CHAPTER X

Coming of Age in College Composition

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Not so long ago—as recently as 1971, when I began my graduate studies in English—college composition was little more than the dreary stepchild of what was otherwise a generally reputable family of disciplines comprising the humanities. Housed almost exclusively in departments of English, curricula in composition consisted of one or two lower-division, often required courses, the primary duties of which were to clean up the messes that students with deficits in their "skills" brought with them into the academy and/or to set the tables upon which the rest of the disciplines could serve up their more substantial portions of the academic menu.

Things have changed a great deal in the intervening fifteen years. Not everything, of course; and not, by any means, everywhere. But composition has not only acquired all of the more visible accouterment of a bona fide discipline—exclusive faculties, a wide array of advanced and elective courses, graduate areas and degrees, designated professional journals, and, in some cases, even independent departmental status; it has also accrued to itself a share of the power and prestige that inevitably accompanies the image of specialization in academic institutions. And with the more recent spread of writing-across-the-curriculum programs, composition now stands poised to insinuate itself into even the most remote appendages of the academy. This process of maturation has been fitful, uneven, often intractably complex, and it is still ongoing; like any such coming of age, it required a beneficent confluence of forces from both within and without, of both ambition and circumstance, design and coincidence. In this essay I would like to sketch some of the more prominent moments in that progress, not so much to describe the "state of the art" in composition, though that too will be part of my project, as to document the renovation of the estate in which that "art," if it can in fact be called one, is currently practiced.

Let me begin with a question I have implied in the previous sentence, a question that has contemporary application though it was formulated first toward a somewhat different purpose by Socrates, in

the midst of his long and testy argument with Gorgias about the purpose and status of rhetoric:

> SOCRATES: Is not the position of the rhetorician and of rhetoric the same with respect to other arts also? It has no need to know the truth about things but merely to discover a technique of persuasion, so as to appear among the ignorant to have more knowledge than the expert?
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> GORGIAS: But is not this a great comfort, Socrates, to be able without learning any other arts but this one to prove in no way inferior to the specialists?
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> . . .
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> SOCRATES: Well, then, Gorgias, the activity as a whole, it seems to me, is not an art, but the occupation of a shrewd and enterprising spirit, and of one naturally skilled in its dealings with men, and in sum and substance I call it "flattery." Now it seems to me that there are many parts of this activity, one of which is cookery. This is considered an art, but in my judgment is no art, only a routine and a knack. And rhetoric I call another part of this general activity[1]

This highly charged critique of rhetoric, though it may seem somewhat stilted and moralistic by contemporary standards, is, I believe, more pressing, particularly in relation to the developmental structure of the discipline of composition, than it might at first seem, for it brings into focus not only the bipolar competition between value- and performance-based notions of instruction in composition (between, that is, a rhetoric whose primary injunction is, following Socrates, "know thyself" and another, whose primary injunction is, following Gorgias, "know your audience"), but it also raises the most fundamental pedagogical question: What should a rhetorician teach? Gorgias is, after all, a teacher; and Socrates is primarily concerned with what, in fact, he is teaching. This latter issue is especially apropos to composition; for composition, perhaps more than any other academic discipline, has been shaped by its long history as a teaching-intensive enterprise. Until recently, the identity of composition was constituted almost entirely by the classroom arenas in which it was "taught," and by the various competing textbooks that were the instruments of that instruction.

This helps, in part, to explain the second-class status that the academy has customarily accorded to the enterprise of teaching composition; for despite the obvious commitment to teaching as part of its mission, the university—and more recently the college and even the junior college—has defined its primary "product" not as the student it matriculates, but as the knowledge it engenders via faculty research and publication. Any discipline, therefore, whose function is primarily pedagogical will almost inevitably be relegated to a "service" role in relation to the principal business of the institution.

