find the entertaining and conversational style of Click and Clack acceptable in a process analysis? Writing an argument in the style of Dr. Martin Luther King might go over well in a rhetoric or other humanities class, but should King's impassioned voice be *the* model for making arguments when that is the student's aim? What I'm asking is how much certainty students should feel

that they are prepared for writing in other disciplines or rhetorical situations when the types of essays in anthologies like Bloom's tend to be written in either a general literary style (as seen in *The New Yorker* or *The Atlantic*) or in more personally identifiable styles that are full of "voice." These styles tend to be what English instructors like to read, but how useful is it for students to learn to write like them? If the goal of the course is to prepare students for writing in other disciplines or professional situations, I'm dubious about whether the nonfiction contents of composition anthologies set the students up for success or confusion later on.

If, however, the goal of the course is to enable students to write in this literary essayistic style for a general audience, or for them to find their own voice among examples of many other accomplished writers' voices, the nonfiction selections seem appropriate. In *Public Discourse and Academic Inquiry*, William Rice argues that academic reading anthologies fail in their stated task to prepare students for writing across the curriculum since their mainly literary (in the *New Yorker* sense) essays in fact don't bear much resemblance to the writing actually produced in other disciplines; they can be at best described as "interlanguages" that bridge expert and non-expert discourse (61). He is critical of David Bartholomae and others for perpetuating the idea of something called "academic discourse," when in fact the discourse communities in academic disciplines use very specialized language that often does not bear much resemblance to the writing valued in English departments, where most composition instructors come from (71). However, he approves of the work that anthologies do to foster intellectual engagement with civic issues, and in a way that can appeal to educated but non-specialist audiences (71).

I agree with Rice that composition anthologies, at least the ones I examined, are not the best texts to use when trying to prepare students to write for their other classes, for two reasons. One is that a generalized "academic discourse" is not a thing that actually exists. The other is that when composition anthologies attempt to incorporate sources that are supposed to represent writing in specific disciplines, the texts selected are often of the "interlanguage" variety that is not quite what I suspect

professors in other disciplines would want from students. But I'll admit that I don't know what professors in other disciplines want. For me as a writing teacher to guess what styles of writing students will need to produce in the future is only that: a guess. Rice maintains that preparing students for specialized academic discourse should not be our goal; that our goal should be to prepare students to understand and participate in civic issues, and that for this purpose, it is good for students to learn to write literary essays.

Personally, I enjoy reading literary essays, but I don't think all first-year composition students need to learn to write them. However, one theme of this dissertation is that composition classes may have a range of goals depending on the institution, the students, the department...in other words, the larger context surrounding the curriculum of the first-year composition course. The texts assigned in writing classes should be consistent with the goals of the course. If a first-year composition course had goals like the ones that scholars like Crowley, Lindemann, or Corbett voice concern over, such as using the literature to model style or to encourage reverence before a conservative canon of texts, the composition anthologies I looked at it would actually not be consistent with such course goals. I don't have data about the proportion of composition classes that include such goals. Even though there are anecdotes suggesting that some courses are taught in this way, they are only two among many possible goals for contemporary composition courses. Besides the quest for "voice" mentioned above, other goals include preparing students for civic engagement (the Crowley and Thomas Miller way) and preparing students to write academic or professional texts (the Lindemann and WAC/WID way). My sense of the nonfiction selections in composition anthologies is that they are more consistent with the civic engagement goal than the academic/professional goal because the majority of the readings are written for a general audience about issues that engage a wide variety of people. It is not unreasonable to think that such a course might also have the stylistic goal of teaching students one good general style, and that that style is akin to the the literary nonfiction essays in the composition anthologies. If teaching one

good style is the goal, though, students will have fewer tools to learn how to learn new stylistic conventions when they enter other disciplines or specialized rhetorical situations. However, such flexibility may not be the goal, so such readings may be fine.

Composition anthologies are widely used, especially in programs staffed largely with non-specialist instructors who may not have been trained to design their own composition course. These books are valuable in that they can be dropped in as the main course text, often along with a rhetoric textbook if such content is not already a part of the anthology, taking out the guess work for the inexperienced, untrained, or even overworked instructor. But there are plenty of situations in which instructors do have the freedom and support to choose their own course texts. In these situations, there is a wide variance in the quality of rhetorical training given to the instructors. As discussed in my introduction, WPA Emily Isaacs claims that the rise of rhetoric departments has led to a concomitant increase in the quality of such instruction to graduate students, particularly those who come from literature backgrounds, and as a result, these instructors are better prepared to create their own composition classes that are actually composition classes and not literature classes in disguise. This improved training (theoretically) remedies an old and persistent problem among those who were charged with teaching writing when that was not their scholarly background. A seasoned professor I've spoken with about the history of English departments and writing programs told me something that illuminated the problem that composition scholarship has sought to rectify over the past several decades. This professor said, "Back then, we taught literature in composition because we had to teach composition *and we didn't know how*, but we had been trained in literature." Now we have much better ideas about how to teach writing and are able to teach others how to teach it. We must ask the question, though, what effect does this scholarly output and training have on the types of instructors who used to be clueless about teaching writing and would therefore teach what they knew best? In my third chapter, I look at the syllabi created by both literature and rhetoric specialists after

participating in a rhetorically grounded teaching practicum to see if the conventional charge still obtains—that literature specialists will teach a literature class if given the freedom to design their own courses.

Chapter 3: Literature Specialists Teaching Composition: The Influence of Instructor Background on Syllabus Design

Among the arguments against using literature in composition that Lindemann makes, one is that teachers whose specialization is in literature will rely too much on the literature at the expense of student writing. As she argues, “literature-based courses, even most essay-based courses, focus on consuming texts, not producing them. The teacher talks 75 to 80 percent of the time...Students do very little writing” (“Freshman” 313). Here, she assumes that the presence of literature will produce a particular type of pedagogy, one that leaves little room for students’ discussion of topics or their own writing. In these classes, the teacher, who is assumed to have a literature background, will lecture on the content or context of the literary work instead of working directly on student writing. In other words, the classroom would be teacher-centered instead of student-centered. Dennis Ciesielski goes as far as to argue that “the vast majority of literature teachers who are *compelled* to teach first-year-composition are unprepared to do so. Because of this lack of preparation, the misplaced teacher will opt to teach what it is she or he knows best: literature” (127, emphasis in original). According to Lindemann (1995), the content of the teachers’ lectures would grow out of their areas of expertise, “knowledge about texts, ways of reading them, and principles governing their form and style” (291). That is, the teacher’s area of expertise does not include rhetoric and composition, and their expertise in literature studies is no help to them in composition classes. The teachers’ way of imparting this knowledge is also problematic, since it is based in the “banking model” of instruction. This model, which fell out of favor in composition pedagogical theory long ago (Hillocks *Ways of Thinking*), assumes that when teachers lecture about content, it is deposited into students’ brains for retrieval later.

As I showed in my introduction, her accusation has been echoed by composition scholars over the last two decades, even by scholars committed to both

literature and composition pedagogy (Elbow “The Cultures”).¹ Those who dispute her claim say that the inclusion of literature does not necessarily lead to its dominance of the syllabus and of class time. Their claims are only backed up with anecdotal evidence, however, and mostly from their own classrooms.² Hoping to encourage compilation of evidence beyond the anecdotal, Tate (“A Place”) and Hesse (“The Nation”) have rightly called for empirical evidence that literature can be used just as effectively to teach writing as other kinds of texts, but no such study has been published.³ Contributing empirical evidence to this debate is important for two reasons. The first is that the arguments offered by Lindemann and her supporters nearly 20 years ago may now be outdated because of shifts in literary studies. Specifically, Lindemann’s critique of using literature to teach composition seems to assume a New Critical orientation, which has steadily been on the wane since the height of its influence in the 1950s and 1960s. Newer approaches can be found in two recent collections of essays about using literary texts to teach writing, Judith Anderson and Christine Farris’s *Integrating Literature and Writing Instruction*, and Linda Bergmann and Edith Baker’s *Composition and/or Literature*.⁴ These approaches include reading literary texts alongside other texts as a way to think about aesthetic values, ethics, and civic participation (DelliCarpini, Kearns, Heyda, Ciesielski); using literary texts and personal narratives as frames for thinking about ethics (Baker); and reading complex literary texts in order to strengthen students’ skills in analysis or interpretive argument (Anderson and Farris, Vandenberg, Emmit et al, Whall, Halpern). Although these approaches rely on the New Critical practice of

¹ See Miller *Foundations*; Fulkerson “Composition at the Turn”; Heyda; Schilb “The WPA”)

² See Baker; Berlin *Rhetorics and Poetics*, Crain; Gamer; Halpern; Heard; Heyda; Isaacs; Lutz;; Mattison and Elbow; Moneyhun; Peterson; Raymond “Rhetoricizing” and *Readings*; Richardson; Salvatori; Seagall; Tate “A Place” and “Notes”; Whall

³ See also the more general calls for more empirical work by Haswell (“NCTE/CCCC’s Recent War”) and Charney (“From Logocentrism” and “Empiricism”).

⁴ It is notable that the Anderson and Farris collection, published by the Modern Language Association, contains essays that are consistently affirming of the practice, while the Bergmann and Baker collection, published by NCTE, includes several essays that take a skeptical or disapproving stance.

close reading, the goal is not to access the truth of the work itself or demonstrate formal unity, but to better understand the world and to make one's way within it.

A second reason why the time is ripe to investigate the place of literature in composition follows the increased influence of rhetoric and composition programs. These programs are often charged with training graduate students from various scholarly backgrounds in current composition pedagogy. These graduate instructors then often teach first-year composition, and when their graduate career has ended, many of them go on to teach composition as adjunct, part-time, or full-time faculty members. The training these teachers receive from rhetoric and composition programs is the best and perhaps only chance to professionalize future first-year composition teachers, and there is evidence that rhetoric and composition programs are enhancing relations between literature and writing specialists by exposing graduate students to the scholarly study of writing and its rich pedagogical tradition.⁵ Junior faculty members are less likely to contribute to or even understand intrafaculty animosity like they were twenty years ago, when graduate training was not as systematic or informed by composition scholarship. Therefore, the training of TAs and its possible bearing on the way they design their courses will be an object of special attention in this chapter.

How widespread is the phenomenon of literature specialists teaching composition? Although specific numbers about how many composition teachers have literature backgrounds are hard to find, it is often taken as a commonplace in composition scholarship that many if not most of them do. One example using estimations of instructor backgrounds comes from Emily Isaacs's 2009 article in *Pedagogy*. She states that since her home institution must offer many more first-year writing courses than they have tenure-track faculty, most of the sections are staffed by contingent faculty (101). Furthermore, "The majority of these teachers have strong

⁵ See Mattison & Elbow and Isaacs for discussion of how the composition pedagogy practicum has enhanced both the teaching of both composition and literature specialists. Isaacs instigated a change to her university's curriculum basing one of their required composition courses on literature, justifying it arguing that those with literature MAs and PhDs are well trained in composition pedagogy and can teach writing effectively using the texts they know best.

background and interest in literary studies” (101). A footnote breaks down the backgrounds of these faculty members.

Of these nontenure-track faculty, 15 percent have their doctorates (mostly in literature), 20 percent have MFA degrees, 30 percent have English MAs, specialized most typically but not always in literature, 20 percent have degrees in English education, composition, or a related field, and the remaining 15 percent have degrees in various fields, from theater to law to American studies to linguistics. While almost all of our faculty have studied literature significantly, it is interesting to note that about half of our faculty claim some form of writing or education as their primary graduate field of study. (n. 2)

Isaacs rebuts some of the arguments against allowing literature specialists to use literary texts in composition classes and is one of few scholars who justifies the importance of interrogating this practice with quantitative evidence. If the scenario at her institution is widespread, that is, having most first-year composition sections taught by people who have primarily studied literature, then the question of how they might teach differently from rhet/comp specialists is a pressing one.

For the critics of using literature in composition like Lindemann, the assumption is that literature specialists will surreptitiously teach a literature class, not a writing class. John Schilb warns, “[I]f you are a WPA in an English department, you may face considerable pressure to let literature utterly pervade first-year composition or to look away when some teachers smuggle it in” (“The WPA” 171). However, little evidence exists to see whether literary texts actually overwhelm other kinds of texts on composition syllabi.

When thinking about how to ascertain whether teachers with a literature background really do spend more time on literary texts than non-literature teachers, there are several plausible routes. A broad survey of WPAs would provide data from a number of departments about such questions as how many teachers include literature in their composition classes, how many of them have a literature background, and what the WPA knows regarding how the instructors use literature. Ethnographic classroom observations could provide more fine-grained data about how a small number of instructors use literature to teach composition. An experimental study

comparing a class that read literary texts and one that did not might show what kind of developments each group of students made in their writing abilities.

However, there are drawbacks and practical limitations to each of these methods. A survey would require either reaching composition instructors directly or their WPA. The problem with polling the instructors is that they are often adjuncts or graduate students, two populations who do not have a permanent place within the institution; thus they undergo a lot of turnover and can be difficult to find contact information for. Polling the WPA would assume that this person can speak accurately about what each instructor assigns in their class and what they ask students to do with these texts. Time and job constraints make knowledge this thorough difficult to come by for many WPAs, assuming they have the time to respond to a survey at all. Ethnographic observations would yield more accurate data about the use of texts in classes, but the sample size would either need to be small enough to be manageable, or aggregating detailed data from a large number of observations would need lots of time to process. And an experimental study, while more likely to yield results that could be interpreted as creating different or better gains in writing development, would be very difficult to design in a way that limited threats to validity and reliability. There are several reasons for this difficulty. One is that there is vigorous disagreement about what “gains in writing development” look like. Another reason is that instructors have different strengths and abilities—one might be brilliant at interpreting programmatic and curricular goals when using literature to teach writing, while another might try to meet these goals and fail at the job, while still another might not even try or might not want to be teaching composition in the first place. A final reason is that even if one highly esteemed writing teacher were to teach two classes, one with literature on the syllabus and one without, it would not be a blind study. The instructor would know the difference and might knowingly or unknowingly approach the classes or assess the writing differently.

A more manageable and quantifiable method for looking into the use of literature in composition is to analyze course syllabi. In a recent issue of *Written*

Communication, Graves et. a provide a persuasive justification for using syllabi as data sources. The authors argue that syllabi are worthy of study because they are public, they act as a contract between instructor and student, and because they have a relatively consistent form and content across courses, departments, and institutions (296-297). For the purpose of finding out what kinds of texts are assigned during the semester, if the reading assignments and schedule are clear, it is a relatively simple matter to determine how many days are spent reading different types of texts. A better measure would perhaps be determining how many pages of different types of texts are assigned, but this level of detail is hard to come by since only the readings for each day and not the number of pages are required.

In response to the lack of knowledge concerning what instructors actually do in their classes, I have conducted a study of composition syllabi. This study intends to determine what kinds of texts are used by teaching assistants (TAs) from rhetoric and literature backgrounds when they design and teach their own section of a lower-division writing course at a the University of Texas, what percentage of class days is spent discussing these texts, and if the TA's background affects what types of texts they include on their syllabus.⁶ I flesh out these numbers by incorporating information about the assignments the TAs gave to their students, as well as survey responses from the TAs. This information will reveal a fuller and more nuanced picture of what TAs asked students to do with the texts assigned and how the TA envisioned the texts fitting into their course goals. The results of my study will constitute empirical evidence of the kind called for by Tate ("Notes") and Hesse ("The Nation"), and will make headway in confirming or challenging the charges leveled by Lindemann and others.

⁶ In the literature about graduate student instructors, "teaching assistant" is the preferred title even though they are called "assistant instructors" at UT and "teaching assistant" denotes another position in the English department. I've used this title and acronym for the purposes of publication.

METHOD

The class I chose to study was RHE 309K, an elective sophomore-level course focusing on rhetorical analysis and argument and primarily taught by TAs in their second year of teaching rhetoric. The department's description for the RHE 309K course makes its goals clear.

Though RHE 309K is organized around a particular topic, it is first and foremost a course in rhetorical analysis and argument. Rhetoric is a lens that can be used to analyze any topic, and RHE 309K should call attention both to rhetoric as a lens (looking "at" rhetoric) and a topic viewed through the lens (looking "through" rhetoric). The course is not intended to grant students mastery over a topic or over rhetoric itself, but rather to place students in an ongoing conversation about a particular topic and to give them the opportunity and the skills to listen, to analyze, and to participate in this conversation. (UT Department of Rhetoric and Writing, n.d.)

As we can see, the department does not specify that any particular type of text will or will not be used in the class or that any particular genre will be assigned, but it does articulate two main kinds of writing that students will learn (analysis and argument). Recent examples of RHE 309K sections include "The Rhetoric of Motorcycles," "The Rhetoric of the Hipster," and "The Rhetoric of Human Rights."

