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THE REVIVAL OF RHETORIC: A BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

ABSTRACT: The author asserts that renewed interest in rhetoric, evident throughout the professional discourse of English studies, is having a salutary effect on the theory and practice of the teaching of composition and basic writing.

The recent turn to theory in the English departments, especially poststructuralism, has brought "literature" and "composition" blocs closer together precisely in their joint arena of rhetorical studies. The result has been a strengthening of the subdiscipline of "rhetoric and composition" relative to the former hegemony of literary studies.

Looking at the convergence of classical and contemporary rhetoric, we see at least three important points of intersection where teachers of basic writing should want to look: First, rhetoric is not science, but *humanist* discourse aiming to promote democratic processes in public discourse. We find a second intersection in the return to prominence of the art of *persuasion*, as distinct from neutral communication. Yet a third area where old and new rhetorics intersect is the holding up of *invention* as a crucial tactic for the writer. After a survey of the historical texts, the article critically analyzes and recommends some practical guides for basic writing teachers.

Is the interest in rhetoric back because its time has come? As Dominick LaCapra puts it, "The study of rhetoric is once again on the agenda of humanistic studies. Scholars in various disciplines have become sensitive to the losses involved in its eclipse over the last three centuries, and a flurry of interest has marked the recent

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past (15)." This renewed interest in rhetoric is evident throughout the professional discourse of English studies—especially in the "conversation" of the composition community. I'm convinced that this return to rhetoric is, on the whole, having a salutary effect on the theory and practice of the teaching of writing.

In talking about rhetoric, many argue that only persuasive discourses belong to its domain, claiming Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as authority. Others, again turning to classical texts, particularly Cicero and Quintilian, claim all "normal" discourse is basically rhetorical. This view is shared by contemporary theorists such as James Berlin, Terry Eagleton, Vic Vitanza, and Ross Winterowd. They would argue that "informative" writing, for example, cannot be neutral but must persuade the readers that the facts are correct; scientists are most eager to persuade their peers (and the public) that their view of material reality is accurate; and poets are compelled to coax their audiences into their imaginary worlds.

The variety of meanings attached to rhetoric need not be confusing, however; this kind of semantic breadth is common. What is clear is that after being thought to reside chiefly in speech departments, rhetoric is now appearing more and more within the realm of English composition, an academic subdiscipline that now is speeding along new currents, perhaps toward some adventurous rapids. We can see this change in the new terminology: "composition" is now gradually being replaced by "rhetoric," or the two are linked together as in "rhetoric and composition." One root cause for this shift can be found in a current development within English departments:

Until recently, there has been a gulf between "literature" and "writing" in most English departments, the literature faculty enjoying greater prestige and salary than the "compositionists." But poststructuralism has, during the last decade, brought the two blocs closer together. Chiefly, the impact of deconstruction and neopragmatism comes from the insistence that language is not a mere technology, but the very ocean in which humanity swims. This is an epistemological position which asserts that our use of language is what constructs society, that reality is not described in language—rather that there is no reality except as soaked in discourse. When this philosophical notion is applied to rhetoric, we get the term "epistemic rhetoric," one which is apparently emerging from among various versions of rhetoric as the prevailing one. As James Berlin has written, "Epistemic rhetoric holds that language is the key to understanding the dialectical process involved in the rhetorical act. Knowledge does not exist apart from language" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 166):

Truth then is not located in some eternal and immutable realm of things of ideas or even relationships. It is a product of discursive formations, of individuals or groups or classes engaging in dialogue. This of course places rhetoric at the center of knowledge since it is in understanding the uses of language that we understand what an individual, group, or class holds to exist, to be good, and to be possible. ("Rhetoric Programs after World War II" 12)

If Berlin is correct, producing discourse—as in a writing class—obviously is not a "skill," like carpentry, but the motor for engaging in social life. Such a rhetorical approach dismisses the old attitude of looking at English composition as a toolshed where people hone a practical skill, as in detecting sentence fragments, and instead places it among the highest forms of human endeavor: learning how to define reality and how to have one's own effect on it at the same time.