This is where composition resided for decades—a training ground for graduate students and part-time faculty preparing themselves for full-time positions, for junior faculty paying their dues on the way to careers as teachers (and scholars) of literature. The public discourse of the profession was almost exclusively classroom-dependent. On the most mundane level, it was a kind of "recipe-swapping" that enacted Socrates' analogy between cookery and rhetoric; on a more theoretical level, it was a chronic oscillation between value- and performance-based rationales for teaching students how to write. More recently, as composition has moved away from its service status, it has had of necessity to gear its machinery for producing knowledge not, as with literary studies, to an extant body of texts, but to the human "text" of the classroom, to students and the writing they provided. In light of this, it is easy to see how and why research in composition has been grounded until very recently not in the most immediate professional environment of traditional literary scholarship, an enterprise that can exist quite nicely (though on a much smaller scale, of course) independent of the undergraduate classroom, but in more remote, and more congenial, connections with the research apparatus of the social sciences, the primary "texts" of which are human subjects rather than historical or cultural artifacts.

One of the most significant steps along this path was the publication in 1971 of Janet Emig's *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*.[2] What Emig produced was, in its own right, a notable body of controlled observations detailing, via case studies, the day-to-day business of teaching and learning writing. But more importantly, she fully appropriated a technique of inquiry from the social sciences and applied it unabridged to research in the composition classroom. The key word here is "research," a particular mode of research shaped by the methodology of the social sciences. Via this appropriation, writing teachers were enabled to produce the institutionally reputable "body of knowledge" that would be their ticket out of the servants' quarters of the academy. Thus, while the primary concerns in literary studies have always been scholarship and criticism, with the available professional roles inscribed by their mutual dependence on extant texts, composition has from the outset been constituted by its concerns with teaching and research, its available professional roles inscribed by their mutual dependence on the human subject, the student writing. This fundamental difference accounts, as I have already suggested, for much of the tension and conflict that often erupt between these two components of English studies. They have been, in fact, alien from one another in both subject and method; they have therefore had little common ground upon which intercommunication could transpire. This relationship is being renegotiated in fundamental ways these days, and I will explain more about that later; but that change did not occur before many composition programs vacated their traditional homes in departments of English and made more companionable arrangements with departments of education, psychology, speech, communications—almost anywhere that the precedents for empirical research were tenably grounded.

Emig's book was, then, instrumental in creating a disciplinary framework for research in composition, primarily by demonstrating that students' writing could be written about in recognizably "professional" ways. On a more particular level, it changed the vocabulary, and thereby the focus, of subsequent research in composition. That new vocabulary and its implications are visible in their incipient stages in her study:

> Although in these linguistic studies the process of writing is sometimes purportedly under scrutiny, to this writer's knowledge none of the investigators has yet attempted to develop generalizations from their studies of specific works and authors. They have not attempted, in other words, to delineate *the*, even *a*, writing process or to ascertain whether the process has constant characteristics across writers. Rather, they have been concerned with product- rather than process-centered research.[3]

The key words here are "process" and "product," which have become so deeply entrenched in our ways of talking about the teaching of writing that they seem almost inviolable.[4] It was Emig, more than any other practitioner, who institutionalized this distinction at the center of our professional discourse. The methodological imperatives are here clearly pronounced: no longer should teachers/researchers, by way of explaining or validating their enterprise, focus on the final "products" that students generate under their tutelage (a method of inquiry that is notably and firmly grounded in the traditional practices of literary criticism) but on the manner(s) in which their writing is engendered and produced, that is, on the "composing process" (a method of inquiry that is firmly grounded in the traditional practices of "soft" scientific experimentation).

When the focus of attention shifts from *what* has been produced to *how* it has been produced, certain consequences, and certain possibilities, emerge. The teacher, for example, is suddenly dismissed (or liberated) from her customary role as the prescriptive authority on how to write, the conservator of the rules and regulations that govern the production of acceptable written discourse. And the student in the activity of composing moves to center stage, the possessor of a viable though flawed "process" which can be studied, analyzed, tinkered

with—a potential experiment always in progress, available for investigation if the proper conditions can be created.