Studying RHE 309K syllabi is a particularly valuable case study for the field because of the commonalities between RHE 309K TAs and writing instructors at other places and the ubiquity of this type of class. The TAs of this course are typical of graduate students or adjunct writing instructors at hundreds of universities in two key ways: they are given some freedom to design their own writing class, and the majority of them have training in literary studies and not rhetoric or composition. About the class itself, RHE 309K is comparable to the two-semester writing sequence required at many state institutions, especially two-year colleges. Often, this sequence will include at least one semester of writing about literature (McCrimmon; Pickavance).

Even with the commonalities between this course and ones like it at other institutions, though, studying RHE 309K at this particular university presents us with a "best case scenario" in terms of balancing instructor autonomy and support. One

reason is that UT houses a very well-regarded rhetoric and writing department that is almost completely independent from the English department. The prestige enjoyed by the members of this department makes it exceptional when compared to most other institutions. Another reason is that all instructors teaching rhetoric for this writing program for the first time receive many types of support described by Wilhoit. Graduate students receive pre-service orientation, an in-service practicum, mentorship by more experienced TAs, experience as writing tutors or computer writing lab proctors, observation by the associate chair, and assigned reading in rhet/comp theory. They are also given guidance and feedback in designing their RHE 309K proposals, guidance that has often steered the TAs away from spending too many days on literary texts. The recommendations to limit the amount of literature on the syllabus is perhaps one of the most salient reasons why this can be considered a best case scenario.

The teaching practicum, E 398T, combines theory, mentorship, and practical advice. It is taught by the associate chair for lower division composition, who is an Associate Professor in the rhetoric and writing department. This mandatory training by a rhetoric scholar distinguishes this writing program from many other institutions, especially ones that rely heavily on adjuncts to teach first-year composition. Adjuncts are often hired by WPAs shortly before the semester begins (Gappa) and provided with no institutional training in rhet/comp. They may be given a course text, a set of assignments, or even a full curriculum, but they may be provided with only some or none of these. Anecdotally, hiring first-year composition instructors with almost no support was commonplace in decades past, but has reportedly since declined in graduate programs (Pytlik). For these reasons, we can expect the teaching styles of RHE 309K TAs to be among the most highly informed by rhetorical and pedagogical theory.

The collection of found data was the archive of RHE 309K syllabi housed in the office of the department of rhetoric and writing. These syllabi are considered public information since they are available when students raise a grade complaint.⁷ Hard copies of these syllabi are available from the years 2004-2008, and syllabi are accessible online for 2009 and 2010 (as a result of Texas HB 2504, a bill passed in 2009 requiring easy online access to all syllabi). The total number of archived syllabi was 141. Since examining syllabi for both fall and spring semesters of the same year might result in duplication of certain instructors' sections and an oversampling, one set of syllabi from the fall semester of each academic year was examined.

My goal was to end up with a sample of 25% of the syllabi. In order to collect a number that would provide me with the necessary information, usability parameters were established in advance. Thus, a syllabus was defined as "usable" if it contained the following information: TA name (for identification of their specialization), list of course texts, and day plans for the entire semester. If one of the course texts was a course packet with unknown contents, I tried to determine from the day plans which texts the class read; if this could not be determined then the syllabus was not considered usable. The final number of useable syllabi was 120, out of 141 total, and my sample size, selected randomly according to year, was 30 syllabi.

TYPES OF TEXTS ON SYLLABI

Texts were divided into four different types. "Traditional" literary genres were defined as fiction, poetry, and drama. Examples include fairy tales, Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Kerouac's *On the Road*, and poems by Walt Whitman. "Emerging" literary genres were fictional movies, comic books, graphic novels, video games, or

⁷ A possible limitation of my study is that I take for granted that instructors generally conformed to the content of their syllabus in their class. Analyzing syllabi cannot get at whether instructors claim to teach one thing on their syllabus and then teach another. However, syllabi are important in an institutional context, in that they are easily available and serve as a contract between the instructor, student, department (and in the case of public institutions in Texas, the general public), about what the class content will be (Graves, Hyland, & Samuels). Whether or not instructors deviate from that contract is a matter for other research.

musicals. Examples include video games played in class, the film *In Cold Blood*, a Bob Dylan song, the comic book *Essential Spiderman*, and the musical *Wicked*. “Nonfiction” included any text that wasn’t one of the literary genres, including speeches, informative articles from newspapers or other sources, viewpoint articles, historical background, websites, blogs, or documentary films. Examples of nonfiction were Nicholas Carr’s article in *The Atlantic*, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?”; excerpts from Norah Vincent’s book, *Self-Made Man: One Woman’s Year Disguised as a Man*; music reviews; or articles from the journal *Gender and Society*. “Rhetoric/composition texts” were often rhetoric textbooks like *Everything’s an Argument*, *Having Your Say*, or *Good Reasons*. They also included style and usage manuals like *Writing With Style* or *The Little Penguin Handbook*. Occasionally they were instructor-provided handouts on topics like context or rhetorical analysis, and a few times they were texts by Kenneth Burke or Aristotle.

A fifth category was “unknown,” though the useability parameters dictated that I determine the genre of the vast majority of texts on the syllabus. An example would be an obscure music zine that was inaccessible to me and would likely be composed of more than one type of text. A sixth category was “non-reading days” when no texts were assigned. Non-reading days were often days when the students were doing peer review, preparing for an upcoming assignment, or giving presentations. Using these six categories, the number of days each type of text appeared on the syllabus was calculated. If texts falling into two different categories were assigned for one day, these texts each received a value of .5, whereas a text category that took up an entire class day was assigned a value of 1. Since classes that met three days a week contained more class days than those that met two days a week, I calculated percentages for each class before averaging the percentages for all classes together. This detailed method ensured that I would be able to calculate the overall percentage of days spent on each type of activity.

INSTRUCTOR BACKGROUND

TAs at this university assist literature professors with their literature survey courses for two years or until they earn their M.A., after which they teach rhetoric classes. The academic concentration of the sampled TAs was determined by either personal knowledge of the TA or finding their dissertation topic. The TAs were categorized as “Literature,” “Rhetoric,” or “Other.” My data reveal that the average percentage of literature TAs between 2004-2010 is 70%, the average for rhetoric TAs is 22%, and TAs from other fields make up an average of 8%.⁸ Since the “other” TAs’ numbers are negligible and they are not typically mentioned in the literature-in-composition debate, only results from the literature and rhetoric TAs will be reported.

RESULTS

What texts are all instructors spending their days on?

When percentages for both groups of instructors are averaged, the largest proportion of class days was spent on non-reading days (see Table 1.). The number of class days taken up with nonfiction was the highest when considering types of texts, followed by rhetoric/composition texts and both types of Literature. Both types of literature combined ranked last out of the text categories, and fourth when non-reading days are included. The texts coded as “Unknown” were either of mixed genre (for example, a music zine), or were texts I couldn’t identify after web searches; the number of unknown texts was very low.

Table 1. Overall % of Days Spent on Texts

	Non-reading days	Nonfiction	Rhet/Comp Text	Both Lit Types	Unknown
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⁸ Since I randomly sampled useable syllabi according to year rather than from the collection as a whole, the number of syllabi designed by literature TAs happens to have been oversampled, at 25 out of 30 syllabi (and 5 rhetoric-TA-designed syllabi out of 30). However, since I am primarily concerned with comparisons between the two groups, this slight oversampling does not affect my findings about TA background and its influence on syllabus design.

Overall % of Days	40%	27%	16%	14%	3%
Std Dev	0.14	0.17	0.13	0.16	0.04

What texts are rhetoric instructors spending their days on?

Rhetoric TAs spent an average of 50% of their days covering texts. The texts they assigned the most were nonfiction, followed by a rhetoric/composition text, and lastly, both types of literature (see Table 2.). One-half of their days were non-reading days. When the percentage of non-reading days is combined with rhetoric/composition text days, we see that 65% percent of all their days were spent on some activity that was not discussing a primary source text, that is, either literature type or nonfiction. When the percentages of literature and nonfiction days are added, we see that only 30% of days were spent discussing one of these primary source texts.

Table 2. Percentage of Days Spent on Texts by Rhetoric TAs

	Non-reading days	Nonfiction	Rhet/Comp Text	Both Lit Types	Unknown
Rhet TA % of Days	50%	23%	15%	7%	3%
Std Dev	0.14	0.22	0.04	0.06	0.04

What texts are literature instructors spending their days on?

Literature TAs spent a much higher proportion of days than rhetoric TAs discussing primary source texts. In contrast to rhetoric TAs, who spent half their days not covering any text at all, literature TAs spent 51% of their days on primary source texts and 17% of their days on rhetoric/composition texts. Around one-third of their days were non-reading days. Thus, the proportion of days spent not reading any texts and days reading primary source texts are reversed for literature and rhetoric TAs (1/2 vs. 1/3.) The days taken up with both types of literature amounted to 20% of the days

of the semester, but notably, the number of days spent on a rhetoric/composition text was only three percent lower at 17% (see Table 3.).

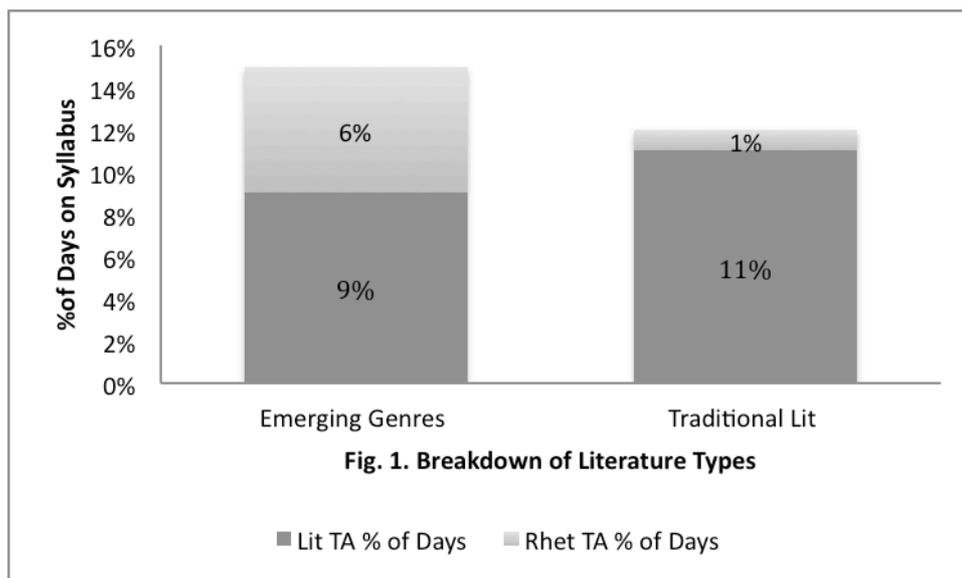
Table 3. Percentage of Days Spent on Texts by Literature TAs

Non-reading days	Nonfiction	Rhet/Comp Text	Both Lit Types	Unknown
29%	31%	17%	20%	3%
0.11	0.16	0.14	0.17	0.04

How does the literature and rhetoric instructors' time spent on texts differ?

From the sample of 30 syllabi analyzed, the data supports the claim that teachers with a literature background teach more literature than those with a rhetoric background. Literature TAs spent a total of 20% of their days on literature (see Fig. 1). When this total is broken down into two types of literature, we can see that 9% of their days were spent on emerging genres and 11% were spent on traditional genres. Rhetoric TAs spent 6% of their days on emerging genres and only 1% of their days on traditional genres.

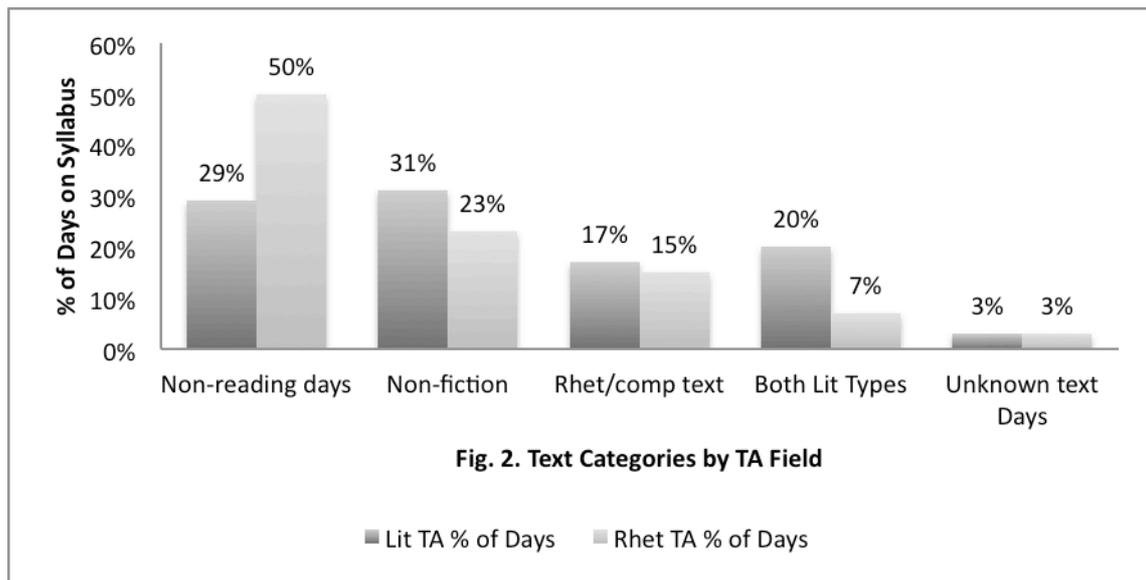
Figure 1: Breakdown of Literature Types



When the average number of days taken from the sampled syllabi of both types of instructors are placed side-by-side, some clear differences emerge (see Fig. 2). Overall, literature TAs spent about two-thirds of the days on their syllabus focusing on a text of some type. The type of text most commonly discussed by both groups of TAs was nonfiction, followed by both types of literature for the literature TAs. Both groups discussed the rhetoric text about the same number of days, although the literature TAs discussed it slightly more often.

The biggest difference in time used was for the category of non-reading days. Rhetoric TAs did not assign a text for about one-half of their days, while literature TAs did not assign a text for one-third of their days. So overall, literature TAs had about 20% more of their syllabus days devoted to discussing a text than the rhetoric TAs.

Figure 2: Text Categories by TA Field



What happens on non-reading days?

In order to gain more insight about what teachers and students were doing when no reading was assigned, I devised some categories for describing these days and counted how many days were spend on each type of activity. The categories used were “student writing,” “content topic “writing topic,” “student presentations,” “course business,” “to be announced” (TBA), and “in-class text.” Student writing days were taken up with work directly on students’ own writing, the most common activity being peer review, but also including workshopping drafts, in-class revising, group work for a group project, or learning technologies related to an upcoming assignment. Content topic days were marked by a topic, title, subject matter, or lecture on the syllabus, seemingly providing some information about the topic of the class (i.e. humanitarianism, cyborgs, or women’s bodies). For instance, in “Rhetoric of Music Writing,” TA Kasey had non-reading days entitled “A brief history of Riot Grrl” and “The Frankfurt School and Beyond.” Guest speakers or field trips related to the topic of the course also counted as content topic days. For example, in his class, “Arguing the Digital Divide,” TA Jasper had a guest speaker speak to the class who represented a community group that worked on providing free internet access in the

city. Writing topic days were also marked by a topic or subject heading for the day, but having to do with rhetoric or writing as opposed to the class topic chosen by the instructor. Instructors devoted such days to discussing an upcoming assignment, a sample paper, or a principle of rhetoric or writing such as ethos, style, or citation. Student presentation days were days when students made a prepared presentation to the class, as distinguished from a workshop, which would have involved helping the student with revision and was thus counted as a student writing day. Course business days were devoted to going over the syllabus or filling out course evaluations. TBA days were marked as such, but I also included days when the only activity listed was that students were turning in papers. My assumption was that instructors would be doing something on those days, but that it wouldn't be covering a pre-assigned reading. In-class text days were almost always taken up with discussing a visual text or film, which the students had not been asked to cover beforehand as homework.

The largest category of non-reading days was student writing, at an average of 34% of all non-reading days for both groups of TAs (see Table 4). The second highest was student presentations, at 24%. Third was writing topic, at 19%, followed by TBA and course business at 9% each, content topic at 5%, and in-class text at 2%.