In a parallel development, distinguished professors of literature such as Jonathan Culler, Paul de Man, Terry Eagleton, Gerald Graff, Frank Lentricchia, and Robert Scholes have taken a renewed interest in the evolution of composition studies. New winds from the spheres of literacy criticism have filled the sails of composition/rhetoric. Practitioners of deconstruction, for example, find enigmas in "plain" language and nonsense or contradictions in intricate reasoning; in short, they want to read texts against the grain, to reverse hierarchies—just as Mina Shaughnessy and other pioneers in the basic writing movement have done. Now, if with-the-grain readings of basic writers' essays seek errors, deconstructive readings might instead locate wisdom in student work, thus turning "correcting papers" into worthwhile reading. Thus rhetoricians among composition teachers now find allies in the land of literature. Discussions of rhetoric and deconstruction by Crowley, Derrida, Eagleton, and Neel are noted in the annotated bibliography which follows this essay.

Old and New Rhetorics Meet

Looking at the convergence of classical rhetoric and contemporary composition—this dancing embrace—we can see at least three important points of intersection where teachers of basic writing should want to look. First, rhetoric is not science, but *humanist* discourse, and, historically, was the primary subject of study in classical education. Its province has always been the contingent, dealing with judgments in human affairs rather than scientific truth.

For example, we can make assertions with certainty about matter in chemistry and physics that we cannot make about candidates in a political election (who would make a better president, for instance). Yet, for most of us, the second situation is far more crucial in daily affairs. In this sense, rhetoric is potentially more important. Aristotle's notion that rhetoric is an art that purports to define not scientific reality but social probability is a brilliant stroke: what rhetoric is about is not the provable but the *probable*. As James Raymond remarked:

Rhetoric, applied to the humanities or any other field is even less certain than science, but also more useful, because it deals with questions that science methodologically excludes: questions about values, ethics, esthetics, meaning, politics, justice, causality involving human motives, and causality involving an indeterminate number of variables. In short, physics can tell us how to build a nuclear reactor, but it cannot tell us whether we ought to build one, or whether, on balance, the costs will outweigh the benefits. (781)

We can see how misdirected have been our common instructions to students, to above all, write rationally and logically and why the texts thus produced sound so inhuman.

We find a second intersection of classical and modern rhetoric in the return to prominence—at least in theory, if not yet in many classrooms—of *persuasion*, as distinct from neutral communication. During the past few decades the word communication has come to suggest a mechanical moving of bits of information from A to B, like the United Parcel Service, or even like electrons along wires or water through pipes, as though without human interference. Rhetoric, on the other hand, is about the aims and effects of language used by all human beings trying to have their way, raising their voices, perhaps, but employing no other means. The rhetorical writer is an initiator, not a channel; active, not passive. Rhetoric is about power and makes writing social and political.

Finally, the holding up of *invention* as a crucial tactic for the writer is yet a third area where old and new rhetorics intersect. Invention was the first of Aristotle's canons, others being arrangement, style, memory, and delivery—sometimes also known as “stages in composing.” Invention had been gone for centuries from formal rhetoric, and is still largely absent from current-traditional pedagogy. Thus the rereading of the classics and the bringing back of invention—sometimes termed “heuristic,” a method of argument leading to discovery—coincided with and perhaps inspired the “process” approach in composition. Invention had

been one of the missing stages in traditional teaching. Its reintroduction helped reconstitute rhetoric itself and shake new life into the teaching of writing, shaping new agendas with such elements as freewriting, prewriting, and group writing, variously termed "process teaching" and "the new rhetoric." Karen Burke LeFevre recounts these developments in her enthralling *Invention as a Social Act*, as well as in her articles about invention/heuristics in Tate/Corbett, and in Winterowd's *Composition/Rhetoric* (35–46).

