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A LEGACY OF BASIC WRITING INSTRUCTION

ABSTRACT: *This article introduces George Jardine, an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish professor of logic and philosophy at the University of Glasgow, and demonstrates how his practical plan for teaching beginning writers prefigures contemporary theories and practices of modern basic writing instruction. The author draws parallels between the works of Jardine and Mina Shaughnessy to illustrate how a theoretical and practical bridge based on social and economic factors does exist between early nineteenth- and late twentieth-century basic writing instruction.*

I recently had the opportunity to examine the Scottish manuscript holdings concerning a little-known, nineteenth-century teacher at the University of Glasgow, George Jardine. As I attempted to align Jardine's findings with earlier theories of rhetoric, I found myself repeatedly comparing both his classroom experiences and writings to modern-day theories and practices characteristic of basic writing. Although current American theorists and practitioners are certainly well-acquainted and dedicated to the nineteenth-century rhetorician George Jardine's concept of education, very few are even familiar with this Scottish educator's name. Jardine's intense concern with communication and comprehension, student-based learning, the preparation of students to function in and contribute to society, and pedagogical practices which we currently label "peer-editing," "writing across the cur-

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riculum," "writing as process," and "writing as discovery," reveal his anticipation of much of what we consider to be twentieth-century developments in the field of composition and rhetoric.

Although Donald Stewart identifies in *The Present State of Scholarship in Historical and Contemporary Rhetoric* 160 pieces of scholarship published from 1980 to the present having some bearing on nineteenth-century rhetoric, only one work by Winifred Bryan Horner mentions Jardine. Stephen North in his influential work *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: The Portrait of an Emerging Field* (1987) is critical of historical studies that investigate the work of one particular figure; however, the case of George Jardine proves that the need for this type of research in nineteenth-century history of composition still exists. We generally don't know who the influential figures of this period were or what contributions they made to modern writing theory. One reason for the obscurity of nineteenth-century rhetoricians' work lies in the fact that the practice of widely publishing professors' lectures decreased by the end of the eighteenth century; therefore, many nineteenth-century professors' lectures and thoughts are preserved only in student notes, letters, and other materials in manuscript form in Scottish manuscript libraries. Winifred Bryan Horner offers another explanation why the advances of many nineteenth-century rhetoricians were subsequently obscured:

> The Scottish universities initiated a series of "reforms" that abandoned the nineteenth-century philosophic and democratic system and resulted in one which conformed to the English university model and which was dedicated to the education of the select few. . . . [T]he important records of their work were often lost or overlooked in the persistent call for educational "reform." (*Nineteenth-Century Scottish Rhetoric* 7)

Although enormously popular at his own institution during his own time, Jardine's work is lost to modern composition instructors. The nineteenth century provides the immediate background for current rhetorical theory. We must study the tradition we come from in order to put into perspective our own contributions.

Jardine is a forerunner of contemporary composition researchers whom North labels "practitioners," teachers who are in the best position to conduct inquiries but often the least prepared or equipped to do so (35). North explains that the most successful practitioner-researchers are those who (1) stay in the field for a long period of time, (2) work under favorable conditions, and (3)

strive to make their practice a form of inquiry (35). George Jardine meets these qualifications. From 1774 to 1824, Jardine taught logic and philosophy at only one institution, the University of Glasgow ("George Jardine" 387). Upon taking over the class, he realized that both the class curriculum and lecture method of teaching did not meet the needs of his students and that even when the brighter students grasped the abstract principles taught in the class, the material would not aid the student realistically in any future profession or employment. As a result of his observations, Jardine radically altered his class to include daily free writing exercises, sequenced essay assignments, and peer evaluation to facilitate the development of communication skills which would help his students function in society. He believed that students failed to learn unless they were required to write essays and compositions that were then critiqued by both the teacher and the other students (*Lectures on Logic and Belle Lettres* iii). From Jardine's letters preserved in the manuscript library at the University of Glasgow and from the testimony of his colleagues found in the Royal Commission Reports, it is evident that he was highly regarded by both his students and colleagues, who after his retirement carried on the method of instruction that he had initiated. Finally, he organized his research and disseminated his findings to other practitioners and researchers in his major work *Outlines of Philosophical Education*, first published in 1818 and reprinted in 1825. Jardine describes *Outlines* as "having been found by experience to answer at least some of the most important purposes of a first philosophical education . . . combining elementary instruction with active habits on the part of the student" (*Outlines* 42). Jardine believes that improvements in education will occur only when teachers assume the duties of practitioner-researchers: "to collect facts,—to record observations,—to watch under the influence of education;—and thus to unite their efforts for the general improvement of our academical establishments" (*Outlines* 524).