Table 4. Overall % of Non-Reading Day Activities

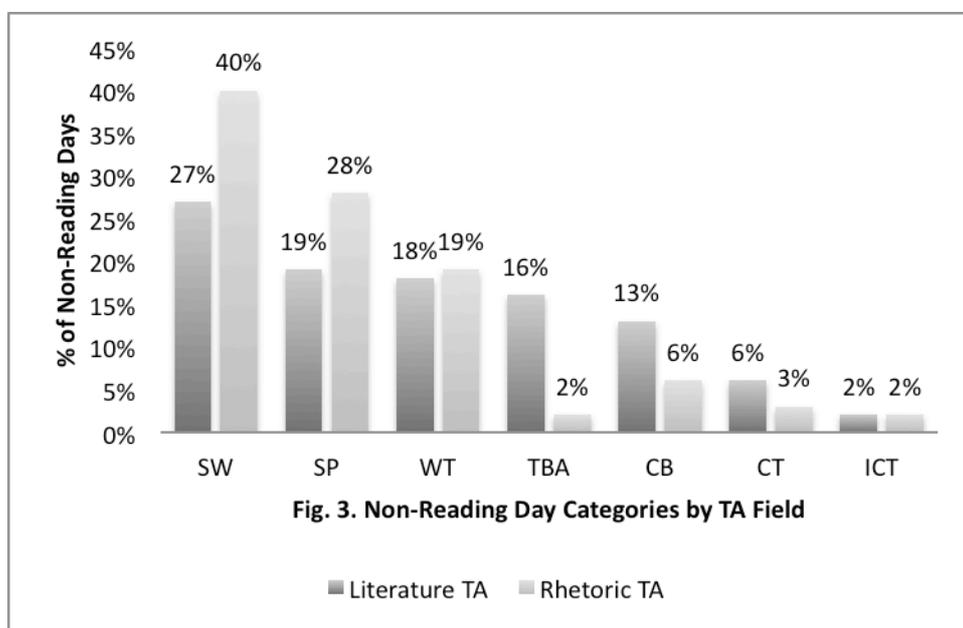
	Student Writing	Student Presentations	Writing Topic	To Be Announced	Course Business	Content Topic	In-Class Text
Overall % of Days	34%	24%	19%	9%	9%	5%	2%

How does the literature and rhetoric instructors' time spent on non-reading day activities differ?

When divided into groups of TAs, some clear differences emerge as to what instructors were doing on their non-reading days (see Fig. 3). Rhetoric TAs spent 40%

of their non-reading days working on student writing, while literature TAs spend 27%. Rhetoric TAs spend 40% of their non-reading days on student presentations, while literature TAs spend 19%. Other sizeable differences were on TBA and course business days. Rhetoric TAs designated 2% of their non-reading days as “TBA” or listing only a paper submission for the day’s activity, while literature TAs designated 16% of their non-reading days this way. And rhetoric TAs devoted 6% of their non-reading days to course business, while literature TAs devoted 13% of their non-reading days to it. In the content topic and in-class text categories, the difference between TA groups was only 3% and 0%, respectively.

Figure 3: Non-Reading Day Categories by TA Field

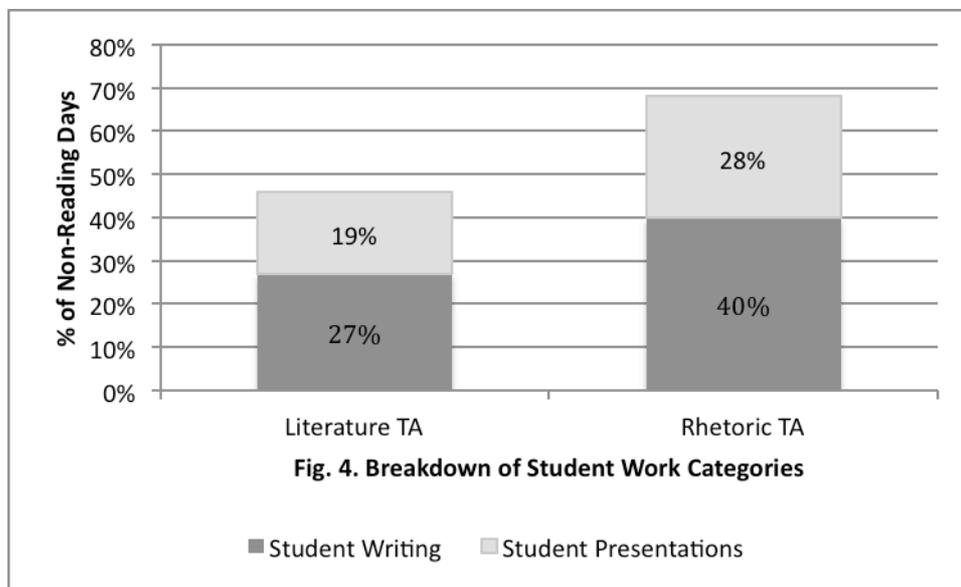


[Legend for Fig. 3: SW = Student Writing; SP = Student Presentations; WT = Writing Topic; TBA = To Be Announced; CB = Course Business; CT = Content Topic; ICT = In-Class Text]

Combining the two highest categories, student writing and student presentations, which also happen to be the categories where student work is the focus

of the class, we can see the combined total of how many days both groups of instructors make student work the entire focus of the class. For rhetoric TAs, 68% of their non-reading days are devoted to student work, and 46% of the literature TA's non-reading days are devoted to the same (see Fig. 4).

Figure 4: Breakdown of Student Work Categories



Comparing the percentage of days spent on student writing (not including student presentations) to the total number of days in the semester, rhetoric TAs spent 20% of the total number of days in the semester working on student writing, while literature TAs spent 8%.

What happens on non-reading days in the most text-centered classes?

For literature TAs, the average percentage of non-reading days was 30%. Thirteen TAs, all of them from a literature background, have a non-reading days total less than the average of 30%, so we might call these the most highly text-centric classes. When the non-reading days activities for these classes are averaged together, there are some notable differences in how non-reading days time is allotted when compared to the average of all TAs (see Table 5). The biggest differences between the text-centered classes and all classes is that the text-centric classes have 20% fewer non-reading days devoted to student writing, and 15% more non-reading days marked as TBA.

Table 5. Percentage of days on non-reading day activities in highly text-centered classes

	Student Writing	Student Presentations	Writing Topic	To Be Announced	Course Business	Content Topic	In-Class Text
< 30% NRD avg	14%	24%	16%	24%	13%	6%	2%
All TA Avg	34%	24%	19%	9%	9%	5%	2%

RHE 309K ASSIGNMENTS

In order to give more context and detail to the information I gathered using the RHE 309K syllabi, I followed up via email with the sampled TAs to solicit the major assignments they gave to students and ask them to contextualize the texts they chose for their class. Seventeen out of the 30 sample instructors responded, which means

that my sample of interviewed instructors is too small to be able to generalize from the respondents to all RHE 309K instructors as a whole. However, their responses lend some qualitative texture to the numbers generated by analyzing syllabi, allowing us to see how the TAs imagined the texts functioning in the class and the types of writing tasks they asked of students. The questions on my brief open-ended survey were:

1. What assignments did you distribute to students?
2. What did you ask students to do with those texts, either in class or in their writing?
3. What were your reasons for assigning your course readings, particularly any literary or nonfiction texts?
4. How did those texts help you meet the goals of your course?

In tabulating the results from this survey, assignments were categorized according to what I determined was the dominant task, recognizing that every piece of writing includes multiple purposes. The exceptions were assignments that seemed to call for equal parts analysis and argument, which were coded accordingly. I also tabulated the genres that TAs expected students to write in and the types of texts they expected students to write about. The categories regarding the texts used in completing the assignments were the same ones analyzed in the syllabus portion of the study. However, I limited my coding to types of primary sources (excluding rhetoric/composition texts), thus coding the texts as: Non-Fiction, Traditional Literary Genres, New Literary Genres, and Split (more than one of the primary text categories). In addition to looking for detail about what the instructors asked their students to do with the texts they assigned, I wanted to find out if the assignments called for the students to consider audience for the texts they were working with and for the papers themselves, but I found this information in the assignments themselves.

Results for Assignments Survey

Out of 30 queries, 17 TAs responded, four of whom had rhetoric backgrounds and 13 of whom had literature backgrounds. These TAs answered my four open-ended survey questions and provided me with their three main assignments, initially yielding 48 assignments. But several of those assignments had different options for students to choose. This yielded 56 tasks asked of students. Out of these 56 tasks, 23 were rhetorical analyses, 17 were arguments, four were rhetorical analysis/arguments, and three were literary analyses. These four categories constituted 83% of the total. The remaining 17% consisted of two or fewer of the following tasks: literary analysis/argument, literary and rhetorical analysis, reflection, advice/analysis, analysis (not literary or rhetorical), narrative, and summary.

Of the genres represented, the overwhelming majority—49—were traditional essays. Of the remaining seven assignments, two were project proposals, and there was one each of advice column, fairy tale, multimedia presentation, and narrative. Since the vast majority of tasks were either analysis or argument, and the vast majority of genres were essays, there was no substantial difference between what the rhetoric TAs and literature TAs assigned.

When looking at the texts students were asked to use, 25 were Non-Fiction, 17 were split between different text categories, eight were Emerging Literary Genres (usually films), two were Traditional Literary Genres, and three didn't apply because no source texts were required. The literature TAs were the only ones who assigned traditional literary texts. Otherwise, there was no substantial difference between the types of texts that TAs of both backgrounds asked students to write about.

When looking at whether students were to consider audience for their source texts, 43 assigned tasks called for them to do so, 10 did not, and three were N/A because no source texts were explicitly assigned. Of the rhetoric TAs, 54% of their assignments asked students to consider the audience of the texts whereas 77% of the

literature TAs did. When writing their papers, 29 out of 56 assigned tasks asked students to consider an audience for that paper whereas 27 did not. These results for paper audience were distributed equally over literature and rhetoric TAs.

DISCUSSION OF SYLLABI AND ASSIGNMENTS

The difference in the way these two groups of instructors organize their syllabus is interesting because of the difference in how many days each spends devoted to coverage of texts. The largest category of text used by both groups of instructors was nonfiction, at 23% for rhetoric instructors and 31% for literature instructors. Both devoted a similar amount of time to the rhetoric/composition textbook: 15% for rhetoric instructors versus 17% for literature instructors. Literature instructors did devote more time to literature of both types—20%—compared to 7% of the syllabus days for rhetoric instructors.

But contrary to what Lindemann and others charge—that a literature instructor will teach literature in a rhetoric/composition class if allowed to—the percentage of days that instructors with a literary background devoted to traditional literary texts was low, at 11%. The percentage of days they spent on emerging genres was 9%, making the total percentage of days devoted to literature defined broadly was 20%. This can hardly be seen as turning the RHE 309K class into a class about literature.

The most notable difference between the two groups is that the instructors with literature backgrounds spent two-thirds of their days covering a text of some type, whereas instructors with rhetoric/composition backgrounds spent only half their days covering texts. This is a difference of 21%, meaning that literature instructors tended to create more text-based syllabi than the rhetoric/composition instructors did.

The TAs who participated in the study had been trained in their teaching practicum, E398T, to teach writing in a rhetorical way that allows for a text to exhibit many possible purposes, and for a purpose to be enacted in many possible types of

texts. That is, for these instructors, text and purpose are for the most part uncoupled. This may be because their training was heavily influenced by stasis theory, a system of rhetorical analysis used in analyzing argument, as seen by the textbooks they used to teach RHE 306 and in many cases RHE 309K. The majority of instructors included in this study first used either *Writing Arguments* by Ramage and Bean, *Everything's an Argument* by Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz, *Good Reasons* by Lester Faigley, or *Critical Situations* by Sharon Crowley—all textbooks that either view writing as argument, rely heavily on stasis theory as terms for rhetorical analysis, were written by established rhetoric scholars, or all three.

Therefore it is no surprise to find that in their assignments, the approach used by so many instructors was to focus on argument as a mode that could be accomplished by a variety of genres, and why nearly half (47%) of their assignments gave students the option of writing about a literary text (either traditional or emerging genre). The ubiquity of the argumentative purpose was seen in the TAs' understanding of the texts they assigned for students to read and the genres they asked them to write. The TAs' survey responses state this approach explicitly. For example, Moses' readings included novels and song lyrics. About these texts, he says that he "wanted to expand our understanding of rhetorical strategies, to see how attitudes and appeals could be embodied in texts that don't necessarily make straightforward arguments" (personal communication). He also want students to "consider rhetoric through multiple media" (personal communication). Another instructor who takes for granted an extremely broad definition of "text" is Jasper, and this assumption is reflected in his assignments. As Jasper observes in his analysis and argument assignment for Paper 1, "A text can be a film, novel, short story, poem, television show, webpage, or any other type of 'text' you can imagine." The texts available for rhetorical analysis in that essay assignment show why the category for mixed types of texts was the second highest behind nonfiction texts in the assignments students were given.

Grouping some classes together to show similar approaches will show the range of ways that instructors sought to fulfill the goals of RHE 309K, as well as add some qualitative texture to the syllabus data. Several TAs created classes that closely matched the department's introductory level rhetoric class, RHE 306, which typically includes a preponderance of nonfiction and rhetoric/composition readings with rhetorical analysis and argument papers. Thus, the TAs in the department are trained using that model. TAs Esther, Charles, Prudence, Lola, Nina, Donald, and Shirley structure their classes this way, all of whom have literature backgrounds except for Shirley. For the most part, the instructors who followed the RHE 306 model did not highlight the argumentative possibilities of a variety of texts as other instructors did. Charles articulates his belief that, like in RHE 306, texts used for analysis should be straightforward nonfiction texts. "Because this was a beginning/intermediate level course, most of the texts I chose were explicit, overt arguments advocating a particular action or type of engagement" (personal communication). Likewise, Lola chose texts that had "discernible arguments or used persuasive tactics" (personal communication). It's notable that of that group, only Esther and Nina ask students to consider an audience for all three of their papers; for the other TAs with RHE 306-style syllabi and assignments, students are not asked to consider audience for at least two of the three papers.

A second group of similar classes, Jasper's and Simon's (both from rhetoric backgrounds), called for student to analyze cultural "artifacts," such as video games, web pages, novels, television shows, etc. Simon explains that students "analyzed the video games for procedural rhetoric and wrote papers about the arguments the games made" (personal communication). The assignments in these two classes culminated in a final project proposal/pitch to a very specific audience: potential (imaginary) investors or a community group the student wants to complete a real-life project for. Otherwise, interestingly, both of their first assignments did not ask students to consider audience for either the texts or the paper. Simon's second assignment asked

students to consider audiences for both texts and the paper, but Jasper's second assignment only asked students to consider audience for the texts.

A third group of classes, based on the assumption described above that any text can forward an argument, included final assignments that asked students to produce a literary or creative text that makes an argument, or produce such a text and rhetorically analyze it. For example, Jacqueline asks students to write fairy tale, Jude asks them to make a multimedia presentation, Mark asks them to make a movie, and Jennifer asks them to write an advice column. Additionally, these syllabi feature different text categories as having the highest frequency in each class: Jacqueline's and Jennifer's highest frequency category is rhetoric/composition texts, Jude's is nonfiction, and Mark's are literature and nonfiction. The audience these instructors asked students to consider for this final assignment varied in their specificity. The audience for the assignments written by Jacqueline's and Jennifer's are defined by the students. Jude instructs his students to create their multimedia presentations for "an audience that is unfamiliar with [the student's topic]." The audience for the students' film in Mark's class is not specified.

A slightly different pair of classes did not call for a creative assignment, but did use emerging genres (films and comic books) to dramatize how arguments over their topic are portrayed in popular culture. Prudence assigned cold war-era films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Platoon* in her class, "American Cold War Rhetoric." As Prudence explains, "The films worked exceptionally well at showing both the pervasiveness of cold war discourse, and how the rhetoric of the cold war shows up in strange places -- like the sexual orientation of a lead character or in the monster attacking the city" (personal communication). Some examples of questions in her film analysis assignment are: "Is the film anti-communist? Does the film question McCarthyism?" In her survey response, Prudence notes that she was asking students to rhetorically analyze these films just as if they were written texts, asking students to look for "tropes," which could be akin to the idea literary tropes or of rhetorical commonplaces that recur in controversial discussions (personal communication).

Prudence, who had a literature background, asked her students to consider the audience for the texts they wrote about, but not for any of their papers. Another instructor, Isaiah, assigned some Spider-Man comic books in his “Rhetoric of Media Bias” class. He used these comic books to dramatize the bias of particular media outlets, a topic which the students almost exclusively read about in the form of nonfiction texts (personal communication). Isaiah, who had a rhetoric background, asked students to consider audience for both text and paper in all three assignments.

It was my hope to be able to look at what kinds of assignments were used in the most literary-looking syllabi. Unfortunately, not enough data was provided to form any conclusions about these classes. Of all 30 sampled syllabi, six had at least 20% of their days devoted to traditional literary texts. Of these six, only two TAs, Moses and Mark, provided me with their assignments. Since this type of class is at the center of the debate over literature in composition, it would be prudent to examine the data from these classes in detail.

Moses’ and Ernie’s classes seem to share a relatively large number of days spent examining literary texts (traditional genres in Moses’ case and emerging genres in Ernie’s) and a set of assignments that are quite literary and imaginative, allowing room for students to be creative and expressive. Moses’ and Ernie’s assignments borrow terms from literary studies, asking students to “trace connections,” “explore themes,” and attend to aesthetic principles. (Out of their combined ten assignments, five of them call for at least some literary analysis.) Their classes also include hallmarks of expressive composition pedagogy, giving students room to incorporate their own insights about their own lives, to offer personal reflection on a topic from the class, or to narrate a story about themselves. In these ways, the classes may both seem to be less concerned with rhetoric and pull primarily from the instructors’ literature training. However, in their survey responses, both TAs provided exceptionally well theorized and articulated rationales for why they chose their literary and nonfiction texts.