This transformation of roles led during the 1970s to a proliferation of "new" (generally performance-based) rhetorics, to a resuscitation of the concept of "invention" from classical rhetoric, to a host of heuristic procedures for facilitating composing. It also changed in fundamental ways the disciplinary understanding of the relationship between a writer and her text, situating the pedagogical locus not on the text, as was customary in the more formalistic rhetorics of the time, and not on the writer, as was customary in the many self-expressive pedagogies popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but on the active relationship between the two, a relationship always "in process."[5]

One can see the effects of this change of venue in even the most stalwart of composition textbooks—in, for example, James M. McCrimmon's *Writing with a Purpose*,[6] a book whose longevity has been predicated on its judicious assimilation of leading concepts in the discipline. From the fourth through the sixth editions (1967-1976) even the definition of "purpose," the governing metaphor for the textbook, underwent significant revisions, revisions that reflect the transition I have just outlined. In the fourth edition, for example, McCrimmon defines purpose as "the overall design which controls what the writer is to do in the essay."[7] The key words here are design and essay, between which the writer is sandwiched. One can see the subjugation of writerly "intent" (to use McCrimmon's word) to the more formalistic conception of "design," suggesting the degree to which his approach is rooted in classical conceptions of the patterns of exposition, those prescribed structures that govern what the writer does "in the essay," the product. For the fifth edition, purpose becomes "the controlling decisions a writer makes when he determines what he wants to do and how he wants to do it."[8] Here the writer, rather than the formal design, controls, decides, determines not merely the essay, conceived as a product (which disappears from this definition), but the "what" and the "how" of the activity of composing. In the sixth edition, purpose is even more reflexively defined as "your awareness as a writer of what you want to do, and how in general you want to do it."[9] Though this latter revision may seem a subtle one, it creates finally, through the concept of awareness, the ground upon which one can stand to study the activity, the behaviors, the habits, of composing, all toward the end of becoming conscious of and assuming a measure of control over the cognitive processes that govern the disposition of language in discourse. No longer is the design, the formal structure, of the essay predominant, as was the case in most of the traditionally formalist textbooks of the 1960s; no longer is the writer's inner self, constituted by personal

experiences, the locus of invention, as was the case in the many neoromantic textbooks that were popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The process models, in fact, raised immediate and direct challenges to both of these systems, which had for some time constituted the poles between which renovative trends in the field had oscillated. This backdrop of conflict is briefly summarized by Gordon Brossell:

> Historically, the teaching of English has vacillated between two competing traditions, each with its own view of language learning. One tradition sees language as a subject to be studied, manipulated, and mastered, and stresses rhetorical knowledge and skill as determinants of linguistic competence and power. In this view, language is a tool for achieving the specific purposes and effects of its users.
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> The second tradition views language as a vehicle for learning and emphasizes the language user and his attempts to discover, define, and express himself and his relation to the world. Language in this view is less a tool for achievement than an instrument for personal and social growth.[10]

One can see some similarity to the structural elements of the argument that has been ongoing since Socrates sat down with Gorgias. Of course, the vocabulary and the conditions have changed, and neither interlocutor would feel entirely comfortable with his side of this debate. But it is fair to say that prior to the "process" revolution in composition theory, instruction in writing resembled either a kind of "routine" that students were expected to master as a rite of passage into the academy or a kind of "art" that somehow endowed them with both self-understanding and civic responsibility.

The process-based approaches assumed a more functional, public stance toward the nature and purposes of discourse, refashioning not only the implicit relationship between the composer and the thing composed—the what and how of writing—but the explicit relationship between writer and reader, this latter locus, the "audience," becoming the primary determinant in shaping discourse, becoming in effect the universal "why" for writing. Among the more prominent spokesmen for this reallocation—away from writer or design and toward audience—of the motivation for composing have been Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, whose articles began appearing during the mid-1970s.