A Profile of Jardine's Students

The eighteenth century was a period of great change for the Scottish universities. The regenting system of instruction, whereby one professor taught a group of students all courses during their entire program, was abolished during this century at the Scottish universities—at Edinburgh in 1708, at Glasgow in 1727, at St. Andrews in 1747, and at King's College in Aberdeen in 1798. The regents, who were responsible for teaching a range of classes

including Greek, Latin, Logic, Moral and Natural Philosophy, Mathematics, Chemistry, and Rhetoric, were gradually replaced by specialist professors. As a result, the quality of education and instruction was strengthened. The first university professor to teach English composition, literature, and rhetoric was John Stevenson, professor of logic and metaphysics at Edinburgh from 1730 to 1777 and most noted for his two famous pupils Hugh Blair and John Witherspoon—two figures who helped institutionalize the study of English in Scotland and America. Before becoming professors at the major Scottish universities, many of the most noted figures of this period, such as Adam Smith and Hugh Blair, delivered series of public lectures on English language and literature. Interest in English language studies spread because these lecturers were often hired to teach at universities other than at the ones where they delivered their public lectures. The Scottish professors were not paid set salaries. Instead their income was derived from fees paid by students in their classes, giving rise to the need to address popular interests and topical issues. These lectures appealed to the many provincial students who were trying to raise their station in life by improving their understanding and usage of English. The demographic make-up and number of students attending the universities also underwent great change during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries due to the growth of Scotland's large industrial cities and the Scottish philosophy that education was a public responsibility and should be open to all classes of students. Glasgow University kept abreast of these changes and thrived during this period.

According to the *University of Glasgow Calendar*, the number of students at the institution increased from approximately 150 in the early seventeenth century to approximately 400 by 1702 (xx). Enrollment continued to increase steadily for the next two centuries as the industrial city of Glasgow grew and expanded. As enrollment increased, the "Common Table" was abandoned, and Glasgow gradually became a nonresidential university with only forty students "living in" by 1704 (*Calendar* xx). The strength of the university increased in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for a variety of reasons: its prominent professors, among whom the most influential and well-known were Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith in the eighteenth century; its sensitivity to topical issues and historical changes; generous support from its benefactors; and its ability to keep abreast of new academic developments. The University's adaptability and strength are evidenced in the number of professorships restored or founded during this

period: seven new professorships were created or reinstated by 1732, and at least eighteen new professorships were founded in the nineteenth century (*Calendar* xx). George Jardine's conduct of the logic and philosophy class at Glasgow reflects the strength of the University of Glasgow and, in fact, goes one step further. Jardine also took a stand against the prevailing practice at the Scottish universities to teach solely by lecture:

> It is with reluctance I repeat the remark, that, in several of our academical establishments, the philosophical education of youth is very imperfectly understood, and most inefficiently conducted. The exertion, whatever it may be, is almost entirely confined to the professor. The pupils are not required to do anything. It is pretty much left to themselves whether they shall be utterly idle or partially employed, whether they shall derive any advantage from their attendance on the lecture, or go away, at the end of the course, as ignorant and uninformed as when it began. Surely, the common sense of the nation will not much longer permit such an abuse of the means of improvement. (*Outlines* 523-24)