In his class, Moses assigned nonfiction texts, and both Traditional and Emerging Literary texts. He says that he “found the interplay of argumentative and aesthetic texts helpful” for demonstrating how literary texts could make rhetorical appeals and forward arguments (personal communication). “Students could see arguments and ideas in action, dramatized in characters and stories. Kenneth Burke’s thinking on identification and dramatism frame my approach to rhetoric more generally, and Burke is very helpful in thinking through the ways that literature embodies and negotiates cultural attitudes and orientations” (personal communication). Moses asked students to consider the audience for texts in half of his assignments, and for their own papers for all but the first of the assignments.

Similarly, Ernie’s thinking about how to teach literary texts rhetorically is well developed and he explains his rationale eloquently.

Fiction seemed a good choice to really illustrate the wide transferability of the skills of analysis. Also, I was curious whether or not I could teach analysis without highlighting that as the goal, if that makes sense...[A]nalysis is a form of close reading suited for the rhetorical sphere same as interpretation is the form suited for the literary sphere. Clearly there are overlaps, in skills and spheres, which explains why I think literature in rhetoric class, and vice versa, is permissible. (Personal communication)

For his narrative assignment, an audience was provided, as was for the final argument essay, but not so for the combination literary analysis/argument essay.

While I did not receive assignments or a survey response from Annabelle, whose “Rhetoric of Chick Lit” devoted 72% of the days to novels, some assignments can be gleaned from her syllabus. It calls for near-daily micro-themes, all of which ask the students to write about the argument of each text they read. The three other non-responsive TAs who had a high number of literary works on their syllabi did not provide enough information on that document for me to surmise what kind of writing they asked students about the texts.

Mark’s class is another one that, like Moses’, Ernie’s, and Annabelle’s, is a highly text-centered class with 45% of the days spent on literary texts and 45% spent on nonfiction. When looking at the tasks assigned, they are in line with the

programmatic goals for the course: teaching rhetorical analysis and argument. The final assignment, creating a film that makes an argument and then rhetorically analyzing that argument, is similar to other TAs' substantially theorized approaches of consider the rhetorical nature of all texts. But in contrast to Moses and Ernie, Mark's survey responses do not reveal such deliberateness in his choices of texts and assignments.

For example, Mark describes how he taught rhetorical analysis in this relatively spare way: "I had them read an article on how to do a rhetorical analysis assignment, and then I asked them to write an analysis based on the model provided in the article" (personal communication). And though his syllabus lists the rhetoric textbook, *Writing Arguments, Concise Edition*, zero days are devoted to this text on his syllabus. The fact that the main conduit of instruction in rhetorical analysis was a single model text along with the absence of the rhetoric/composition text on his syllabus leads to the conclusion that terms for rhetorical analysis were not featured prominently in the day-to-day workings of the class. Additionally, the final film assignment is vacant of any specific guidelines about how to craft a rhetorically aware argument on the topic of the class, and in his survey response, Mark recollects that the assignment was to make a film "about" the topic, suggesting an explanatory task rather than an argumentative one (personal communication). Finally, none of his major assignments ask students to consider both an audience for the source text and for their papers—only one of these at a time. Of the literature-heavy courses I was able to examine, this one may come closest to Lindemann's feared literature class disguised as composition.

CONCLUSION

One way of trying to determine if Lindemann, Schilb, and others are correct in charging that literature teachers will turn a writing class into a literature class is to look at the percentage of days on the syllabus spent covering a literary text. We saw from the data about text type in this study that literature TAs did not turn their classes

into literature classes in the sense that they spent an especially large percentage of their days on literary texts. But literature TAs did seem to have more text-centered classes on average, since two-thirds of their days were spent covering a reading of one kind or another. This is not a difference I've seen articulated in the scholarship surrounding the question of literature in composition.

These different emphases could be the result of the scholarship that literature and rhetoric TAs have read before designing their syllabi. It could be that within literary studies, the turn away from a New Critical or humanistic orientation to an approach more influenced by cultural studies explains the relative lack of traditional literary texts but the presence of other kinds of texts in these classrooms. Junior literary scholars today are probably less likely than those in the early 1990s to revere traditional literary texts, instead turning their attention to texts of other kinds: historical, popular, cultural, ephemeral, etc. The lack of reverence before these types of texts might explain why literature TAs so consistently adhered to a rhetorical approach of seeing the argumentative possibilities of any type of text, whether it be a literary or non-fiction one. Still, what today's junior literary scholars have in common with literary scholars since at least the dominance of New Criticism is their text-centered methodology.

Another way to test the charge leveled by Lindemann—that if literature is assigned, it is at the expense of working on students' own writing—is to look at what percentage of days is spent working on student writing. As a group, literature TAs spent a lower percentage of their days working directly on student writing (8%) than did rhetoric TAs (20%). When grouping the most text-centered classes and averaging the percentage of days spent on various non-reading day activities, we find that in these highly text-centered classes, student writing receives much less time than the average of all TAs (14% vs 34%), and the classes marked TBA occur more than the average (24% vs 9%). Perhaps TAs who are more apt to structure their syllabi around texts have a harder time planning what to do when they don't know in advance which texts they want students to read. So, Lindemann and other critics are half correct:

when we look at the readings they assign, literature TAs don't overwhelm the syllabus with traditional literary texts, but they do rely more on covering texts than rhetoric TAs and do so at the expense of spending class time on students' production of their own texts.

It is not hard to imagine that in their course planning, literature TAs plotted out their courses using the texts they wanted to cover very early in the process. Rhetoric TAs, on the other hand, had done more coursework and perhaps their own scholarship in rhetoric and writing. Though some of our scholarship is just as text-oriented as literary scholarship, it is student-oriented much more often than in literature. As Jeff Walker argues in *The Genuine Teachers of this Art*, its pedagogical foundations distinguishes rhetoric from other disciplines. Studying rhetoric and composition scholarship may have given the rhetoric TAs more ideas about how to talk about (and allow class time for) working on students' writing processes, rather than build the syllabus out from discussing or analyzing texts.

Though the literature TAs did not allow as much class time to discuss students' writing, it is important to note the very rhetorically focused nature of the writing assignments given by the TAs. Far from being literary close readings, almost all of the assignments I looked at emphasized rhetorical terms for analysis and expected students to make their own arguments in relation to those they had studied. Even assignments that did include literary texts typically asked students to analyze them rhetorically, effectively erasing any difference in status such texts might have in comparison with nonfiction texts. None of the assignments I saw looked like traditional literary criticism papers, further complicating the charges made by critics of literature in composition.

At least partial credit for this sustained attention to rhetorical analysis and argument should go to the training all TAs received in their teaching practicum, where they were guided and mentored in their early planning stages for RHE 309K. Mattison & Elbow and Isaacs have praised the practical education novice teachers receive in these practica and argued that relationships between literature and

composition faculty are improving in some places because junior literary faculty members have more respect for composition as a result of this education. Teachers of the practicum in this program, though they rotated in and out over the years of the study, were able to consistently focus these relatively new teachers on the goals of the course: rhetorical analysis and argument. As I stated earlier in this chapter, the strength of this training makes this study a best case scenario of sorts, since so many other institutions where TAs are trained do not have the depth of experience that faculty in this program have, or there are not high expectations for all TAs, regardless of background, to adhere to classical rhetorical principles in their classes. The implications of this being a best case scenario are that in other programs with a less well-developed rhetoric program we could probably expect the differences between the way literature TAs and rhetoric TAs design their own classes to be more pronounced, if there were even rhetoric specialist TAs teaching writing courses at all.

Despite the strength of the teaching practicum, perhaps the difference between literature TAs and rhetoric TAs' emphases on students' writing process is an indication that those who were not previously familiar with the scholarship on writing process were not able to pick a lot of it up in the practicum. The communal endorsement of writing process work seemed to rest on the inclusion of a peer review and a substantial revision for each major paper, but not necessarily any other days spent on invention, revision, or style. The difference in time spent on students' writing processes might be narrowed between the two groups of TAs if strategies for focusing class time on writing process were incorporated more fully into the practicum.

What role texts should have and how much class time should be spent on them in composition classes is an important question, one that is contingent on the goals of the class. For RHE 309K, a class meant to teach analysis and argumentation, the students must have texts to analyze, and they must all read something to give them a good grounding in the analytical terms they will be using. And for the classes that require a researched argument paper, in order for the students to make their arguments

using texts they find from research, they have to read other texts. In my interviews with instructors, many of them seemed to adhere to the departmental goals for the course, using texts to teach analysis and argument. Additionally, being designated as a “writing flag” course by the university, more than enough writing was required to meet the 16-page minimum necessary to qualify as such a course, regardless of how much reading was assigned or how many days were devoted to covering the reading.

However, it could be argued that writing classes should have at least as many days devoted to solely working with student writing as there are days devoted to covering texts. An NCTE group recommended as much in its statement, “Assumptions, Aims, and Recommendations of the College Strand” (The English Coalition Conference). According to this taskforce, teachers should “[e]nsure that the acts of speaking and writing (not only in response to texts that are read but as a means of exploring and communicating the students' own ideas and experiences) hold as prominent a place in the English curriculum as do the arts of reading and responding to texts by others.” That is, the balance of emphasis on reading and writing should ideally be 50/50, according to this document. The rhetoric TAs in this study seem to have been better equipped to strike this balance than the literature TAs.

This study was able to provide some much-needed empirical evidence about what kinds of texts are used by instructors at a flag-ship university, how often they are discussed, what instructors plan to do on days when no reading is assigned, and whether the background of the instructor is correlated with different patterns in these course planning decisions. Additionally, the survey responses and assignments provided a window on some instructors’ rationale about what they intended students to do with the class texts. Syllabi provided a great deal of information about the courses, but this data set comes with some limitations. One is that my study was biased in favor of the better-prepared instructors, those whose syllabi were most complete. My usability parameters meant that I filtered out 21 syllabi because there was not enough detail in them about the daily activities. This means that the syllabi I used were taken from the most prepared and complete examples, so studying the

entire archive of syllabi would reveal more incomplete syllabi. Another limitation is my assumption that the content of the syllabus was close to what transpired in the classes. The syllabi were meant to be turned in to the departmental office for filing and storage by the first week of classes, so these texts reflect what an instructor had planned to do but not necessarily what they actually read or discussed. A final limitation is that I did not observe these instructors teaching these texts, which would have yielded more authentic information about the instructor's attitude toward the text and exactly how (and how much) it was used to accomplish their goals. But the current study's method could be one way that WPAs or teaching mentors could help novice instructors plan their classes in a way that emphasizes student writing in concrete ways. This might be especially beneficial for instructors whose background is in literature, since they may be more likely to plan their class activities around consuming texts rather than inventing them.

Additional studies of syllabi from programs either similar to or different from this one would give us a better idea of how typical or atypical instructors in this program are. Since the rhetoric department at UT is a particularly prestigious one and the TAs receive a substantial amount of support, it may be that at other institutions, the differences between the syllabi and assignments written by literature TAs and rhetoric TAs are even wider. And classroom observations could certainly establish a firmer grounding for our suppositions about what instructors do with texts in their classrooms. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that even in courses with a common syllabi and readings, literature TAs are more likely to talk about the truth of the text or the text as a model of good writing, rather than the rhetorical strategies, good or bad, employed by the author. Classroom observations would be a logical next step in determining whether the TA's background influenced how they treated texts in class. These and other such studies could move our professional conversations forward past conjecture and anecdote, and toward creating knowledge that helps us teach writing more effectively and train novice instructors to do so as well.

Chapter 4: Student Evaluations of Teaching

In my first chapter, I established that past criticisms against humanism are not necessarily relevant to today's composition programs because of changing intellectual trends concerning textuality. In my second chapter, I showed that traditional literary texts are not held up as models of style in the composition anthologies I examined. In my third chapter I showed that instructors from literature backgrounds tend to spend more days covering texts than instructors from rhetoric backgrounds, but did not spend an excessive number of days covering traditional literary texts. But what do these statements mean about whether literature contributes positively to writing classes? How could we determine whether using literary texts or other types of texts made a difference in students' developments as writers? For that matter, how can we tell if any element of a composition program results in improved writing skills?

For my final chapter, I'd like to consider these questions even though solving the perplexing problems of writing program assessment is most definitely beyond my scope.⁴⁶ The goal in writing program assessment is to evaluate what is working and what needs to be changed. As Diana Ashe maintains in her *WPA Journal* article, assessing teaching practices "is not merely an exercise to please administrators or accrediting bodies--it is what good teachers do" (Ashe 159). She makes this claim based on Teach for America study that found assessment was an integral practice of "superstar" teachers. One tool teachers and administrators typically have at their disposal is the course evaluation, also known as teaching evaluation or student evaluation of teaching (SET). Information from these forms is easily collectable, but how much do we know about its validity in composition classes?

⁴⁶ See Elliot and Yancey for more on the long, contested history of writing program assessment.

RESEARCH FROM OUTSIDE COMPOSITION

There is a wealth of data about SETs from other fields, most of it conducted by educational psychologists. Educational psychologists use the tools of psychology to measure educational outcomes, and there have been upwards of 2,000 studies on the validity and usefulness of SETs. However, it is not clear if these researchers' conclusions, which are drawn from studies of a wide range of courses, are relevant to composition classes. Because I have not been able to locate any kind of report considering the implications of SET research specifically for composition, in the first part of this chapter I will review such research and draw attention to the unique concerns of our field, concerns which question the utility of SETs for assessing teaching quality in writing classes. In the second part of the chapter, I will present a pilot study using SETs from the RHE 309K classes whose syllabi I examined in my second chapter. This pilot study will demonstrate the difficulty of drawing conclusions about the quality of writing instruction solely from student reports.

Because there are researchers who argue forcefully that there is a scholarly consensus about the validity of SETs and an opposing group of researchers who argue just as vociferously that SETs are invalid, the most accurate statement about SET research is that it is highly contentious and no consensus has been reached. The most heated disagreement over the past few decades has been over the small positive effect that high grades have on teacher ratings; that is, researchers have confirmed that when students receive higher grades, they tend to rate the course more highly. This effect is small, but consistent. One such study that garnered a large amount of media attention was conducted at the Air Force Academy by economists Carrell and West. They found that students in math, science, and engineering classes who initially got high grades in introductory courses received lower grades in subsequent courses and vice versa. They also found that the ratings students gave their professors had no correlation to the students' grades in subsequent courses, causing the researchers to question the value of SETs, especially in promotion and tenure decisions. Three major

hypotheses have emerged to explain the positive effect of grades on SETs. The first is the “leniency” hypothesis, which states that students reward lenient graders with higher SET scores. The last major primary research article in education psychology to assert the leniency hypothesis was published in 1997 (Greenwald and Gillmore). Alternative hypotheses are that higher grades indicate better student learning, and that students who are better prepared for classes will earn higher grades and be more satisfied with the class. Though there is still some disagreement among educational psychology researchers about whether SETs are valid measures of teaching quality, consensus within educational psychology circles (though not other disciplines) seems to have settled on March and Roche’s argument (“Effects”) that though there is a small positive relation between grades and student evaluations, this relation is best explained by the student learning and student preparation hypotheses.⁴⁷

A dissenting stream of research is being produced by some researchers, primarily in business and law schools, which says that SETs are mere popularity contests, and are invalid measures of teaching effectiveness.⁴⁸ Theall and Franklin (“Looking”) point out that such objections are problematic because that word goes undefined, and often the assumption is that popular teachers' classes lack substance--an unsubstantiated claim (49). Additionally, personality traits or teaching styles that contribute to an instructors’ higher ratings may indeed make them more “popular,” and they may also be conducive to creating a better atmosphere for learning (Walvoord and Anderson). Theall and Feldman contend that studies finding a substantial grading or personality bias tend to get picked up in mainstream media despite methodological shortcomings and lack of research expertise by the scholars making these claims (“Commentary”; see also Kulik). Theall and Franklin argue studies that are critical of ratings are problematic in several ways: they oversimplify the issues surrounding student evaluations and fail to account for established findings;

⁴⁷ See Theall and Franklin “Looking”; Kulik; Abrami; Ory and Ryan; Arreloa; Centra

⁴⁸ See Clayson; Clayson and Sheffet; Merritt; Williams and Ceci; Shevlin et al; Emery et al.

they are methodologically unsound and/or based on small samples; rely more heavily on opinion than research; and are produced by researchers whose expertise is not in evaluation or ratings (134). However, compelling evidence still exists that SETs are vulnerable to factors other than teaching quality. For example, in Judith Fischer's survey of law school writing faculty, 37% of instructors reported that lower grades had negatively affected their or a colleague's student ratings (152). One-fourth said they had personally lowered their grading standards because of student ratings (153). Though Fischer's expertise is in legal writing and not psychometrics (thus making it likely that Theall and Franklin and their ilk would not trust her findings), reports like hers are still disturbing.