History

Originally, rhetoric arose as the art of persuasive discourse in public life: the social practice of *using language to effect*. In developing this art of public speaking, or the art of persuasive discourse, the ancient, ill-fated Greek sophists, who have suffered both in their own time and now from a worse reputation than they deserve, according to Susan Jarrett's recent scholarship, were the first teachers of rhetoric. Since most of their clients—at first mostly lawyers and politicians—wrote their speeches before delivery, many of the classical pointers apply to writing as well. By Cicero's time, certainly, the art of rhetoric included both oratory and written composition. Richard Enos, in fact, has demonstrated that the notion of dialectical interdependence (rather than separation) of orality and literacy, which is so central to contemporary composition theory, was a notion already familiar to the Romans. Gradually through medieval times—especially after the invention of printing—rhetoric as a term came to include the rules for producing discourse in general. The meaning was further stretched to include the study of old speeches and other texts as examples, thus in fact becoming literary analysis. Still today, rhetoricians such as Berlin, Eagleton, Schilb, Vitanza, Walker, Wells, Winterowd suggest that literature could well be subsumed under the rubric of rhetoric. Many more would include even electronic and visual discourse as the proper objects for rhetorical study.

In common with other signs, as linguists would say, rhetoric expresses and carries forward its own particular history (see John Schilb, "The History of Rhetoric and the Rhetoric of History"). Actually, we have no "standard" history of rhetoric. Histories of rhetoric are just now being written. A good place to begin reading would be the capsule history in *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (594–630) by the founding father of the Revival, Edward P. J. Corbett. For a more detailed historical study, see James Murphy's *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric*. I also recommend Murphy's 1982 MLA anthology—the book that first

stirred my interest in the subject—*The Rhetorical Tradition and Modern Writing*, one of the best introductions to that amphitheater of speculative debate, i.e., rhetoric. The most recent book on the subject that I have seen is Susan Miller's interesting *Rescuing the Subject: A Critical Introduction to Rhetoric and the Writer* (1989), a revisionary history of rhetoric that proposes a *textual* rhetoric. See especially her last chapter, "The Educational Result: Rhetoric and Composition" (149–170).

In these works and other secondary sources we learn that the first job of the rhetorician was to capture the attention of the audience. The early teachers of rhetoric, Protagoras among them, offered classes to anyone who paid the fees, upsetting many, like Plato, who worried greatly that unworthy people might learn the "mechanical" skills of persuasion and use them to evil ends. Plato left two dialogues about rhetoric, the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*. His fear that rhetoric would be abused is clear, and I would put his chief admonition this way: use rhetoric only to seek truth and the good, a suggestion lost in many composition texts.

We might also consider William Covino imploring us to play and wonder in our writing (*The Art of Wondering*), and add to our instructions for our students that their search for truth in their writing should not be too quick on the draw, but that they might wander and wonder first. Certainly Plato's dialogues don't pounce on the truth but amble down different lanes, searching and discovering. Writing is learning through discovery of meaning. But Aristotle was excited by the promise of rhetoric and wrote down its detailed organization; his *Rhetoric* has remained *the* classic text on the epistemology, semiotics, ethics, and politics of rhetoric.

In Rome, Cicero (*De Inventione*) and Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria*) wrote educational texts about rhetoric that dominated schooling in Europe for a thousand years. Rhetoric has endured spasmodic shrinkage in the sense that most of Aristotle's functions (or "canons") were left by the wayside, with the focus remaining on one function, style. Rhetoric became the keeper of tropes. Unfortunately often the "high" style became mere ornament, as the Host complains in *The Canterbury Tales* when asking the Clerk to tell a tale:

Telle us some myrie thyng of adventures.
Youre termes, youre colours, and youre figures,
Keepe him in stoor til so be that ye endite
Heigh style, as whan that men to kynges write,
Speketh so pleyn at this tyme, we yow preye,
That we might understonde what ye seye.

This was a typical attitude during the Middle Ages, reflecting the prevailing idea that rhetoric was adornment in "high style" and had little to do with ordinary discourse: rhetoric was for scholars and kings. From this we have the specialized derogatory sense of "insincere style," as in "mere rhetoric." By the end of the Middle Ages, rhetoric had lost much of its glamour and was severely narrowed, often only to a concern with adornment. In the twentieth century, rhetoric has returned to prominence—first in commerce and in the media, and now finally in the teaching of writing.

Though rhetoric enjoyed some renewed temporary prestige during the Renaissance, until our century it was often neglected in the cultural affairs of Europe and America—or, as Kinneavy says, "exiled from entire disciplines." Let's turn now to the infant discipline of composition to trace its new association with classical rhetoric.