Jardine specifically states that his primary motivation for making theoretical and practical changes in the logic and philosophy class was the realization that the class no longer met the specific needs of his students: "[E]very day more and more convinced me that something was wrong in the system of instruction, pursued in this class;—that the subjects on which I lectured were not adapted to the age, the capacity, and the previous attainments of my pupils" (*Outlines* 27-28). More than any other factor, the background of his students at the University of Glasgow influenced Jardine's decision to make changes in both the subject matter and method of instruction in his class. According to Jardine, young men at this time (women were not admitted) were sent to college at a much younger age than had previously been the custom (*Outlines* 28). In fact, the Scottish university students were often as young as thirteen or fourteen in the late eighteenth century and were graduated at age seventeen or eighteen. In Scotland, the student population was often drawn primarily from the working classes. By the nineteenth century, the University of Glasgow attracted a diversified range of students, consisting of many different ages, classes, and occupations. Jardine explains that his students were younger than their predecessors and, therefore, educationally unprepared for the lectures in ontology, metaphysics, and

Greek which characterized the logic and philosophy class. In addition, they were lured away from college at an earlier age than students of the past because of increased employment opportunities both in Scotland and abroad, opportunities which children of the working classes could not easily afford to ignore (*Outlines* 28).

Although Jardine's students were not necessarily "typical" basic writers—those who produce small numbers of words with large numbers of errors (Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 14)—they were beginning writers, who in many cases were ill-equipped and unprepared for university classes. In addition, they were receiving instruction which they had neither the prerequisites nor perhaps the maturity to understand, like many modern students. Characteristic of basic writers, Jardine's students also came from diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds where the students had limited writing experience due to the traditional lecture method of instruction and where people spoke in a variety of rusticisms. Jardine explains that one goal of his students was to acquire an understanding and appreciation of "correct, chaste and graceful English style" to improve their station in life; he advocates writing as a means of achieving this end but warns that "the art of composition is one of no easy attainment . . . without careful study and constant habit, in endeavoring to acquire it" (*Outlines* 489-90). Contemporary composition theory opposes teaching methods that demand slavish devotion to "correct" English; however, for basic writing students the desire to write "correctly" is often paramount. Mina Shaughnessy explains that "so absolute is the importance of errors in the minds of many writers that 'good writing' to them means 'correct writing,' nothing more" (*Errors and Expectations* 8). Like many contemporary basic writers, Jardine's students were trying to improve their lot through education. A knowledge of "correct" English improved their employment opportunities. Because of the shortened time spent at college, the students' education became "less systematic and considerably more abridged. Thus, the changes which were taking place in society required a more miscellaneous and practical kind of instruction in the first philosophy class" (*Outlines* 28-29).

The syllabus for the logic and philosophy class prior to Jardine's appointment as professor of logic was as follows:

- October 10 (commencement of the term) to November l—the students read and analyzed portions of memorabilia of Socrates.
- November 1 to February l—the instructor explained Aristotle's logic.

• February 1 to April 15—the instructor lectured on metaphysics.

• April 15 to the end of the term—the instructor lectured specifically on ontology "or that branch of metaphysical science which comprehends the various doctrines on the general attributes of being, existence, essence, unity, bonity, truth, relations, modes of possibility, impossibility, necessity, contingency, and other similar abstract conceptions of pure intellect" (*Outlines* 23).

The lectures were delivered early in the morning and were followed by an oral one-hour examination in the afternoon. At intervals throughout the term, the instructor assigned two or three compositions loosely connected to the subjects discussed in class (*Outlines* 23-24). From his experience as both a student in and later as professor of the philosophy class at Glasgow, Jardine surmises that this method of teaching failed because the class was both boring and useless. In fact, the class was routinely known as "the drowsy shop of logic and metaphysics" among the students (*Outlines* 24). Jardine claimed that traditional education failed to prepare the students "to adorn conversation, or to qualify the student for the concerns of active life" (*Outlines* 26). Jardine knew that knowledge alone was not enough for the Scottish students to succeed in business: "A man may be capable of great reflections but if he cannot communicate it to others, it can be of but little use" (GUL ms. Gen. 737, vol. 2, 155-56). He felt that the Scottish Arts program depended upon writing and rhetoric in its fullest sense.