Related to the grading leniency of an instructor is the required workload in the course. A popular assumption among instructors and administrators is that a teacher can guarantee higher ratings by requiring a low amount of work. However, there is a substantial body of research to contradict this finding, or even suggesting that a higher workload correlates positively with higher SET scores.⁴⁹ Marsh and Roche have argued that students award low scores to courses requiring either very little work or an excessively high amount of work, but excluding those two extremes, courses that are challenging are more likely to have higher SET scores ("Effects"; see also Centra, Dee). A few researchers have concentrated on "time-value ratio"—the number of hours students spend on coursework that they feel is valuable versus the total number of hours they spend. These researchers have found that courses with higher time-value ratios tend to have higher SET scores, suggesting that students are happy to spend time on coursework that they find challenging, but will penalize instructors for the amount of "busywork" they have to do even if the total time spent on coursework is not onerous (Gillmore and Greenwald "The Effects"; Franklin and Theall "The Relationship"). These findings contradict the assumption by many teachers that students give low scores to challenging classes. As a whole, workload studies suggest

⁴⁹ See Remedios and Lieberman; Marsh and Roche "Effects"; Heckert et al.; Lucking et al.; Dee; Griffin

that students only react negatively to classes that are excessively difficult or require a large investment of time on activities they see as having little to no value to their learning.

SETs IN COMPOSITION

However, the studies conducted by educational psychologists tend to incorporate data from a wide range of classes, and researchers in other fields usually study classes in their discipline (economics, marketing, law, public policy, etc.). Unlike the classes that SET researchers have studied by correlating multiple-choice final exam results with SETs (e.g. Cohen), there are no standardized multiple-choice tests that can reveal how a student's writing improved. Assessing the degree to which students improve their writing is a notoriously thorny controversy among composition researchers. Therefore, understanding the linkage between achievement in writing classes and SETs is a more complicated problem than classes where the students' knowledge seems to be more easily assessed.⁵⁰ Diana Ashe observes that, specifically in the case of Carrell and West's Air Force Academy study, such research does not translate to writing courses because none of the courses they studied were in the humanities, much less writing intensive.⁵¹ She argues that compositionists must devise their own studies to assess teaching effectiveness, not rely on studies that assess teaching in science and engineering classes (158). Her call in 2010 for compositionist-driven studies reflects the dearth of research about student evaluations and composition classes.

It appears from searching for "student evaluations" in the NCTE journals that the educational psychology research on SETs does not carry much currency in

50 I say "seems" because past studies have shown that even after students perform well on a physics final exam, they still fail to understand foundational concepts of modern physics (see Halloun and Hestenes).

51 Actually, Carrell and West did include humanities courses in their study. The two English classes they studied were introductory classes in composition and literature (18). Contrary to their findings about STEM courses, they found that humanities professors did not have a significant effect on the ability of students to succeed in the subsequent class.

composition. Most of the articles that result from the search are from the 1970s or earlier, and even these usually just mention “student evaluations” in passing, but the article itself is not about them. A heated exchange in *College English* between Kenneth Eble and Robert Powell occurred in the mid-1970s, with both scholars citing empirical studies to back their claims that SETs are or are not valid, or are or are not linked to grades. Since that exchange, NCTE journal authors tend to refer to their own student evaluations when talking about classroom successes or ways they revised the course the second time around (e.g. James, Rubin), or express skepticism about the usefulness of the feedback they get (e.g. Heyden and Henthorne, Armstrong). Of the more recent articles that take student feedback as their topic, several are published in journals for teachers in two-year colleges, such as *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* and CCC’s *Forum*. When these brief articles cite sources backing their claims about SETs, the sources are other two-year college publications, online journals, blogs, or books published by popular presses (Heyden and Henthorne; Heller; Baker). I found no mention of the voluminous research on SETs from educational psychology and other fields in these articles. A comment typical of compositionists about SETs can be seen in Nancy Sommers’s 1998 essay in *College English*, when she muses that SETs are “imprecise at best in showing us if we have taught our students to write” (424), and “I often think that student evaluations do a better job of ranking how students feel about the grades they were given, or how they liked the clothes or personality of their teacher, than what they learned about writing” (424). Sommers directs the Expository Writing Program at Harvard and the Harvard Writing Project. She is clearly skeptical about the utility of SETs and seemingly unaware of the vast body of research on them from other fields.

Franklin and Theall found that faculty and administrators from a variety of disciplines who were more familiar with research about SETs had a more favorable attitude towards them than faculty and administrators who were not familiar with the research (“Who Reads”). Besides Sommers, other writing program administrators are somewhat aware of the research on SETs from other fields and almost uniformly hold

the position that when teaching effectiveness is evaluated, SET information should be used alongside other sources of information in a teaching portfolio. Within composition, scholarship or commentary on SETs can be found in the literature on assessment and departmental administration, including the *WPA Journal* and the *ADE Bulletin*. Searching the CompPile bibliography using the term “teacher-evaluation” yields many relevant results, also. The most relevant sources I located that were about SETs in composition were (in chronological order): the 1982 statement on evaluation teaching of writing by the CCC Committee on Teaching and Its Evaluation in Composition; Witte et al’s 1983 *Research in the Teaching of English* article; Peter Elbow’s 1994 chapter in Christine Hult’s book on assessment, and Peggy O’Neill, Cindy Moore, and Brian Huot’s 2009 book, *A Guide to College Writing Assessment*. The statements of each of these authors, along with many others, will be discussed throughout this chapter, but if a composition scholar is looking for sustained, informed discussion of SETs in composition, these are the best sources to start with. The WPAs who write about SETs tend to be skeptical about them—Ed White calls the research “complex and mixed” (167)—and they point out the lack of consensus among educational researchers regarding their validity (O’Neill et al, Witte et al), though I did not encounter any arguments from 1980 onwards that SETs should not be used in composition at all.⁵² There is a strong consensus in composition that though SETs are an important source of information when evaluating teaching, it should not be the only source, and that the research in other fields does not necessarily translate to the unique concerns of composition.

One of the few studies I encountered that was specifically about composition and SETs compared full-time and part-time writing faculty. Ghaffari-Samai et al’s study indicated that when full-time and part-time writing faculty are compared on the basis of SET scores, mean course grades, mean course grades in the next-level English course, and writing achievement (as measured by a writing assessment test),

⁵² Robert Powell did make this argument in the 1970s as part of the exchange with Kenneth Eble.

no statistically significant difference exists. This suggests that despite the unequal distribution of resources available to full-time faculty and part-time faculty, the teaching quality of both groups is consistent (Ghaffari-Samai et al; see also Landrum for similar results from a study of classes other than composition.) Though this study does not tell us about the relationship between grades, learning, and SET scores, it does give us important information about writing faculty. Composition programs are staffed with an especially high number of vulnerable teachers (graduate students and contingent faculty). O’Neill et al point out that the power of belief among instructors is strong, whether or not such beliefs are supported by research. There is a widespread belief among such instructors that SETs can be negatively affected by rigorous grading. This belief has repercussions for how they evaluate students’ work, especially instructors who feel vulnerable to evaluations themselves (O’Neill 145).⁵³ There is a great deal of evidence from other fields that rigorous workloads and grading have only a small effect, if any, on SETs, but more studies like Ghaffari-Samai’s need to be conducted to see how the research on SETs from other fields holds up in composition, with its unique concerns.⁵⁴

The staffing issue is only one of several issues that sets composition programs apart regarding the usefulness of SET data. Others are the design of forms to reflect local concerns, the small class size typical of composition classes, the interaction of the teacher’s gender and students’ expectations about the teacher’s affect, the role of frequent feedback in the student/teacher relationship, and the difficulty of assessing learning outcomes for composition classes. More to the point for this dissertation, it’s not known whether the amount of literature in a writing class correlates with higher student ratings. There has been one study showing that students preferred reading at least some literature in their writing classes, and they expressed relatively high levels

⁵³ For examples of the power of this belief, see Baker’s and Heller’s essays in *TETYC*.

⁵⁴ Gould says that first-year composition might be well-suited to the kind of assessment of learning that multi-section validity studies like Cohen’s have measured (“Assessing Teaching Effectiveness”), though I’m not so sure due to the difficulties of agreeing on the quality of written products.

of confidence that reading literary texts would be helpful to them in the future (Segall). Until more work is done to validate the utility of SETs in composition classes, we can only attempt to triangulate how they might be used based on the small amount of composition research we do have and the relevance of studies from other fields.

Instrument Design

Unsurprisingly, the scholarship about SETs in composition mirrors the dominant intellectual movements in composition and rhetoric, including the need to situate writing assessment locally and tailor SET instruments for the audiences who will use and interpret them—the students, faculty, and administrators in a particular department. O’Neill et al’s statement about evaluation systems is typical. They advocate for an evaluation system that, like writing program assessment as a whole, is "site-based, locally controlled, rhetorically based, context-sensitive, accessible, and theoretically consistent" (139).⁵⁵ However, there is a tension between this desire to situate writing assessment locally and to ensure its validity and reliability through a rigorous development process. Educational psychologist Lawrence Aleamoni notes that most faculty-designed forms have not been constructed in consultation with a professional psychometrician. Raoul Arreola is careful to note that the published educational psychology research is about well-designed and validated psychometric forms, not "homemade" SETs (100 ff). The process of developing a reliable instrument to rate teachers is a long one, and includes not only deciding what kinds of questions to ask, but also conducting field trials, factor analysis studies, and establishing norms--activities that require expertise in psychometric study design (Arreola 113-115). For this reason, Christopher Gould recommends that English teachers work with specialists in instructional development and educational

⁵⁵ See also Flannery and Gould ("Assessing Teaching Effectiveness") for this view and Schwalm for an example of a locally developed (but apparently not rigorously normed) evaluation instrument.

psychology to develop local instruments (“Assessing Teaching Effectiveness” 48). The 1982 CCC statement on evaluating teaching states that the Committee has not seen any forms specifically created for writing programs and does not accept that the research on SETs in a range of college classes is relevant to writing instruction (219). The committee called for the development and analysis of such tools. So, it would seem that the compositionists don’t trust instruments not specifically developed for composition and the educational psychologists don’t trust instruments created by non-specialists.

Shortly after the CCC statement was published, an article in *Research in the Teaching of English* (referred to with anticipation in the CCC report) was published by rhetoric scholars Stephen Witte, Lester Faigley, communications scholar John Daly, and educational psychometrician William Koch (all UT-Austin faculty at that time). The team developed an instrument for assessing the quality of writing courses and instructors. They report,

The instrument we have described has been very carefully developed over a period of nearly 30 months. Because of the way it was developed and because it was developed specifically for use in college composition courses, the instrument is perhaps the best such instrument available for evaluating college composition teaching and courses. The instrument meets all the criteria we set for such instruments at the beginning of this report: it has content validity; it is reliable; and it can be easily scored. (255)

Their testing instrument was validated specifically for college composition classes across 9 colleges. But even they caution that the data gathered from the instrument should not be the only source of data evaluating teaching. Despite its careful development and validation by experts in composition pedagogy and psychometrics, Faigley and Witte say they do not know what became of the instrument (personal communications). The researchers moved on to other projects, and the questions for UT’s current instructor surveys were developed by faculty committees. Their RTE article has only been cited once, according to Google Scholar. It appears that the

careful work that went into creating and validating this evaluation instrument went nowhere.

Formative vs. Summative Assessment

Many researchers both within and outside of composition discuss the different purposes of formative assessment (to improve one's teaching, either correcting mid-semester or at the semester's end) and summative assessment (to make decisions, usually employment-related, based on evaluation results at the end of a course) (Elbow "Making"; Hativa "Becoming"; Roche and Marsh). Within composition, this distinction is well-known because of the need for both types of assessment when evaluating students' papers, and it makes sense that it would be an important concept in a field that places so much importance on teaching. Elbow stresses the need for informal, low-stakes, formative assessment by students of their teachers (e.g. mid-semester evaluations). He says that these should be used in addition to, and more frequently than, summative evaluations. One potential for facilitating formative assessment can be found in the CCC report. In the report, among other questionnaires for teachers and administrators to use in evaluating a teacher's performance is a questionnaire for students that includes 48 questions; instructors are encouraged to select the items that are most relevant to their class (225-226). There are questions about how the student believed his/her writing abilities improved, what the student did or felt comfortable doing in the class, their beliefs about writing, their appraisal of the teacher, and spaces for answering open-ended questions. Most of the questions are quite specific and would be more helpful to instructors for improving their teaching than to administrators who may look for an overall score of teaching effectiveness and want assurance that such questionnaires had statistical validity and reliability.

The CCC statement draws attention to the fact that the questions we ask reflect the assumptions and values we have about teaching (217). Therefore, the design of SET forms is a high stakes endeavor. Abrami et al point out that (depending how

they're written) the specific items on SET forms might focus teachers' attention on teacher-centered behaviors related to teacher-centered pedagogy, such as the effective delivery of information, rather than behaviors shown to foster a student-centered learning environment and affect student learning. That is why it is crucial that a composition pedagogy specialist help design the instruments that will be used to assess writing classes. In our field, we are generally lucky to have relatively small class sizes (if not light course loads), so questions designed for the efficient delivery of information in lecture courses would have limited relevance to our situation.

Class Size

The fact that writing classes are usually small, a characteristic that distinguishes them from many other types of classes and definitely other freshman-level classes, could be a reason to think that the main thrust of SET research might not be applicable to composition classes. Most educational psychology researchers have found evidence that smaller classes tend to be rated slightly higher, though there is also evidence that both small and very large classes get more positive ratings than medium-sized classes (d'Appolonia and Abrami; Marsh and Roche "Making Students"; Wachtel).⁵⁶ The appeal of small classes seems to lie in the additional engagement students feel they are able to have with the material and the instructor. In a 2008 study by education researchers Remedios and Lieberman, students' level of involvement in the course material and their feelings of support were the factors that most impacted the students' evaluations, and these were primarily determined by teaching quality. In contrast, the students' time investment, the difficulty of the course

⁵⁶ The positive ratings of very large classes might be explained by the assignment of skilled lecturers to large classes, the popularity of some teachers attracting large numbers of students, the inclusion of audio-visual aids in such classes, or the use of teaching assistants and small discussion sections in large classes (Wachtel).

work, and their final grade had much smaller impacts on their ratings of the course (108).⁵⁷

Compositionist Ellen Strenski affirms the value of close interpersonal relations between students and teachers when she notes that students rate advising as being very important. Strenski argues that composition teachers are well positioned to succeed at advising because our small classes enable us to develop closer relationships with students. Whether or not composition teachers actually advise students in an official capacity, Strenski's point about the relationship between composition teachers and their students is important to remember when talking about class size. Keeping composition classes small is essential because of the ongoing dialectical relationship between teachers and students about their writing, a relationship that is only possible with a small number of students. It is interesting to note that rhetoric classes at UT tend to be rated higher than the average for the College of Liberal Arts and for the university as a whole. The classes especially tend to garner high marks for the instructor's interest in the progress of students and ability to create an environment where students feel free to express their thoughts and questions. Though we can't know if the small size of the class directly impacts the SET scores, the level of engagement between the instructor and students seems to be a strength of these classes.

It is not clear how the small size and relatively close relationship between teachers and students affect SETs in writing classes. The often-cited educational psychology studies aggregate results from a wide variety of classes, including many lecture courses. Multi-section validity studies, studies that analyze SET results from courses that share common textbooks and assignments, rely on lecture courses and courses where learning can be measured by a final exam. In Cohen's meta-analysis of multisection validity studies, he found that instructors who were well organized and

⁵⁷ See also the influential research on engagement and formative assessment in K-12 students by Black and William.

skilled at delivering material facilitated greater learning than less organized instructors. He also found that even while a teacher's rapport, feedback and interaction with students was positively correlated with their achievement, this effect was less robust than for organization and instructional skill. He speculates that these differences could be due to the "information-oriented nature of most multisection, introductory-level courses" (301-302). But since first-year composition classes are not usually conceived of as information-oriented, but instead should allow students lots of opportunities to practice writing and receive feedback from the instructor, it is possible that rapport with the instructor would be more important in writing classes. As Ed White says, "Essentially, the teaching of writing requires a different kind of relationship between student and faculty than most other courses do, and calls for a much more steady pressure on the teacher to respond sensitively to student work" (165). In other words, rapport between teacher and student is more important in writing classes than others. He also speculates that this sensitive relationship can damage SETs, though he does not present any research to back this up (167-168).