The Beginning of Composition

Many accounts of the displacement of old rhetoric as a discipline by "English" and its companion, "composition," have recently been written. Some of the most interesting are Richard Ohmann's in *Politics of Letters*; William R. Parker's "Where do English Departments Come From?" Tanner/Bishop's "Reform Amid the Revival of Rhetoric," and of course Berlin's *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges*. As part of the business of education, "composition" had its start in the last decades of the 1800s at Harvard. Just as today, business and government thought they had a "literacy crisis" on their hands. The need for *practical* writing instruction was felt so strongly because of the quick growth in the skilled work force along with the rise of American capitalism.

The new composition courses were placed in the newly emerging English literature department rather than in the old rhetoric department largely because it was felt rhetoric applied to oratory rather than to writing. In reality, of course, the precepts in the art of rhetoric are indeed applicable to written discourse. Nevertheless, until the current revival, traditional rhetoric remained an esoteric field of inquiry chiefly for philosophers, classicists, and speech scholars.

The Recent Return of Classical Rhetoric

Corbett's major work, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, appearing in 1964, is often cited as a forerunning text, a sign of things to come. In a recent interview article, written by Victor

Vitanza—who with Covino believes in the power of rhetorical playfulness and is the movement's rhetor/clown par excellence—Corbett reminisces about the circumstances that made him produce that modern classic. Corbett reveals that, as a young instructor in the 1950s, he knew how to take a poem apart but was utterly mystified by nonfiction prose. Then he discovered rhetoric, eventually coming “to see rhetoric as the keystone to [the] liberal arts” (Vitanza 251).

After Corbett, James Kinneavy's *Theory of Discourse* (1971) has had a strong influence, though his theoretical model has come in for some criticism. But rhetoric is not a realm of isolated “giants”; it has been a group effort sustained by great numbers of teachers, scholars, and critics. Many of their works appear in rich anthologies like Donald McQuade's *The Territory of Language*. Another source is *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse*, edited by Robert Connors, Lisa Ede, and Andrea Lunsford. In one of its pieces, “On Distinctions between Classical and Modern Rhetoric,” Lunsford and Ede come close to glorifying the benefits that the study of classical rhetoric will bring today's students. Though this view is spreading, it's not shared by all other rhetoricians.

Indeed, it's time now to assert that “the rhetorical imagination” is *not* dominating English composition, at least not yet. Though it has come to exercise a powerful influence on theory it has only a tiny impact on practice, so far. Many scholars and critics who have enriched our domain of writing instruction in recent decades don't speak of themselves as rhetoricians and in fact speak softly. David Bartholomae, for instance, said about his apprehension: “I am continually amazed, however, by the degree to which we speak and write as though we had control of the rhetorical tradition—as though it were ours and we could name its key figures and projects. At the moment, rhetoric is very much out of our control” (46).

Another warning appears in *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* by Jasper Neel who, while essentially pro rhetoric, cautions against uncritical reliance on classical theories. He fears that Platonic and Aristotelian influences on composition students may not be in their best interests. He sees especially Plato as a powerful model for the worst in current-traditional classrooms: the useless formalistic modes of development; the notion that we must think before we write; and above all the view that literary studies are superior to composition (1–29). Instead, he shares with Sharon Crowley the view that the best classical sources for students of composition are the principles and practices of the ancient sophists, like Protagoras and Gorgias (202–211). *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* (1989) is one of

the most useful books for compositions teachers interested in the rhetoric movement.

But the most celebrated—or infamous—dissent is found in *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing* by C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon. They call classical rhetoric “That Old-Time Religion” (22). Their chief complaint is philosophical and political. They claim the ancients didn’t afford rhetoric the ability to create knowledge, only to mechanically transfer it (the banking concept of Paulo Freire). “The purpose of discourse in this ancient epistemological context was very simple: its moral imperative was to convey the truth in a verbal dress that would make it attractively visible to particular audiences on particular occasions” (23). They are worried that the ancient “ceremonial” aura remains not only in current-traditional classrooms, but in the rooms of teachers who believe they’re progressive.