Citizens of Glasgow, a growing commercial city, echoed Jardine's thoughts on the unsuitableness of the class of philosophy. In an undocumented reference, Jardine quotes a published opinion of education at this time:

> Some of the classes in universities bear evident marks of their original design; being either totally, or in part, intended for the disputes and wranglings of divines, and of little use to the lawyer or physician, and still less to the merchant and the gentleman. Of this sort we reckon logic and metaphysics. These arts or sciences (for it is not agreed yet which of them they are) to the greatest part of students, are quite unintelligible; and, if they could be understood, we cannot for our life discover their use. (qtd. in *Outlines* 26-27)

The successful merchants, who financially supported the University, called for a liberal arts education tempered with classes

suitable for students going into business. Jardine agreed and called for an alteration and expansion of the class in logic and philosophy:

> It ought therefore to be the great object of a first philosophy class to supply the means of cultivation, . . . to present appropriate subjects for their exercise; to watch over their movements, and to direct their expanding energies. . . . To secure a suitable education for young men destined to fill various and very different situations in life, the course of instruction ought not certainly to be limited to the narrow range of logic and metaphysics; but, on the contrary, should be made to comprehend the elements of those other branches of knowledge, upon which the investigation of science, and the successful despatch [sic] of business, are found chiefly to depend. (*Outlines* 31)

Jardine believed that any change in the class depended on a change in the role of the teacher. It was no longer adequate for the instructor to simply convey information in a teacher-centered lecture. Instead the teacher must take on the role of "companion or friend," stimulating and cultivating the student's natural abilities "when his difficulties are most formidable" (*Outlines* 315). Jardine encouraged teachers to closely analyze the needs of their students and to abandon prescriptive textbooks in favor of picking and choosing appropriate subject matter for the students from all the arts and sciences (*Outlines* 51).

Jardine also supported discussion and writing as a way of learning in conjunction with lectures. He knew that adopting his plan would mean more work for the teacher than simply composing lectures, but he felt his system was necessary in the Scottish universities where there were many students who were "not qualified, either in respect of age or of previous acquirements" (*Outlines* 427). Jardine used writing as a means of encouraging students to be their own best teachers and as a way of tracking their development. For example, he discouraged the traditional practice of taking down verbatim the teacher's lectures and instead advised students to "commit to writing, in their own composition, whatever they judge[d] to be of leading importance" (*Outlines* 279). He encouraged his students to write down the most interesting or important thoughts they encountered as they read for pleasure (*Selections* 282). And he promoted a method of revision by suggesting that students keep a journal of all the letters they both received and wrote, encouraging them to write several drafts in

order to teach themselves "accuracy and exactness" (*Selections* 284). His more formal assignments included daily writing exercises, which he wrote along with and shared with his students; a lecture review through discussion and writing; and a hierarchy of four levels of sequenced writing assignments spaced throughout the course. Jardine stressed the concept of writing as process, and recognized the value of prewriting and revision: "In all cases, perfect specimens must be preceded by many unsuccessful efforts." Imperfect early drafts are the "natural and indispensable steps which lead to higher degrees of perfection" (*Outlines* 313). Both Jardine's problems and solutions sound familiar and are instructive for modern teachers at the college level who face large classes and inadequately prepared students.