Unfortunately, we just don't have much research about how size affects learning in writing classes and how students judge teaching effectiveness. Patricia Roberts-Miller laments this fact since such research, even if it merely demonstrated what writing teachers already know (that smaller is better when it comes to composition classes), would help writing program administrators argue their case with deans to keep writing classes as small as possible. Roberts-Miller says it is possible to make these arguments based on related research by A.W. Astin and George Hillocks. This research stresses the effectiveness of creating an environment conducive to learning and giving students lots of thoughtful feedback rather than simply delivering information and expecting students to memorize it. Roberts-Miller remarks that even though it is obvious to writing teachers that this style of teaching is more time-intensive than grading with exams, it sometimes needs to be explicitly explained to administrators. Professional organizations like NCTE and CCCC have issued statements about class size and the need for writing instructors to attend personally to

students. However, such statements would carry more weight with administrators if they were backed by research specifically about how small classes are crucial to students' success in composition classes, as measured by SETs and other tools.

In a similar fashion to Roberts-Miller, in "The Definitive Article on Class Size," Alice Horning extrapolates from engagement, general education, and K-12 research to argue that smaller writing classes are better. In fact, she argues, if any classes are going to maintain a low student-faculty ratio, it should be writing classes.

So, while many subject areas may clamor for small classes, writing has...the strongest claim and should have the highest priority. Ultimately, writing and the critical reading that is one of its essential components underlies virtually all courses in college; success in college is tied to success in writing, taught well in small classes. (13)

Horning offers further evidence in the form of reports from two large universities that managed to decrease the size of their writing classes—Arizona State and Texas State—resulting in higher pass rates and higher student evaluations. However, Horning stresses that published empirical studies about class size in college writing classes are sorely needed to help persuade administrators. With the increasing interest in the cost-saving possibilities of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), we need to arm ourselves with data about teaching effectiveness and its relationship to class size.

Gender and SETs

Compositionist Larry Beason writes that there are two dimensions a good teacher must possess: a cognitive dimension—"an academically sound understanding of writing"-- and an affective dimension--"caring and enthusiastic about student success" (149). Critics of SETs suspect that the affective dimension is actually what gets reflected in SET, and that personality or affective qualities should not bear weight on an instructor's worthiness. Christopher Gould raises the possibility that English teachers may fit better into the affective model that some students desire from

their teachers—responsive and self-sacrificing—because of the stereotype that we are more receptive to intimacy and comfortable discussing the subversion of authority (“Teaching Effectiveness” 43). However, Gould maintains that students' expectations for intimacy may be too high and partially places the blame for such expectations on Hollywood portrayals of heroic teachers such as Mr. Keating in *Dead Poets' Society*, saying “it seems no more realistic to expect our colleagues to emulate heroic teaching than it is to ask students in a composition course to emulate literary genius” (46). Female professors may face even higher expectations to fill the role of emotional caretaker; in fact, there is a large body of evidence that strongly suggests that this is so.

Historically, teaching freshman composition has been thought of as “women’s work” (Miller *Textual Carnivals*). Women make up a majority of English department faculty and an even larger majority of part-time English department faculty, according to the ADE Executive Committee on Staffing. So, both by the numbers and tradition, the role of gender is something we need to be sensitive to. In addition, students’ expectations of their composition teacher’s availability and affect may have a gendered component if we consider the stereotypes that a more nurturing style of relating to students is a more feminine one.

Large-scale educational psychology studies of SETs and gender show conflicting and merely negligible effects of gender bias on SET scores.⁵⁸ One study showed that the sex of the instructor was not as important as gender characteristics, and androgyny was reported to be the optimal gender expression for professors, especially in science classes (Freeman). However, there are many more studies that suggest that androgyny, i.e. displaying the stereotypically masculine characteristic of competence and the stereotypically feminine characteristic of warmth, merits women average SET scores but garners high SET scores for men. In other words, women

⁵⁸ Marsh and Roche “Making Students’”; Centra and Gaubatz; Campbell et al; Feldman “College Students’”; Cashin “Student Ratings”; Aleamoni

must exhibit both warmth and competence to get the same scores as men who only display competence.⁵⁹ As Susan Basow puts it, "In order to receive comparable ratings, female professors need to do more than their male counterparts. Thus, findings of no difference between male and female professors in overall ratings may mask the fact that different standards are being used to judge male and female faculty." The additional labor needed for women to measure up to the same level as male faculty has been overlooked by the most often-cited educational psychology studies.⁶⁰

The extra labor for similar SET results has ramifications for female instructors' careers. Bellas argues that the additional energy female instructors spend on student interactions, whether in class or in the office, is "emotional labor" that goes unacknowledged and unrewarded by most existing promotion and tenure standards in four-year universities. Such standards (and the committees that set them and judge promotion by them) reward research and administration more highly than teaching and service, two areas women spend more time on than men. As a result, women do not advance in the numbers that men do.⁶¹ In their thorough study of faculty at a large Midwestern research university, Statham et al also find this to be true. Their study suggests that though women's and men's teaching styles were regarded equally by students, the women's required more investment of time and thus endangered their cases for tenure. They found that the female faculty tended to use

⁵⁹ Kierstead et al; Bennett; Burns-Glover; Basow "Student Ratings" and "Best and Worst"

⁶⁰ Student evaluation data depends on the questions that are asked, and Therese Huston points out that certain kinds of questions can privilege certain teaching styles. She writes,

If some of the questions on the course evaluation focus on warmth, such as the instructor's ability to understand or respond to students' needs (qualities usually associated with feminine expressiveness) then female instructors have higher scores (Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001; Kierstead et al., 1988)... If however, some of the questions ask students to rate instructors' enthusiasm or eagerness in the classroom (qualities usually associated with masculine expressiveness), then male instructors have higher scores (Helgeson, 1994; Mulac & Lundell, 1982). (Huston 4)

The wording of questions was not addressed in the other studies referred to above, but Huston's point is a good one for us to keep in mind when considering survey design and language.

⁶¹ Moore and Ritter found this disparity within UT faculty, which confirmed the findings of researchers at UCLA, Harvard, MIT, and other institutions.

feminist (read: student-centered) pedagogy, which they contend is more effective teaching (146). Despite their belief in such student-centered methods, however, they recommend that these teachers maintain stricter boundaries between themselves and students. But they also recommend that administrators become familiar with the research on feminist pedagogy and provide leadership to counteract the institutional philosophy that regards time spent with students as counterproductive (153).

Statham et al's study included faculty from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Some of the faculty were from the English department, but they do not specify if the English classes were literature or composition (or both). So the degree to which we can extrapolate from their study to composition classes specifically is limited. But, just as we saw in the research about class size, investing time in students' growth as writers is time-consuming but necessary for their development. A composition instructor of any gender who invests lots of time into responding to student writing and/or conferencing with them is practicing a comparable type of student-centered pedagogy as the female professors in Statham et al's study. This investment of time should not be regarded as counterproductive. When the administrators and faculty who make teaching assignments, hiring decisions, and decide on promotion and tenure files have themselves taught composition and/or are familiar with the research on how necessary it is that instructors invest time into responding to students, it is more likely that such time will be valued. But if those charged with making these decisions have not taught composition and/or are not familiar with this research, they, like the promotion and tenure committees at the school in Statham et al's study, may not appreciate the necessity of this time investment. In such cases, female instructors who teach composition and prioritize interaction with students are especially at risk for being victimized by negative employment decisions.⁶²

⁶² See Elizabeth Birmingham's case study, in which she finds female TAs wrote paper comments that were five times as long as their male TA peers. She notes that though the TAs were trained using a process writing model and taught to write attentive and thorough end notes, they were also told to

In addition to the larger time commitments female instructors tend to make, there is evidence to suggest that students penalize them unfairly because of the criticism every writing teacher must deliver to students. Sinclair and Kunda found that students view females more negatively than males after receiving negative feedback on their writing. A legal writing instructor, Judith Fischer, says that students react negatively to receiving critiques on their writing in legal writing classes. She maintains that SETs are typically lower in these classes than other types of legal classes because of factors unrelated to teaching quality. Legal writing faculty believe that the lower ratings are due to the intellectual rigor of the course, students' resistance to having their writing critiqued, and the fact that students received graded work before filling out their evaluations.⁶³ The lower SETs awarded to these instructors penalizes women more than men since there is a higher proportion of female professors in that subspeciality (129). Respondents to Fischer's survey believe that a teacher's gender sometimes negatively impacted their student ratings. Close to one-third of respondents said they knew of at least one instance of this negative consequence for female professors, but only one-tenth reported a similar occurrence for male professors. I have not located a similar study strictly for undergraduate composition courses, but it does not seem like a stretch to wonder if female composition teachers are similarly penalized, or to speculate about the lengths they must go to to counteract such penalties.

SETs and Portfolios

Regardless of whether researchers believe that SETs are valid indicators of teaching quality or not, almost across the board, they recommend that SETs be used as one

limit their teaching time and concentrate on their own academic work. Birmingham speculates that the female TAs took the process training to heart but the male TAs took the time limitation advice more seriously.

⁶³ Course grades in most legal classes are decided by a final exam or paper, but students write papers in their legal writing classes throughout the semester, and therefore receive criticism from the instructor and have a fairly accurate idea of what their final grade will be.

component of a teaching portfolio.⁶⁴ Many contend that other sources of information are needed to balance the peculiarities of student-reported data. For example, Gould argues that faculty visits are necessary to mitigate against students' unrealistic expectations of intimacy in English classes ("Teaching Effectiveness"). Others argue that SETs should not be discounted completely despite their shortcomings, because feedback from students is crucial for getting a picture of the instructor's abilities (Kress 51); indeed, students are the "intended audience" of a teacher's performance, and they are also especially qualified to provide feedback simply because they are taking more classes than faculty or administrators are (Elbow "Making"). Arreola holds that students are the best sources of information about instructional delivery, but faculty peers are more qualified to assess instructional design and disciplinary expertise.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, as the idea that student writing is best evaluated in portfolio form has developed over the past two decades, a parallel idea about evaluating teaching has gained adherents. Writing and teaching are both "complex performances," as O'Neill et al describe them, and require sophisticated means of assessment.

As with any complex performance, the evaluation of writing teachers--and teaching and learning--needs to include multiple sources of evidence that are systematically collected and reviewed. Relying on only one data source--or on a haphazard collection of data--may not provide the kind of information needed to make a sound assessment decision about the quality of the instruction and the faculty's performance. (142)

A complex performance is open to interpretation in a number of ways. Peter Elbow makes this point, along with others that echo mainstream currents in composition

⁶⁴ Kress; Arreola; Gould "Assessing Teaching" and "Teaching Effectiveness"; O'Neill et al; Ackerman; Armstrong; Cashin "Research Revisited"; Elbow; Elbow and Belanoff; Fischer; Ory and Ryan; Tebeau; Theall and Franklin; CCC Committee on Teaching and Its Evaluation in Composition; AAUP

pedagogy, rhetorical theory, and literary criticism. He says that teaching is impossible to evaluate accurately or "truly" by any measure, just like there is no one interpretation of a text or one correct grade on a student's paper. He stresses, "*In teaching, as in writing, it is possible to be good in very different ways*" (Elbow "Making" 104, emphasis in original). The complexity of teaching can in some ways be better captured by specific questions that call for description rather than vague questions with multiple-choice answers (Elbow "Making"; CCC Committee on Teaching). To the charge that students' evaluations are not reliable because they vary from student to student, he answers that this is true, like the interpretation of other complex texts is also unstable.

Surely one reason why faculty so often distrust student evaluations of teachers is because the disagreement in those evaluations calls too uncomfortably to mind what we accept in published literary criticism but hide in our own grading; namely, the obvious fact that we would get just as much disagreement if we had multiple teachers grading the same student performance. The unreliability of teacher grades is effectively disguised by our handy custom of getting only one opinion. (103-104)

The difficulties of reliably assessing student writing shore up Elbow's wince-inducing criticism of many teachers' position on their own grading. One way instructors and administrators have found to more fairly honor the work students do in their writing classes is to give them credit for working on their writing process and not only their written products. In a similar vein, Elbow and others encourage the use of formative comments from students to teachers in the middle of the semester ("Making"; CCC Committee on Teaching and Its Evaluation in Composition). These more informal, low-stakes assessments can help shape the rest of the semester and help the instructor improve at teaching and responding to feedback from their "intended audience."⁶⁵ Elbow goes as far as to say that formative assessment from students to teachers

⁶⁵ Roche and Marsh have done some valuable research on using SET formatively instead of just summatively for external decision-making (see also Hativa; Theall and Franklin).

should be conducted more frequently than summative evaluations, which he maintains do not need to be conducted for every instructor at the end of every semester.

The beliefs underlying teaching portfolios—their being an appropriately sophisticated method of evaluating a complex performance, the need to incorporate multiple sources of information from different audiences who are able to evaluate various parts of the teacher’s performance, the importance of accepting that teaching is an indeterminate text just like the texts we study—have gained currency not only within composition studies, but also outside it. At UT, the official stance on SETs is that they are a valuable source of information, but should be supplemented with other sources. A report by UT’s Educational Policy Committee includes the recommendation that colleges and faculty “develop and use additional methods of evaluation,” including “student surveys, alumni surveys, major retrospective surveys, peer review of materials, self-report in the form of portfolios, and mid-semester course adjustment data” (549). Language on UT’s guide to interpreting its Course-Instructor Survey reflects this suggestion.

Course-Instructor Surveys have been shown to be a valid indicator of teaching effectiveness. However, most experts on teaching evaluation advise that no one method gives the complete picture of an instructor's teaching ability; multiple measures, on multiple occasions, are advised to give a full picture of the teaching effectiveness of a particular instructor. Moreover, other factors, such as size of class, level of the class, and content of the course, can cause small variations in the ratings. Thus while the results reported for the Basic Form items can be useful in selecting courses, the results for a particular instructor should not be interpreted as providing complete information on the teaching effectiveness of that instructor. (Center for Teaching and Learning)

UT’s Center for Teaching and Learning gives admirable guidance on how to interpret the single source of data available from SETs, a source that should not be used in isolation. I don’t have any information on how SETs are actually used in the different units at UT. But at other institutions, there is evidence to suggest that they are the sole source of information about teaching effectiveness. Janet Heller claims in the *CCC Forum* that personnel decisions for contingent faculty at two-year institutions are

frequently made on the basis of SETs—a practice she regards as unfair. A better process would be to assign teachers with low SETs a faculty mentor and give them a semester to bring up the scores.⁶⁶ A still better process would be to assign faculty mentors who could coach beginning or vulnerable teachers through building a teaching portfolio, which a large number of experts agree is a more fair method of assessing teaching effectiveness.

PILOT STUDY

There is so much we don't know about what gets reflected in SETs of composition classes: the effects of workload, giving feedback, and grading; how the testing instruments should be different from other disciplines; the effect of class size (and perhaps teaching load); and the effect of gender, to name a few of the most active debates. How can composition researchers fill in these gaps? I have conducted a basic pilot study of the 30 RHE 309K classes from which I analyzed syllabi. In the next part of this chapter, I analyze the SETs of these classes to demonstrate how such a study of composition SETs might be conducted. Such a sample is too small to generalize to composition classes overall. But it does raise some interesting questions about what to look for in a larger scale study. Using the publicly available course instructor survey information on UT's website, I tabulated the scores from the 30 courses' course instructor surveys (CISs), including each class's rating for instructor overall, the course overall, and the percentage of students in each class who reported that the workload was above average. I then analyzed the data to see if there were any correlations between instructor or course rating, perceived workload, whether the class was text-centric or not, and the background of the instructor. I also compared

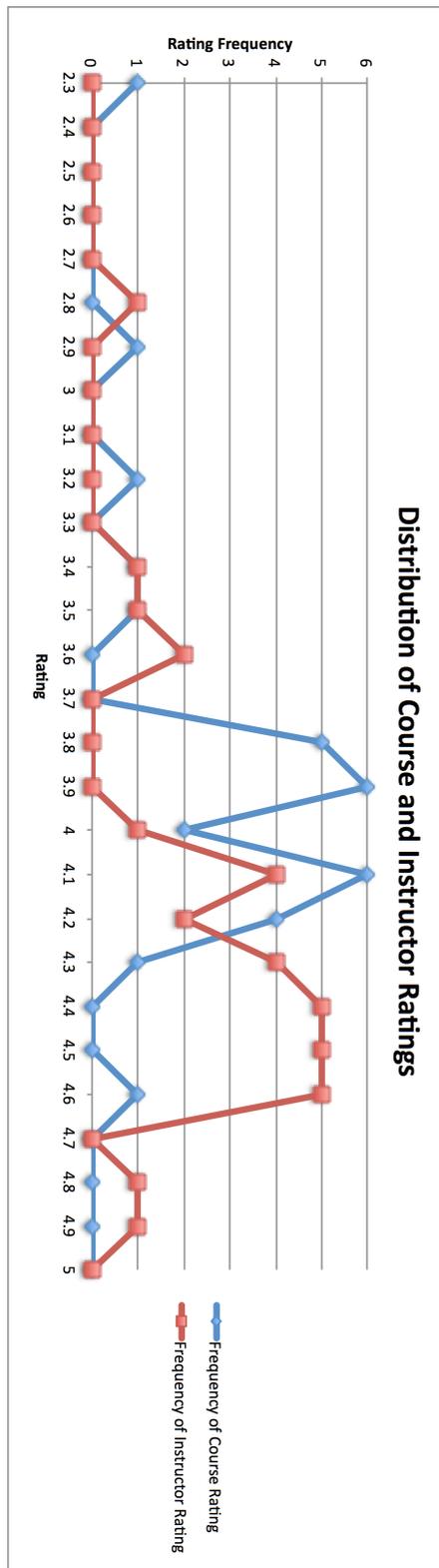
⁶⁶ See Heller; Roche and Marsh; Hativa; Theall and Franklin. See also Bamberg for a detailed description of how USC facilitates discussion between a mentor teacher and novice instructors about their first student evaluations (154-155).

average scores for instructors based on gender, instructor background, and two key measures based on the averages of the department.