For their assault on the negative influence of classical rhetoric—and on their unwitting colleagues—Knoblauch/Brannon received much attention, notably a counterattack in the pages of *CCC* (37 [1986]: 502–506). In an interesting article aptly titled, “The History of Rhetoric and the Rhetoric of History” (11–32), John Schilb has contrasted their critical approach with the highly favorable one in *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse*, edited by Connors et al. His point is that what’s important is not who is right or wrong but what we can learn from the dialogue.

We should note also a weakness in the new rhetoric movement, the relative lack of attention it has paid to the role of minority rhetorics. Though much work has been done in Black linguistics during the last two decades, very little attention has been given to rhetorical features of Black English—with the notable exception of *The Signifying Monkey* by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. And regarding women, Catherine Peadar wrote in 1989, “Despite nods to feminism in recent journal articles and conference sessions, many rhetoricians, particularly historians of rhetoric, have yet to confront feminism and its transformative implications both for writing and for teaching the history of rhetoric” (116). Nevertheless, her article was included in a new section entitled “Rhetoric and Feminist Theory” in the 1989 edition of Charles Kneupper’s biennial anthology published by the Rhetoric Society of America.

The Rhetoric Movement and Basic Writing

Our concerns as teachers of composition often lead us into discussions about literacy, another concept that is currently being

reexamined by theorists, such as Ross Winterowd ("Literacy, Linguistics, and Rhetoric"). This is natural enough since our basic writing courses have sprung upon us precisely to cure an alleged increase in illiteracy. At the 1989 Conference on College Composition and Communication in Seattle, Lisa Ede said:

I would argue that rhetoric is situated at a crucial moment in its history. Rhetoric is being called upon or invoked by theorists in a number of fields, including English and composition studies, and it has the potential for offering a site (as it has in its past) for a genuinely interdisciplinary, critical theory and practice—a theory and practice that would, for instance, remove conceptions of literacy from the margins (where functional illiterates are supposed to reside, next to the homeless) and place them at the center of the cultural debate (9).

Thus, while "rhetoric" and "literacy" may embody abstract concepts, they both bring forth practical implications for everyday classroom work. Rhetoric more than any other version of writing instruction highlights the inherent power of those trained in public discourse. Because rhetoric is a humanistic discipline rather than just a mechanical skill, we avoid the dehumanizing disasters so common in current-traditional classrooms where the goal may be the construction of a correct five-paragraph theme. That rhetoric empowers, we know from the media, and though we don't promise that rhetorical practices will make people rich, our students need hearing that professional-economic advantages come with an ability to write well.

Some of these practical and political implications can be found in books and articles such as Erika Lindemann's *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. She shows in "Writing as Economic Power" (4–5) that this is still true in spite of all the audiovisual electronics of our age. Another notion of most rhetorics is that speakers and writers begin by taking a stance vis-à-vis their audience, and clearly announcing their topic and aim. Such a stance is helpful to our basic writing students, many of whom hem and haw while attempting to open their essay with a funnel, as their teacher told them. Wayne Booth, one of the pioneers in the revival of rhetoric, has put this point well:

The common ingredient that I find in all of the writing I admire—excluding for now novels, plays, and poems—is something that I shall reluctantly call the rhetorical stance, a stance which depends on discovering and maintaining in any

writing situation a proper balance among the three elements that are at work in any communicative effort: the available arguments about the subject itself, the interests and peculiarities of the audience, and the voice, the implied character, of the speaker. (141)

Another healthy effect of the rhetorical model is its disprivileging of the romantic image of lonely writers locked in combat with their own solitude. Instead we get a rhetorical writer in the context of social struggle, a far more appropriate image for the basic writing room. "Perhaps the most important contribution of classical rhetoric is precisely this focus on context. Classical rhetoric assumes that the function of writing is not to express oneself but to effect change in the human community in which one lives," as Patricia Bizzell has put it (60). Though I am convinced basic writing students need to *practice* expressive writing as part of the learning process, this is not the sole end but rather a stage in a strategic movement toward producing discourse with a social *effect*.

In stressing that writing is social in origin, contemporary rhetoric embraces dialogue among writer and readers during the practical process of production: group work or "collaborative learning" is paramount. Thus rhetoric coincides with, and encourages, that element in "process" pedagogy that insists on revision after feedback from peers and teacher. Bakhtin has a discussion of "the dialogic imagination"; Gere of history and theory of group writing; and Moberg of classroom suggestions.