George Jardine and Mina Shaughnessy

A comparison of the works of Jardine and Mina Shaughnessy supports the claim that Jardine prefigured many modern theories and practices of basic writing. Both educators were instructing a population of students who varied from the traditional student; both were dedicated to searching for alternatives to the pedagogical methods of instructing these new students; and both wrote easily accessible treatises that outlined their own teaching problems and solutions. These educators wrote from their personal experiences as classroom teachers and directed their works to teachers who are only beginning to work with disadvantaged students. Just as the demographic makeup of Jardine's students reflected Scotland's democratic philosophy toward education and the growth and change taking place in the industrial city of Glasgow, so did Shaughnessy's students reflect America's shifting society and policy toward education in the 1960s and 1970s The Open Admissions policy of the 1970s, which was enacted at many American universities, including The City University of New York where Shaughnessy taught, was part of a vast shift within American society "from a rural to an urban population, from an industrial to a service-oriented labor force, from a culture of conformity to one of diversity" (Shaughnessy, "Open Admissions" 401). This new policy guaranteed to every New York City resident who held a high school diploma admission into one of eighteen tuition-free colleges. The emphasis of public education in America during this period was to prepare a wide range of students for increased business opportunities within a growing urban area, an educational scenario similar to the one of Jardine's time. This policy

lowered or in many cases eradicated college entrance requirements so that higher education was made accessible to everyone. In most cases, these students simply did not possess the prerequisites necessary to benefit from traditional pedagogical methods and curriculum—much like Jardine's students of more than 150 years earlier.

Shaughnessy's works, on which all subsequent scholarship in the field of basic writing relies to some degree, echo Jardine's twofold teaching objective: to encourage students to cultivate their individual reasoning abilities and to perfect their communication skills. She stresses that by and large basic writers are not students who have failed but rather beginning students whose needs have not been met by traditional instruction. Like Jardine's major treatise *Outlines of Philosophical Education*, Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* outlines what has been traditionally taught in her classes and why this curriculum and methodology now fail. Both teachers call for renewed respect for students' needs and abilities, and offer concrete pedagogical advice for meeting these needs based on their classroom experiences.

Specifically, Shaughnessy embeds within *Errors and Expectations* three primary goals for teachers of basic writers: (1) to encourage students to recognize their own thought processes, examining their responses to outside information; (2) to stress learning by writing; and (3) to instill in students the ability to connect all parts of grammar and logic. Likewise, in *Outlines*, Jardine includes a chapter entitled "Science of the Human Mind," four chapters on theme writing, and a chapter concerning logic and grammar entitled "On The Origin and Progress of Language, and the Principles of General Grammar." The strong correlation between Jardine and Shaughnessy's teaching objectives is evidenced in her echo of Jardine's emphasis on training students for business and civic responsibility: "The goals of a basic writing course are generally practical, namely, the development of a readable expository style that will serve for courses and, later, for professional or civic writing assignments" (*Errors and Expectations* 280). Shaughnessy and Jardine agree that students must learn to master formal written English because it is the "language of public transactions—educational, civic, and professional" (Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 125).

Shaughnessy and Jardine suggest similar practical methods for carrying out these goals. First, in the matter of errors they agree that teachers should initially be "satisfied with overlooking some of these faults" (Jardine, *Outlines* 366), so that students are not

totally alienated from the process of writing. Shaughnessy explains that "there is no reason why the BW student must wait until all his sentence problems have been dealt with before he can begin to work on the organization and development of academic papers" (*Errors and Expectations* 274). They both stress that for the beginning writer the lack of "confidence in himself and in academic situations. . . magnifies his inadequacies" (Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 85). To remedy this self-doubt, they advocate trying to remove the stipulative academic conditions under which the student is expected to write. Jardine says that the "rules to juvenile composers should be addressed not only to their understanding but to their feelings, and should carry with them the authority both of reason and of sentiment" (*Outlines* 314). He explains that beginning writers can't be expected to compose the simplest of themes unless the teacher modifies assignments and encourages students to find their individual expression for thoughts on the topic (*Outlines* 315-16). Shaughnessy also says that "without reforming the conditions under which students are expected to write, particularly during the early stages of their apprenticeship, it is difficult to see how they will ever learn—or want to learn—to write well (*Errors and Expectations* 87). To successfully communicate, she explains that the beginning students must be made to believe that they have something of interest to say. They also agree that the teacher of beginning writers should avoid the temptation to mark all errors and instead "mingle some approbation with his censure, and lay hold of every thing that can afford encouragement" (Jardine, *Outlines* 366). Both teachers sequence assignments so that students can achieve early success and thereby build confidence in their writing abilities. The early assignments are less "academic" and attempt to alleviate the writer's self-doubts. Shaughnessy and Jardine both think that narrative papers focusing on historical events or ideas are good early assignments for beginning students (*Errors and Expectations* 288; *Outlines* 300).