Results

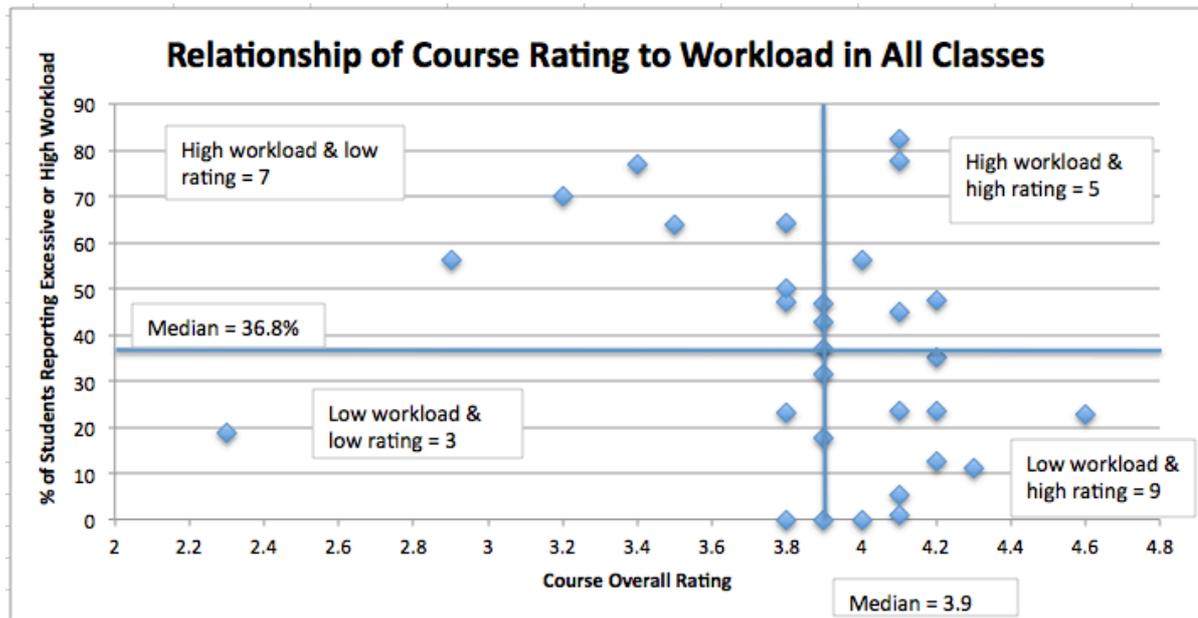
As you can see in Figure 5 (next page), the RHE 309K courses I studied had higher average rating for instructors than the course. The ratings for both instructor and course were on the higher side of the 5-point scale, with the median rating for course overall being 3.9 and median instructor rating being 4.3.

Figure 5: Distribution of Course and Instructor Ratings



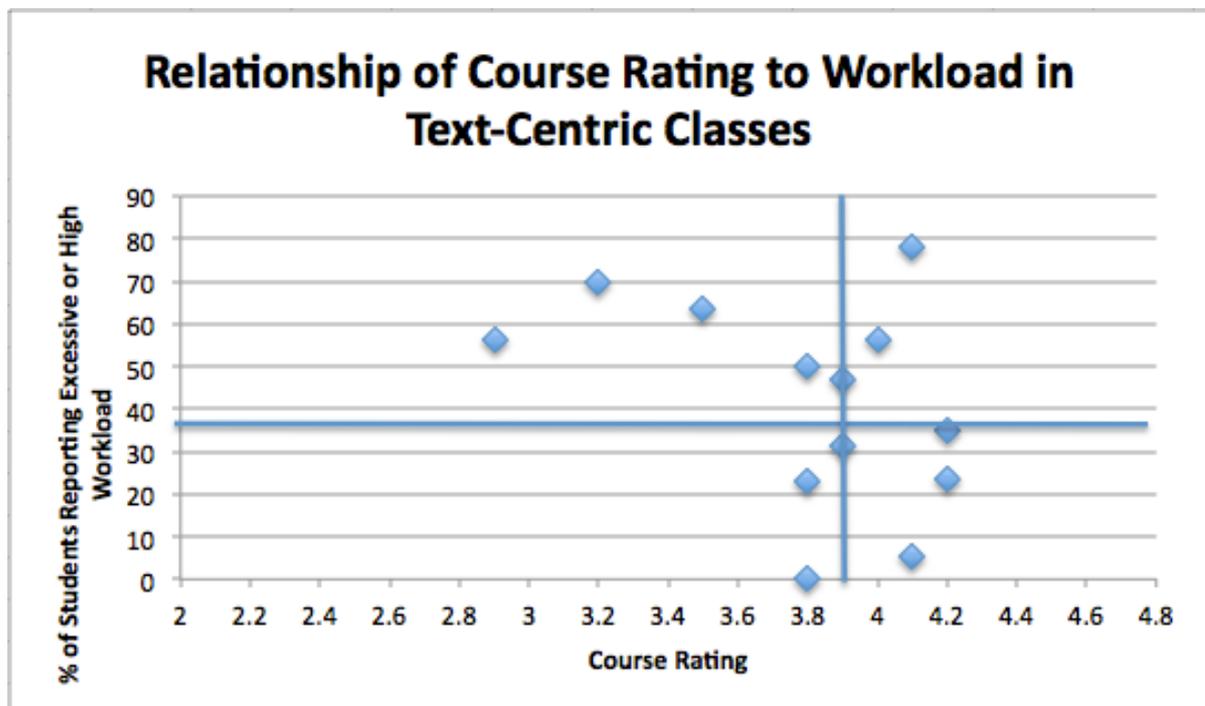
I calculated the percentage of students reporting that the course had an “excessive” or “high” workload, and plotted each course according to its course rating and percentage of students reporting excessive or high workload (Figure 6). I then divided the scatter plot chart into quadrants based on the relationship of each point to the median score for course rating (3.9) and percentage reporting a higher than average workload (36.8). The scores were distributed across all four quadrants, though not evenly. Excluding the six courses which fell on the median line, the most populous quadrant was “Low workload and high rating,” with nine courses. The second most populous quadrant was “high workload and low rating,” with seven courses. Third was the “high workload and high rating” quadrant, with five courses. Least populous was the “low workload and low rating” quadrant, with three courses.

Figure 6: Relationship of Course Rating to Workload in All Classes



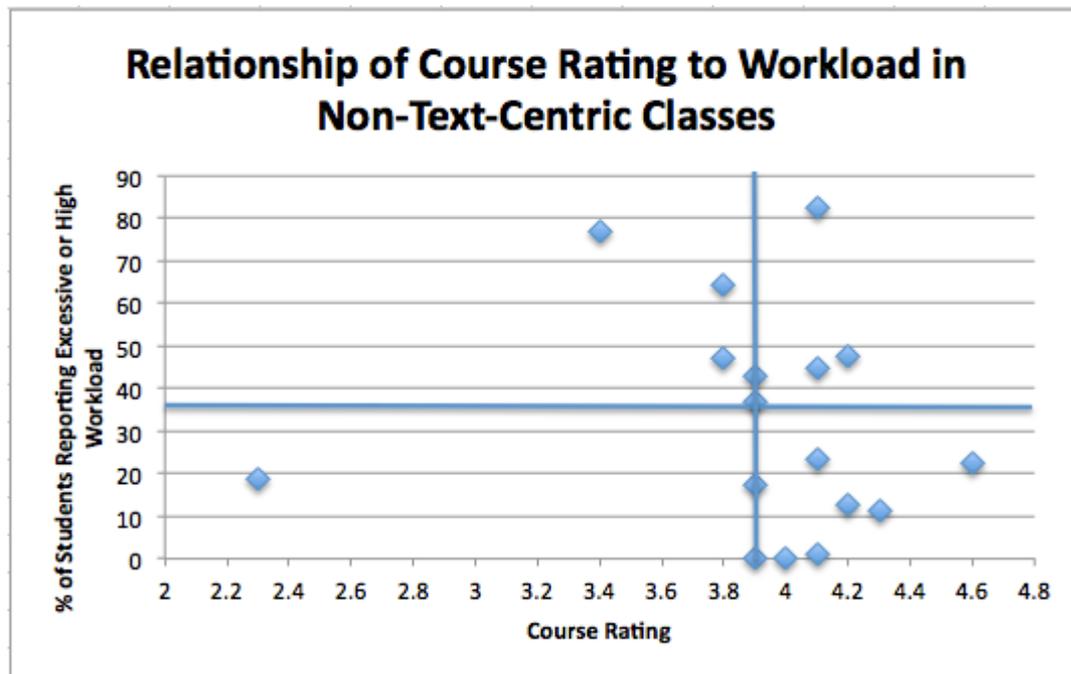
I divided the courses into those that had a higher than average number of days devoted to covering texts, a group I referred to in my previous chapter as being “text-centric” classes (Figure 7). There were 13 such classes, 54% of which had a perceived workload higher than the median for all classes, and 46% of which had a perceived workload lower than the median. 46% of the text-centric courses were rated lower than the median for all courses, with 38% being rated above the median. The most populous quadrant for text-centric classes was “high workload and low rating,” with four courses. The second most populous quadrant was “low workload, high rating,” with three courses. The other two quadrants, “high workload and high rating” and “low workload and low rating,” were equally populated with two courses each.

Figure 7: Relationship of Course Rating to Workload in Text-Centric Classes



Of the 17 non-text-centric courses, 41% had a perceived workload higher than the median for all classes, and 53% had a perceived workload lower than the median (Figure 8). 24% of the text-centric courses were rated lower than the median for all courses, with 53% being rated above the median. The most populous quadrant for text-centric classes was “low workload and high rating,” with six courses. The second most populous quadrants were in the “high workload” half of the chart, with “high rating” and “low rating” equally populated with three courses each. The least populous quadrant was “low workload, low rating,” with one course.

Figure 8: Relationship of Course Rating to Workload in Non-Text-Centric Classes



The rhetoric TAs and literature TAs had similar course ratings and reported high workloads. The average course rating for the five rhetoric TAs was 3.9 and the average course rating for the 24 literature TAs was 3.86. The average percentage of students reporting a high workload for rhetoric TAs was 34% and it was 36% for literature TAs.

To get an idea of how SETs broke down across gender, I averaged the scores for “Instructor Overall,” “Interest in Student Progress,” and “Student Freedom of Expression” for male and female instructors. I elected to use the instructor rating instead of the course rating because I hypothesized that the instructor’s personal qualities would be reflected in the instructor rating rather than for the course. I selected the other two measures (“Interest” and “Expression”) because I believe these could reflect the most gendered qualities in an instructor’s teaching style, i.e. Their concern for students’ development and the degree to which students felt nurtured in the classroom. They also happen to be the two measures that RHE 309K instructors

consistently score highest in. There were 15 men and 15 women in my sample. The average scores were nearly identical across all three categories (Table 6).

Table 6: SET Scores by Instructor Gender

	Instructor Overall	Interest	Expression
Women (n=15)	4.19	4.49	4.61
Men (n=15)	4.23	4.49	4.65

Finally, to see whether students rated the classes of literature or rhetoric instructors any differently, I averaged the instructor overall, course overall, and weighted workload scores for each (Table 7). There was little difference between these two groups.

Table 7: SET Scores by Instructor Background

	Instructor Overall	Course Overall	Weighted Workload
Literature Background	4.22	3.86	335.40
Rhetoric Background	4.18	3.90	340.74

Discussion

As stated above, this is only a pilot study meant to demonstrate some possible methods for analyzing SET data in composition classes, not to say anything definitive about composition classes overall. Because one of the major controversies in SET research is about whether the workload in a course biases the ratings, I wanted to try out a method of assessing workload as it related to the amount of reading in a composition course. Because there were such clear differences between the score for instructors and courses, in my workload analysis, I used course ratings instead of instructor ratings. I was interested in the possible relationships of the texts assigned rather than behaviors of the instructor (grading promptly, explaining concepts clearly,

etc.), and believe the course rating gets at the structure and readings of the course more than the instructor rating would.

The number of days spent covering texts seems to correlate positively with the workload students perceive in the course. Fifty-four percent of the text-centric classes were perceived to have high workload, compared to 41% of the non-text-centric classes. As I described in Chapter 3, on days when instructors didn't assign texts for discussion, they asked students to carry out a variety of other tasks, including peer review, discussing upcoming assignments, working on their writing in class, or giving presentations. The classes with more of these sorts of activities seem to have been rated as having a lighter workload than the classes that had a higher number of reading days.

Interestingly, the non-text-centric data points cluster more closely around the medians as compared to the more diffuse text-centric data points. It is not clear what this means, but the text-centric classes appear to have been more idiosyncratic, causing more variation in their SET results. The non-text-centric classes fell more on the upper end of the course ratings scale, with a higher number of highly ranked courses regardless of workload. The text-centric classes were less popular with students.

Within the context of this pilot study, these illustrations of the relationship of workload to course rating seem to support both the popular belief that students prefer courses with a lower workload, but also support the research that requiring less work does not ensure high ratings. The popular belief about students preferring less work would predict that the highest number of classes fall in the "high workload and low ratings" and "low workload and high ratings" quadrants, and that is what we see in these data. However, as the perceived workload gets higher, we do not see the course rating dropping systematically. If the relationship between workload and course rating were stronger, there would be a tighter cluster of data points accumulating from the upper left corner of the chart down to the bottom right corner. But we do not see such a distribution. There are eight out of the 29 classes that defy the popular assumption

and receive either low ratings and a low workload (3) or high ratings and a high workload (5). Of the five courses that were highly rated and were perceived to have a high workload, three were non-text-centric and two were text-centric, and one was taught by a rhetoric specialist with the remaining four taught by literature specialists. Such instructors, who manage to challenge students and still receive high course ratings, deserve to be recognized in their departments if they consistently produce these results.

As for the results I obtained in my gender analysis, I was surprised to find that within this small sample, there was virtually no difference between the male and female instructors on the measures I most expected to break down along gendered lines. This would seem to contradict research (though not on composition instructors) that indicates women are typically more concerned with creating a safe classroom environment and being emotionally engaged with students than their male colleagues. These numbers do support the research that male and female instructors tend to receive the same average SET scores, although female instructors spend more time and/or invest more emotional labor in their classes to receive equal scores, at the expense of their tenure and promotion.

Finally, the minuscule difference I found between instructors with a background in literature or rhetoric may indicate that there is little difference in the way that these instructors teach rhetoric at UT. Alternatively, if the instructors do have different approaches, it could indicate that students can't tell the difference or expect that a rhetoric class will be very similar to a literature class. A qualitative study conducted by Bergmann and Zepernick revealed that students regarded their literature and composition classes to be indistinguishable. The authors note that the composition classes were mainly taught by literature specialists, who used a variety of approaches, including current-traditional, expressivist, argument, rhetorical theory, and academic discourse (130). An extensive qualitative study using classroom observations would be able to shed more light on the pedagogical approaches of literature and rhetoric specialists.

CONCLUSION

I began the research for this chapter hoping to find out whether SETs, an easily obtainable and familiar data source, might tell us anything about the type of curricular questions I've been asking throughout this dissertation: what kinds of assessment methods can give us satisfactory information about whether a particular instructional method/text/strategy improves students' writing? Student evaluations only give us students' opinions about what they learned, but as the target audience for our teaching, their opinions should count for something. I arrived at three main findings through analyzing the small sample in my pilot study.

The first finding is that the perceived workload of the class seemed to have a small positive effect on SET scores, though the correlation was not one-to-one. There were classes that followed the expected pattern of receiving high SET scores in a class where the workload was low and vice versa, but also classes that garnered low SET scores for low workloads and high scores for high workloads. For administrators, one way to identify high quality instruction could be mapping student evaluations of the course along with their perception of the workload, as I showed in Figures 1-4. If the upper right quadrant of the graph includes those classes that were regarded as having a high workload but still got high satisfaction scores, this can be a way to identify excellent course design through a more sophisticated measure than the lone course satisfaction score. The instructors who can make a challenging workload seem beneficial to students deserve to be recognized.