In *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing* Flower draws the distinction this way: "If you want to be understood, it is usually not enough simply to *express* your ideas. One of the secrets of communicating your ideas is to understand the needs of your reader and to transform writer-based thought into reader-based prose.[11] The goal of writers must then be "to transform writer-based prose (which works well for them) into reader-based prose (which works for their

readers as well)."[12] Writer-based prose is characterized "by one or more of these features: (a) an *egocentric focus* on the writer; (b) a *narrative organization* focused on the writer's own discovery process; (c) a *survey structure* organized, like a textbook, around the writer's information."[13] Reader-based prose, on the other hand, is organized "around a problem, a thesis, or a purpose" with "a goal or thesis as the top level of . . . a hierarchy," and it must always be "vivid and clear to the reader."[14]

Such an audience-based mode of discourse must, of course, make certain assumptions about what a "reader" is, wants, needs. Flower defines her "creative reader" and consequently her good writer, as the one who

> 1. Tries to fit new information into an old framework he or she already knows. *Therefore*, the writer should supply that framework by creating a context for his or her ideas.
> 2. Develops expectations and uses them to actively process and understand the text. *Therefore*, the writer needs to create (and then fulfill) accurate expectations that will help the reader anticipate the writer's meaning.
> 3. Sorts and organizes information into an unconscious hierarchical structure built around a few key concepts or chunks. *Therefore*, the writer needs to make the hierarchical structure he or she has in mind clear to the reader.[15]

Clearly, then, the role of the writer is to locate herself in service of the "knowledge," "attitudes," and "needs" of her reader.[16]

This shift in the balance of power for acts of composition is, once again, reflected in several revisions of the McCrimmon textbook. In the fourth edition, for example, the role of the reader or audience in shaping discourse is rarely mentioned and is—at least by comparison to the writer, the material or the patterns of organization—of little consequence. By the fifth edition, the reader is introduced as one of the "two relationships [that] dominate the act of writing," the other, of course, being the "one between the writer and his *subject*."[17] The reader, in fact, becomes something "a writer must think of . . . long before he begins to write." This readerly role remains fairly constant through the sixth and seventh editions (1976, 1980), though it is worth noting that in the sixth edition the subchapter "Your View of Your Subject" precedes "'Your View of Your Reader," and in the seventh edition their positions are reversed, reader preceding subject as a factor for the writer to consider. It is not until the eighth, and most recent, edition of *Writing with a Purpose* that the full impact of both audience-based approaches, and more particularly problem solving, is evident. Here even the three "stages of the writing process," which had for over fifteen years followed D. Gordon Rohman's nomenclature (prewriting, writing, and revising or rewriting)[18] have been

renamed as planning, drafting, and revising, borrowing the nomenclature of the "new" process-based rhetorics. "Your View of Your Reader" becomes now "Analyzing Your Audience," a concept and a problem which are defined in terms comparable to Flower's. This edition also appropriates, almost directly, such heuristic procedures as "brainstorming" and "clustering" from the problem-solving model of composing. In effect, over a period of fifteen years, the preeminent relationship in acts of composition is transformed from the one between the writer and her subject to the one between the writer and her reader.

It is ironic I think that this very process of movement away from the dominant literary critical method of the period—a kind of neoromantic formalism—and toward the methodology of the social sciences, a movement that served generally to aggravate the tensions between these two primary factions of English studies, has also indirectly prepared a vocabulary for their ultimate reconciliation. The pivotal concept here is of course the "reader." And it is largely along an entirely different and competing line of argument that this restoration of integrity to studies in English has been lately moving.

One of the catalytic voices of this countermovement toward the recuperation of reading into composition theory has been Ann Berthoff, a longstanding complainant against the process movement in general and problem solving in particular. Though like almost all of her predecessors and colleagues she grounds her work firmly in the classroom, it is a classroom of a different sort from the one implied by the process models I have just described. In fact, she begins one of her earliest articles (1978) with a characteristic effort both to critique and to renegotiate the concept of pedagogy:

> Any pedagogy is properly constituted by a method, models, and a theory. Insofar as a pedagogy is concerned with teaching reading and writing, a concern with language will be central to all three. The province of rhetoric, which is the structure and function of language, is thus coterminus with the boundaries of an English pedagogy.[19]

Embedded in this passage is much of Berthoff's theoretical lexicon. Let me begin with her concept of "method," which is central to her system and which, in itself, carried much of the weight of her explicit critique of current modes of inquiry in the discipline:

> True to the spirit of the age, English pedagogues—I use the term to name all those who are concerned with methods, models, and theories—have sought to be scientific, but with very ill-formed notions of what constitutes scientific inquiry . . . . Scientific or not, we need a method that encourages critical questions about goals in conjunction with ways and means: a method that

does not allow for the continual exploration of purposes and premises as well as procedures will soon become doctrinaire.[20]

Method, then, from Berthoff's point of view, is a critical stance that provides both the occasion and means for its own self-criticism. It is in short "reflexive" [21] and it is therefore radically self-conscious of the political implications and effects of its application.