Both teachers help beginning students get initiated into the writing process by focusing on the social act of writing. As a means of avoiding redundancy and regression, students are encouraged to write for a "real" audience—their peers. Jardine developed a detailed method of peer review whereby the students didn't merely point out defects but noted effective parts of the essays as well. His method of collaborative learning, similar to the one championed by Kenneth Bruffee in this century and advocated by Shaughnessy (*Errors and Expectations* 83), was designed

to improve the writing of both the writer and reviewer. Shaughnessy and Jardine agree that student writing should be reviewed by both peer tutors and teachers (*Errors and Expectations* 288; *Outlines* 367-68). They also agree that the classroom should be structured so that students can "talk openly about what they don't understand" (Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 40).

Shaughnessy and Jardine believe that teachers should write the assignments they give and revise student papers in demonstration lessons so the students better understand what is expected of them (*Errors and Expectations* 271; *Outlines* 306). They also suggest holding essay contests to generate models for the students to emulate (Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 271; Jardine, *Outlines* 376). And they believe that for beginning writers the biggest problem is getting started because these students perceive writing as a single act (Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 81; Jardine, *Outlines* 313). Jardine offers this insightful advice to beginning writers: "[I]t is abundantly obvious, that if a young man did not begin to compose on any subject till he has obtained a complete knowledge of it, he would never begin at all" (*Outlines* 313). Shaughnessy agrees that apprentice writers are "ignorant" of the process of writing and should not blame themselves "for having to revise or correct sentences or for taking a long time to get started or even for not being able to start at all" (*Errors and Expectations* 81).

A final arresting similarity between the theories of Jardine and Shaughnessy is found in their characterizations of the ideal teacher. In "Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing," Shaughnessy describes successful teachers as those who are willing to remediate their own teaching deficiencies and to seek a deeper understanding of their students' learning needs (302). She points out that the best teachers are the ones who instill in their students the ability to identify and remediate their own learning difficulties so that they are capable of teaching themselves (299). This characterization directly parallels Jardine's summation of a successful teacher:

> A teacher must not expect to carry his pupils, in the course of a few months, to the higher parts of those sciences, which it may, notwithstanding, be proper to put them in the way of studying for themselves. . . . By inducing them to employ their intellectual faculties, according to the plan of diligence proposed, he will enable them to know their own strength; and, at the same time, to acquire the command of a powerful instrument which nature has put into their hands, for the most valuable purposes. For when the habit of investigation is once formed, and the energies of the mind are

> placed under the control of well-regulated attention, the student becomes his own best teacher, and the important work of education goes on of its own accord, without either pain or effort. (*Outlines* 421-22)

Certainly, there are many differences between George Jardine's educational plan and modern basic writing instruction. He was not dealing with the wide ethnic and linguistic diversity that characterizes many modern basic writers. Also, 150 years of social, political, and economic development separates his work from ours. However, he did develop a plan for instructing beginning writers that is characteristic of basic writing instruction. The parallels between the work of Shaughnessy and Jardine illustrates the writing connection between modern practices and Jardine's educational plan. His adaptation of teaching methods and curriculum to meet the needs of poorly prepared students at the University of Glasgow provides an historical link in the developing discipline of composition.

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