The second result was that there was no difference in SET scores between instructors with literature or rhetoric backgrounds. We might find different results in a larger sample, and identifying such patterns would help us understand the strengths of both sets of instructors in order to better prepare or train them to teach composition. Literature specialists teach and will continue to teach most sections of composition. If they get lower SET scores in composition than rhetoric specialists, it is important to the success of our students that we devise strategies for improving these instructors'

pedagogical techniques and course design skills. If their scores are equal to or higher than rhetoric specialists' and we also find that the students' writing is of comparable quality, then we need to identify other ways to support instructors who need instruction in composition pedagogy.

My third finding was related to the gender of the instructor. In my sample, there was no difference in SET scores between male and female RHE 309K instructors, a result in line with voluminous research also reporting no difference across gender lines. However, a different line of research suggests that female and male instructors put in different amounts and kinds of work to achieve those seemingly equal results.

These results, particularly the ones about instructor background and gender, seem straightforward, but there are reasons I uncovered in my research why we should be suspicious of their apparent simplicity. Regarding the question about how much literature or other types of texts is appropriate for a writing class, SETs don't seem to be a very good method for getting feedback on curricular choices. Many researchers argue that students are the best sources of information about instructional delivery since they are the intended audience, but faculty peers are more qualified to assess instructional design and disciplinary expertise (Arreola; Gould; Theall and Franklin "Looking"). Syllabus design and choice of readings fall under the category of instructional design, so there is some agreement that an instructor's colleagues or supervisors are better qualified to evaluate things like the balance of literature and other texts or the balance of reading days and non-reading days. Including the evaluations of one's peers on such curricular matters is one reason why there is a near-consensus among researchers in a variety of field about the importance of teaching portfolios. I say "near-consensus" because it often happens that administrators responsible for staffing decisions rely on SETs as the sole source of information about a teacher's effectiveness. Though relying on SETs is an easy route, it is not a sensible one.

As an example, we might look at Mark's class, the class I discussed in chapter three in which the instructor spent 45% of the syllabus days on literary texts, none on the rhetoric text, and whose assignments were thin on rhetorical concepts. Mark's overall course score was 4.1, above the median. His overall instructor score was 4.4, also above the median. However, his workload score was the lowest in my sample, and the score for the question "At this point in time, I feel that this class will be (or has already been) of value to me" was the second lowest in my sample. This is a case where a mentor could almost definitely provide some assistance to the instructor, perhaps helping Mark clarify the goals for the course and revising the syllabus and assignments to align more closely with those goals. But if we are just looking at the overall instructor and course scores, it wouldn't be as clear that this instructor could benefit from some guidance about how to design a rhetoric course.

An alternate example would be an instructor who is trying some innovative assignments or evaluation techniques and gets unimpressive scores while she works out the kinks. If a high-stakes decision about staffing were made strictly on the basis of these unimpressive scores, it might have the effect of punishing or preventing innovation. A mentor could help the instructor refine the course to capitalize on the strengths of its creative design, and a portfolio evaluation method at the administrative level could reveal the promise of the course beyond the initial low SET scores. In both of these cases, some mid-semester formative assessment could help these instructors make timely adjustments to the class before the final SET is administered.

I'm especially suspicious of the lack of difference between men's and women's SET scores because of the research indicating that students hold them to different standards when it comes to the emotional labor required to make students feel cared for and heard. Aggregating all rhetoric courses taught at this institution, we see that the instructors garner highest marks for caring about students and allowing them freedom of expression, suggesting that these two student-centered measures are very important to students in their writing classes. Along these lines, Beason says that

good writing teachers must be affectively as well as cognitively engaged in their teaching. Gould says that students expect the kind of committed and passionate affective model that English teachers (literature and composition) may be best able to inhabit.

Moving from Beason's and Gould's speculations into the empirical realm, researchers have demonstrated that female instructors tend to invest more time and emotional labor in working with students, and that this additional investment hurts their tenure and promotion cases. Composition is a female-dominated field. If what I'm suggesting is true--that female composition instructors have to put in more hours to meet the expectations of emotional availability of their students in order to achieve SET parity with their male colleagues--then the stakes here are high. If administrative decisions are made purely on the basis of SET scores, a seemingly objective measure, especially since women's and men's scores tend to be equal, these decisions actually contribute to the institutionalizing of sexism. It's important that we find out more about the hours per student put in by female and male composition instructors and how this matches up with their SET scores. How can we use this information to make hiring and promotion decisions more equitable?

In closing, what I learned about SETs highlighted all that we don't know about how students evaluate composition courses. This gap in our knowledge is large since most of the educational research (which itself lacks consensus) has been conducted on a variety of classes, many of them lecture-based, with very few studies of composition classes exclusively. We don't know much about how the unique characteristics of composition classes make them different from the often lecture- and exam-based classes predominately studied in SET research. These characteristics include the small class sizes, close student-teacher interaction, and the frequent critiques teachers provide about students' writing.⁶⁷ The sole instrument developed to

⁶⁷ Another such characteristic is students' perception of their instructor's objectivity, since we might expect students to think of the grading in a writing class as being more subjective than the grading methods used in a course where multiple-choice exams are used.

assess student responses in composition classes (Witte et al) included questions about the degree to which instructors were encouraging, their role in facilitating class discussion, the quality of their paper comments, and their interactions with students in class, among other factors. These concerns all fall under the umbrella of emotional labor and are unique to small classes that rely on a carefully constructed relationship between teacher and student, as opposed to a class where the teacher's job is primarily to deliver information or help students pass a multiple-choice exam. I'm raising the question of whether emotional labor is more important for composition teachers than others.

The necessity of more emotional labor for composition teachers is not limited to women. What might this mean for student evaluations of both genders? Might students give composition teachers higher scores for being more affectively available than they do their other teachers, that is, in larger study of composition classes, might a teacher's emotional labor make a bigger difference than in other types of classes? Would we find that teachers who don't use student-centered pedagogy are especially penalized in composition as compared with other disciplines?

Historically and presently, we value teaching quality more than in other fields. Figuring out ways to reward high quality teachers and support struggling teachers is crucial for our discipline. I have demonstrated in this chapter the importance of supplementing SET data with other forms of input when assessing teaching to compensate for the ways in which SET data may fall short of being the easy marker of teaching quality that we are seeking in this age of assessment.

Conclusion

My dissertation grew out of my interests in literature, composition, and the history of English as a discipline. In the earliest versions of this project, I was interested in late nineteenth-century rhetoric textbooks and puzzled about the snippets of literature in them. Why was Shakespeare being used as a model alongside journalists and other writers who had a broader appeal to that nineteenth-century audience? How did the examples in the rhetoric textbooks relate to what the teachers actually wanted students to write? In our own classes, what do we want students to write? How are the texts we assign related to our goals for the class? These questions structured the directions my chapters took even though they look quite different from each other because of the variety of research methods I use. I found it necessary to use a variety of research methods—textual, qualitative, quantitative, and interdisciplinary—in order to address problems I saw in the conversations composition scholars were having about literature in composition. Many sections of the dissertation read like a literature review. One reason for this is that my work is at times meta-critical. Scholarship about literature, composition, pedagogy, and other fields is often my primary source, though it is typically thought of as a secondary source. This dissertation is in part *about* the conversations scholars have about composition pedagogy, and part of my aim is to close-read these exchanges and taxonomize their positions.

I first noticed that the conversation about literature in composition, which flared up in the early 1990s with the Tate/Lindemann debate, was never resolved but was perpetually at a low simmer. The changes in literary theory and aims of composition programs since that time had prompted scholars to revisit the issue in two edited volumes about using literature to teach composition, published by NCTE and MLA, signaling the fact that this debate was still relevant to the field. However, I didn't see anyone intervening to clarify the charges about humanism that were still

being made, either explicitly or implicitly. I took this as my task in chapter one. These charges stemmed from the belief that literary texts were caught up in an ideology called “humanism,” and that a teacher using literary texts was necessarily an elitist and/or a formalist critic who lectured about literature in class and expected students to revere a traditional canon of texts. In the 1980s and 1990s, partially due to the work of Jim Berlin, there was a fantasy that if teachers got their theory right, their pedagogy would follow. So Lindemann and others sought to argue humanism and literature out of first-year composition with the expectation that the focus of the class could become on their preferred goals—making students’ texts and academic writing the focus of the class.

But I argue in chapter one that these critics were wrong at every step. The sometimes problematic relationship between literature departments and composition programs can’t be summed up with one word. There is not a stable and cohesive set of beliefs called “humanism,” and those who subscribe to some of the *topoi* attributed to humanism do not subscribe to all of them. Therefore, it’s not possible to label someone a humanist and think that you’ve successfully questioned their entire pedagogical approach. The presence of literature in a composition class is not an irrefutable signal that the instructor is not teaching writing effectively. Literature be used in a variety of ways to meet a variety of aims, and in my second chapter I investigated what some of those uses were by looking at composition anthologies.

One of the longest enduring arguments in favor of using literature to teach writing is that literary texts are superior examples of written products and students can learn what good writing is by reading them. “Good writing,” known in the classical canon as *style*, is, of course, open to interpretation and dependent on context. I found that in the conversation about style, the various contexts of writing programs and their different aims were not being accounted for, just as within the conversation about literature in composition. It is crucial that we specify what “good writing” means and for what purposes or audiences it is good, both for our students and in our professional conversations. To investigate how style and literature were treated in one

very important and tangible part of the field, I analyzed composition anthologies. These textbooks are particularly significant in our field due to the number of short-term faculty who teach the class; if they have little time to prepare, are required to use a particular textbook, or have little training in composition (or all three), the textbook assumes a more prominent role in the instructor's and students' experience of the class than in other college classes where the instructor has more freedom and expertise to deviate from such course material. I found that literature was not included in half the books I examined, and in the books where it did appear, it was generally not treated as prose the students should strive to emulate, but rather an alternative way to discuss the chapter themes or to provoke reflection and discussion.

Looking at textbooks was one way of determining the current place of literature in composition, an approach I felt was lacking in the disciplinary conversation, where I had noticed that critics and proponents of using literature didn't have much data beyond classroom anecdotes. To address this lack of information, in my third chapter I examined the syllabi designed by literature and rhetoric specialists to see how much literature they included. Contrary to what I thought I'd find, literature specialists at UT don't design rhetoric courses with lots of literature on the syllabus, but they do spend more days covering texts of other kinds—nonfiction and rhetoric textbooks—than rhetoric specialists. This often occurs at the expense of focusing on student writing in class and could be remedied with professional development that provides ways to work on writing process in class. We shouldn't assume, however, that the instructors expect students to revere the literary texts or use them as catalysts for discussing enduring humanist issues, since many of the instructors I spoke with saw the literary texts as making arguments in similar ways to the more straightforward nonfiction texts.

I realized early in the process of investigating why our conversation was in such a muddled and uniformed state that if I was trying to make claims for what "better" teaching looked like, I needed to be able to say why one way was better than another. Student evaluations of teaching (SETs) are an easily accessible and

frequently studied method of assessing teaching from one perspective (the students'), but I wanted to know what SETs could tell us about teaching quality in composition classes. I concluded that they are a problematic way of assessing teaching quality, even though there is a great quantity of evidence that says these scores are valid indicators of student learning. Most of that research has been done on classes that are different from composition classes, and the particulars of composition classes (small class sizes, frequent critique of writing, lack of customized testing instruments, the necessity of emotional labor and its implications for gender) are unique enough that we can't be lumped in with the introductory lecture courses that frequently form the basis of educational researchers' data set on SETs.

Looking at the evaluations for RHE 309K classes didn't seem to reveal anything very dramatic. But my findings of no difference between instructors of different academic backgrounds and genders become significant when paired with the research about instructional design and gender. If literature specialists base their classes more on reading texts than writing them and don't have the expertise in composition that their rhetoric colleagues have, yet receive the same SET scores, does that tell us that the background of the instructor doesn't matter to students? Or does that tell us that SETs don't measure the kinds of pedagogical knowledge and skills that we thought were important? The results about genders should give us pause for a different reason. The seeming equality between instructors of both genders in their SET scores belies researchers' findings that women must put in more hours and emotional labor to achieve the same results as men. With those two reasons to doubt the seeming parity of the two groups of instructors I compared, the prospect of digging deeper into a larger sample looks more worthwhile.

In sum, each chapter is about how we might be able to tell if teachers are good at teaching composition. My research reveals that it's not as simple as finding out if they use literature or not. It reveals the need to dismantle some common assumptions about course design and what constitutes good teaching, while pointing the way toward new ways of thinking about these two things: Ideology does not determine

pedagogy. “Good writing” is a non-existent entity. It’s not which texts are taught that’s as important as how they are taught. Student surveys are not a quick and easy way to assess teaching quality.

So, to circle back to the Tate/Lindemann debate where I started, I’m with Lindemann when she says that a writing class should include more focus on producing student texts than analyzing what’s been written by published authors, whether those published authors are novelists, poets, bloggers, op-ed columnists, philosophers, or textbook writers. But I’m against Lindemann when she says that using literature will lead to other certain specific pedagogical choices, like writing New Critical assignments, lecturing to deliver information about the text, or grading for correctness. That simply isn’t true. There is a wide variety of goals, teaching methods, assessment methods, and texts that can be used to teach writing effectively, and choosing one of them doesn’t determine the others. Some combinations work better than others, and teachers should be mindful about the goal of the class above all else, and align the course design with the goal. Lindemann’s and others’ assumptions about what happens when literature appears on the syllabus just aren’t true.

I’m in agreement with Tate when he says that literature is one type of text among many that might help accomplish the goals of the course, which to him, involve helping students grow into mature adults and discover some of the complexities about human existence. That’s fine, but if the goals are more pragmatic, say, related to writing in the disciplines or writing about writing, the role of literature looks less clear. My impression (though I consider it an informed impression) is that many composition programs are transitioning to these more practical models and away from the humanistic enduring-issues model, so it would be interesting to more closely investigate the place of literature in composition classes outside UT given these trends.

I’m sympathetic to arguments that say we should bridge the gap between the background of most of the composition workforce (contingent faculty who studied literature) and the knowledge and skills they need to teach composition. This reality

of staffing is not going away—there just aren't enough composition specialists to teach the thousands of composition sections American students need. And there are ways that studying literature attunes a person to the written word that can be used to teach students close reading, which can be a useful skill for a novice college writer. But I'm not sympathetic to arguments about what's best for the instructor instead of the student. One of these is that since literature specialists are the ones who teach writing, they should teach what they know. Or that since literature specialists read good writing, they can automatically write well and can teach writing better than scholars of other backgrounds. It's true that some of them do receive training in teaching composition by accident of institutional history, which differentiates them from people in other fields, but I think in addition to close reading, "soft skills" like patience and creativity make it likely that someone will be a good writing teacher. Our Undergraduate Writing Center employs graduate students from across the university as writing consultants, and I think this model could be a useful one for staffing writing programs. Though it might not seem likely, the horrendous job market for literature PhDs might eventually serve to decrease the number of literature graduate students available to staff first-year composition classes, and until there are enough dedicated composition specialists (a day which may never come), I believe we should learn how to build on the strengths of teachers from a variety of scholarly backgrounds. Such diversity cannot be bad for a field that reaches such a wide swath of students and includes such a wide variety of aims.

Teaching writing, first-year composition specifically, is a privilege, and it's important. It should be done by trained professionals who want to be there, not, as I have seen happen, reluctant instructors who see the class as a burden, obstacle, detour, consolation prize, or punishment. We should get better at identifying who seems genuinely enthusiastic about teaching writing and has the interpersonal skills to pull it off, make sure they have at least a semester of training in composition pedagogy, and give them job security so they can focus on teaching and not living paycheck to paycheck. Obviously, this is a much loftier goal than a professor or writing program

administrator like I hope to be can achieve in a lifetime, but this is the project I want to be involved in.

In the meantime, while we lobby for the resources necessary to fix the dual tragedies of the contingent labor force and the academic job market as a whole, there are ways of thinking and acting that will help us become better at what we do. Teaching, the teaching of writing in particular, is worthy of its own body of scholarship. In my own scholarship, I hope to learn more about the different ways teaching can be effective and the ways we think we can identify good examples of it. I want to use this information—whether I glean it from sifting through scholarship, observing effective teachers, or quantifying aspects of teaching that can be measured—to help novice composition teachers feel more comfortable about what they are doing and do their jobs better. More information can lead to better teaching which will hopefully lead to improved student learning.

In addition to research, which takes a notoriously long time to conduct, write about, and disseminate, we teachers can serve as immediately accessible resources for each other. We need to get into each others' classrooms. We need to have a semi-formal mentoring system to foster innovation, faculty development, and support. Everything I know about teaching I learned from somebody else—my high school teachers, college professors, the teachers I worked with in Japan, the professors I TA'd for, the professors in my graduate program, scholars who write about pedagogy, the teaching practicum faculty who taught me and who I worked alongside. But most of all, I learned from the friends and colleagues I met in graduate school, who never cease to inspire and challenge me. In the next phase of my career, I hope to be the kind of scholar who helps others teach and the kind of teacher who never stops learning.

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