It is via this conception of method, consistent with its etymological implications—"*meta + hodos, about the way*"[22]—that Berthoff dismisses not only the "skills" and "self-awareness" models of pedagogy in composition, but all models that conceive of "performance" as distinct from, and generally prior to, "criticism." By subverting the dichotomy between performance and criticism, Berthoff in effect dismantles and disallows any hierarchical conception of the production of discourse, which includes both formalistic and audience-based models for composing. What she proffers as an alternative is a dialectical system capable of managing the various bipolar constituents of the disciplinary discourse (form/content, process/product, even writer/reader) in an entirely different manner—in terms of mutual interdependencies rather than discrete levels, stages, or parts. And her claim that "without an understanding of dialectic as the heart of method, we are doomed to see one after another promising technique disappear without ever having been given a fair chance"[23] creates the ground for her subsequent redefinition of the sort of "research" that composition theorists should be engaged in. As she explains in "The Teacher as REsearcher":

> REsearch, like REcognition, is a REflexive act. It means looking—and looking again. This new kind of REsearch would not mean going out after new "data," but rather REconsidering what is at hand. REsearch would come to mean looking and looking again at what happens in the English classroom. We do not need new information; we need to think about the information we have.[24]

This paragraph concludes with an exhortation on behalf of a "dialectical relationship" between "theory and practice," a recurrent motif in her work. As she explains in a subsequent essay entitled "Method: Metaphors, Models, and Maxims":

> The chief purpose of a theory of composition is to provide teachers with ways to present writing so that it can indeed be learned by writing. . . . [T]heory is not the antithesis of practice and, in fact, can only serve an authentic purpose if it is continually brought into relationship with practice so that each can inform the other. . . .
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> Without the perspective that theory provides, there is no way of maintaining a genuinely critical attitude towards assignments and courses. . . . In between recipe swapping, which is the result of rejecting theory, and the collocation and manipulation of data, which is the result of theory for theory's sake, there is a third way. . . . This third way is best named *method*.[25]

Clearly Berthoff is seeking here to differentiate the term "method," to "reclaim" it, from its more generic application to almost any set of specifiable procedures, techniques, guidelines, or, to use the current jargon, heuristics, for producing written texts. A complete discussion of the role of "method" in contemporary theory is beyond the scope of this essay. But it should be noted that Berthoff's conception of method is decidedly dialectical, thereby distinguishing it from the many hierarchical systems proffered by both classical and contemporary rhetoric. Problem solving, for example, as some of the above excerpts indicate, grounds not only its notions of the production and reception of written texts, but also of human knowing generally, in hierarchical metaphors. Dialectical systems of rhetoric can be distinguished from such hierarchical systems by two primary features. The first is the manner and means by which the various constituents of the rhetorical event are ordered and arranged in relation to one another. Hierarchical systems must, by their nature, assign either status or temporal privileges to the various elements, or stages, crucial to composing. Most formalistic systems presume, for example, that thinking is prior to, and largely independent from, the language that thinking engenders, that, in brief, thought finds form and form finds language in a sequence of discrete stages. And most heuristic rhetorics presume, for example, that the needs of the reader, the audience, must take priority over those of the writer, with both of these roles assigned always and solely to separate and discrete parties in the rhetorical event. Dialectical systems, on the other hand, provide for the constant interplay, even interchange, between and among the various contraries that constitute rhetorical situations. Reader and writer, thought and language, assume their significances not as separable concepts and categories but by their confluences and conflicts with one another. As Berthoff conceives it, method, the dialectic, is not simply theory, but "the perspective that theory provides," not simply the materials that constitute assignments and courses, but a "critical attitude" toward those material instruments. Which leads us to the second distinction between these two systems for conceiving composing. Dialectical systems of rhetoric tend to be content-dependent in their recommended modes of application; hierarchical systems tend to be content-independent. Most formalistic and heuristic rhetorics, for example, offer quite specific and transferable agendas for composing, agendas (most often, as I have noted, depicted in stages) that are designed to suffice for most if not all