In fact the main virtue of teaching writing with a rhetorical approach may be the social learning experience inherent in the engagement of writer with readers. Rhetorical writers situate themselves in a social context, defining themselves in relation to their readers and asking to become an influence on them and ultimately on themselves, thereby gaining knowledge. Above all, this epistemological dimension is fitting for us teachers: as students engage in dialogue, they learn. The art of writing is a learning act. The art of rhetoric is not presenting knowledge but creating it. In this fashion rhetoric also facilitates awareness of contemporary concerns, such as the gender, race, and class of writer and audience, vital information inherent in the rhetorical *stance* taken by the author, the stuff usually absent in current-traditional discourse.

Some Practical Guides for Basic Writing Teachers

One of the most helpful articles for coaching basic writers is William Pixton's in a recent issue of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*,

especially the thorough discussion of "rhetorical stance" and audience identification (267–279). Two other useful pieces that originally appeared in *Journal of Basic Writing*, are Lynn Troyka's "Classical Rhetoric and the Basic Writer" and Andrea Lunsford's "Aristotelean Rhetoric: Let's Get Back to the Classics."

As for classroom texts, most authors seem unaware of even the basics of rhetoric, but there are a few exceptions (see also Donald Stewart's "Composition Textbooks and the Assault on Tradition"). In fact, Stewart himself has written a sound text, *The Versatile Writer*. It's a fine example of a "new/old rhetoric" for students of English composition based on Aristotle. Its major parts include Invention, Arrangement, and Style. Another college English text that imitates the classical model, even more closely than Stewart's, is Winifred Bryan Horner's *Rhetoric in the Classical Tradition*. And Ross Winterowd's *The Contemporary Writer: A Practical Rhetoric* is one of the best texts for college writers; among other felicities, this book has the clearest explanation of Kenneth Burke's Pentad (his method for invention) that I have seen (96–100).

I've always found "handbooks" too formidable to use in class, and one of the newest—*The St. Martin's Handbook* (1989)—is colossal in both its mass and grasp, yet the specially produced "Annotated Instructor's Edition" has frontal matter about the history, theory, and practice of rhetoric that is useful for basic writing teachers. No wonder: the authors of this handbook are two of the leading rhetoricians today, Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors. I've been tempted to assign some of these texts, but they may be a touch too advanced for the work usually done by basic writing students.

Finally, A Pedagogical Suggestion

Instead of beginning a basic writing course with the usual lesson in sentence structure or modes of development, how superior it would be to start students off with an oral and written discussion of a piece of discourse relevant to the writing course itself, such as the following extended metaphor about humanity's unending conversation, taken from our greatest living rhetorician, Kenneth Burke:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all

the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (*Philosophy* 110–111)

Kenneth Burke's rhetorical and epistemological notion of discourse as a "conversation of mankind," or of "the social construction of knowledge," or of "interpretive communities," clearly anticipates the later formulations of Kenneth Bruffee, Richard Rorty, and Stanley Fish. The more closely we look into modern rhetoric, the more we can see it as a multidisciplinary nucleus, a *global* discipline as Vitanza calls it (261). Similarly, Ross Winterowd refers to it as "the ecumenical umbrella under which grammar, poetry, logic, composition, and public speaking can find shelter" (*Composition/Rhetoric* vii).

A writing pedagogy informed by some of these rhetorical precepts would be superior to the fill-in-the-blanks grammar and composition "service" course which according to available reports—in spite of all the theoretical progress in recent composition studies—still dominates actual classroom practice in America. Best of all, when students have been trained to create persuasion, they are likely also to have learned *not* to be persuaded by treacherous rhetoric (see Dietrich). They practice taking care of themselves. "Empowering the students" can be a fanciful way of talking, but surely we fail our basic writing students if we don't pull them into the kind of rhetorical language use that confers power. This kind of rhetoric instruction can make college writing the most important course in our freshmen's curriculum. If taking this stand be arrogance on our part, then perhaps we have been unduly meek in the past. Viewing ourselves as rhetoricians is a fighting stance, one that wants our students to be given an opportunity to enter the discourse of real social struggle.

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