sorts of rhetorical situations. They are answer-oriented. Dialectical systems are question-oriented, abjuring the security of rules or steps or recommended procedures in favor of a more problematical, exploratory mode of invention/interpretation. Thus, the actual course of both the activity of composition and the ultimate structure of the composition will be determined more by the specific issues/problems that the writer is seeking to address in their context than by a universal, preconstituted package of principles or heuristics. Briefly, in Berthoff's terms, "the *what* and the *how* depend on one another," and it is "making meaning," rather than "saying what you mean" or "let[ting] the reader see,"[26] that becomes the imperative of dialectical rhetorics.

It is largely via this shift toward such a notion of practical theory that composition has turned its renovation to a more restorative phase, reacclimating itself to its local environment in departments of English. One of the primary means by which this move has been facilitated is by the redefinition of what can legitimately function as a "text" for "reading" in the composition classroom.

Let me illustrate one version of this redefinition by asking Stanley Fish's former student's question—"Is there a text in this class?"[27]—in relation to the sort of composition class enacted in the work of W. E. Coles. Coles has published several complete assignment "sequences," each designed in terms of a particular content—what he calls the "nominal subject"—which becomes the occasion for thinking and writing and talking about writing itself. Any of these sequences could serve to make the point I want to make here. I will restrict my discussion to *Composing: Writing as a Self-Creating Process*,[28] which provides an elegant rendition, in the form of an introductory course description, of the argument on behalf of a dialectical method for imagining the intrinsic relationships that must exist among language, self, subject, and reader in the activity of composing.

Let me ask the question first in the terms that Fish designates as its apparent meaning in the first-day-of-class context: "Is there a *textbook* in this class?" From the very first sentence Coles makes clear that in his class there is not, at least not in the sense of a published text claiming auspices of authority in the classroom arena: "The assignments of this text are designed to be used for a course in writing, a course in which writing, specifically your writing, is the center."[29] What Coles is suggesting here is that, yes, there is a "text" in this class: the one that the students themselves produce and are always in the process of producing. But what exactly is the status and authority of such a text, to shift a bit in the direction of the second possible reading of Fish's student's question? Perhaps it is easier to begin by saying what it is not. It is not, for example, the single essay that each student happens just to have written, nor the one that is being talked about in

any single class session; it is neither a new text every week, the sum of all essays submitted in response to a particular assignment, nor any combination or collocation of these various discrete products. For, when student writing displaces the "textbook" at the center of a writing course, it must function at two textual levels simultaneously. On the one hand, each student will be composing her own text as the semester proceeds, which means most immediately that it can never, and should never, have the sort of immutable authority accorded to "finished" textbooks. It is fairer, I think, to say that it accrues its own authority in the process of its emergence. On the other hand, there must also be, as a means of production and revision of the first kind of textuality, the ongoing, commonly shared, dialogical "text" that is enacted in class discussion, which itself is engendered by students writing in response to the course's assignments. In that case, one might fairly ask the question in this form: "If there is no textbook located at the center of authority in this class, and if the student's texts do not yet exist, is it not the assignments that function, covertly, as the "real" text of the course?" Not so, Coles insists:

> It must be emphatically said that the assignments themselves are not an argument. They contain no doctrine, either individually or as a sequence. . . . Above all, the questions of the assignments must be understood as invariably open, as questions to be addressed rather than answered. In fact, the assignments are arranged and phrased precisely to make impossible the discovery in them of anything like a master plan. They are put together in such a way as to mean only and no more than what the various responses they are constructed to evoke can be made to mean, a meaning that will be different for different teachers and students as well as differently come by.[30]

While there is, then, an agenda that the assignments make possible, it is neither a hidden nor a prefigured one. The assignments are, like student essays, clearly textual in that they are there to be read and written, reread and rewritten; but they are not, in themselves, the "text" of the class. But is then, as the above passage can be taken to suggest, the "subject" of the assignments the course's text? Again Coles's answer is no:

> The nominal subject of the assignments is teaching and learning. This subject provides you with something relevant to your immediate experience to think and write about, and serves also to give class conversation a focus, the day-by-day movement of a course some kind of shape and direction. But the real subject of the assignments is language, and their real function is to involve you with the activity of language using, of *composing* in the largest sense of the word:[31]

The key words here are "movement," "function," "activity," and

most particularly "composing," all of which suggest that there neither is nor can be anything resembling a fixed and static "text" at the center of the course. The real text of this class is, quite simply, the activity of reading and writing texts, which are themselves constituted of and by the languages through which they are enacted. It is perhaps best to say then that *because* there is *no* text in this class, *everything* in this class is a text: assignments, subjects, selves, perception, thinking, writing, reading, everything, in that all are equally "composed" of and by language. Thus, at least in part via an effort to dismiss reading—in its most formulaic, "literary" terms—from the writing classroom, the *activity* of reading has been brought into a more companionable relationship with writing, as a comparably reflexive mode of interpretation, of making meaning, of composing not any particular universe of discourse—that is, one centered in traditional forms, or in the self, or in an audience—but of apprehending these various universes *as* discourse.

Method-based conceptions of interpretation have been instrumental more recently in, to use the current metaphor, "bridging the gap" between the two primary constituents of English studies: literature and composition or, more generally, reading and writing. This reconciliation has been initiated via the just described way of talking about reading and writing as dialectically inseparable activities, as companionable contraries rather than separable opposites. And it bears repeating here, as I make this passage in my own analysis, that both Berthoff and Coles envision this merger, or perhaps more accurately presume it, when they talk, as they invariably do, about "teaching reading and writing" as if all three activities are simultaneously interrelated, sharing in common the centrality of language.

Winifred Bryan Horner summarizes this position in her introduction to *Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap*:

> In reality, literature and composition cannot be separated either in theory or in teaching practice. Composition theory and critical theory are indeed opposite sides of the same coin, and the "teaching" of writing and the "teaching" of literature are applications of theories that are closely connected, often inseparable, and always fundamental to the study of language. Not only are composition theory and critical theory philosophically connected, but research in one can enlighten and enrich knowledge of the other.[32]

Which is, of course, another way of saying what I have already said, except that Horner introduces the contributory effect of recent developments in literary "critical theory" in the movement toward reconciliation. A detailed account, if one is even possible, of the manner and degree to which critical theory has facilitated the confluence of literature and composition, the "teaching of reading and

writing," is clearly beyond the scope of this essay. Even the essays that comprise the collection Horner has edited, written by some of the most prominent "names" in the profession, do not adequately unravel, decode, deconstruct, or, in general, "read" the issues fully. But it is safe to say that one of the primary effects of the multiple movement toward deconstructionist, reader-response, and hermeneutical systems of interpretation has been to redefine both the status and function of the "reader" in relation to the "text." And whether one chooses to describe the activity of reading as compositional or decompositional, the readerly role is an active one, much like, in that respect, the writer's. Reading, in short, becomes as much an act of production—rather than reproduction—as is writing; it becomes in fact a manner of writing, just as, conversely, writing becomes a manner of reading.

This integration, in both theory and practice, of the teaching of reading and writing has begun, on the one hand, to draw composition (now more broadly defined to include both reading and writing under the more general rubric of interpretation) back into its more customary habitat in departments of English. But it has not by any means relegated composition to its former subservient role in relation either to literary studies or to the curriculum in general. In part because composition acquired during the 1970s, on the terms that were then available, a well-defined and quite expansive domain of its own, along with the intrinsic authority to oversee its various provinces, the discipline is not likely to be reassimilated into the local setting of any other particular department. In many cases in fact, for the short run at least, composition programs are more likely to sustain and preserve the allies they choose, whether they be in literature programs or education programs, both of which are under considerable pressure to retrench their estates for a variety of institutional, economic, and cultural reasons.

But, paradoxically, this same integration of reading with writing has also made possible one of the more dramatic movements for general curricular revision of the last twenty years, a movement that could well lead to the gradual demise of composition as a disciplinary entity: writing across the curriculum.

An early and persistent spokesman for this movement, which originated in the mid-1970s, has been Elaine P. Maimon; and, quite appropriately, given all I have said thus far about the teaching-intensive character of composition, one of the clearest expressions of the nature and purposes of writing across the curriculum is her *Instructor's Manual to Accompany Readings in the Arts and Sciences*. As she explains, picking up a theme I have just discussed, the two companion texts in this series "are based on the following assumptions: (a) writing and reading are inseparable activities; (b) writing and reading are central to learning in all disciplines; (c) writing

and reading are essential modes of discovery."[33] Though one might argue over precisely how these imperatives are to be enacted (Maimon is, for example, heavily process-oriented in her conception of writing), these are reasonable expressions of the common ground of assumptions for most writing across the curriculum programs. Maimon addresses this manual primarily to teachers of composition, preserving, it would seem, the predisciplinary character of the enterprise and the status distinction between composition and the rest of the curriculum:

> We believe that the composition course can prepare students to understand disciplinary differences without assuming that perceived disharmonies create a cacophony. We provide guidance in reading and writing about textbooks and about original scholarship in the humanities and in the social and natural sciences.[34]

But her method also represents a significant redefinition of the relationship between these two components of the curriculum, suggesting that all of the "content" areas, what I earlier called the "menu," of the academy are in fact discourse-dependent in their essence. In other words, all disciplinary "knowledge" and "research" are fundamentally rhetorical, and practitioners of these more specialized modes of inquiry need to become more conscious of, to locate themselves in a reflexive relationship with, the specific discourses that shape and constrain their activities.

These implications are evident even in Maimon's defense of the necessity of a predisciplinary composition course: "Composition courses are often criticized because they seem to be without content, to be *about* nothing. We believe that a composition course should be about writing and reading in college, that is, *about* our students' intellectual heritage."[35] Clearly, if writing is to acquire any status "across the curriculum," every discipline must begin to assume its share of the responsibility for literate participation in the "conversation" that constitutes both "education" and, in the weightier language of the above passage, "our . . . intellectual heritage." In effect, every discipline must find ways of imagining its own practices as *about* nothing, nothing that is beyond the discourse that makes its own highly specialized disciplinary "something" possible. The thrust then of almost all writing across the curriculum programs is to disperse the "teaching of reading and writing"—that is, interpretation or composing—throughout the academy. The long-range effects of this distribution of authority on the disciplinary status of composition are difficult to specify at these early stages of implementation. For the time being, "specialists" in composition are likely to serve as expert consultants in designing, implementing, and evaluating such

programs. Because composition has for so long functioned as the primary "servant" of the rest of the curriculum, at least in regard to matters of verbal literacy, it is the only agent now capable of functioning as the "master" of such a curricular transition.

Ironically, it is the very contentlessness of the discipline that accords it now a privileged status in writing across the curriculum programs. While Gorgias (primarily through his mouthpiece, Polus) advances one of the possible arguments on behalf of the meta-disciplinary "power" of rhetoric, one could turn as well to Aristotle, who argues the same point, somewhat more wholesomely perhaps—that is, that rhetoric is both powerful and instructive in relation to "the rest of the arts and sciences" precisely because it has, in its own right, "no special application to any distinct class of subjects." Unlike Gorgias, Aristotle locates rhetoric firmly on the side of "truth and justice,"[36] which is, of course, what makes it "valuable as a means of instruction."[37] Thus, the very contentlessness—or, in the terms I previously employed, "textlessness"—of the discipline, which served originally to confine it to the lower-division classroom, has now become the means by which it has constituted not only itself but also, to a certain degree, the entire university curriculum.

By the same token, once this work is accomplished there is, theoretically, no longer any need for such a "discipline." For if writing across the curriculum does, in time, transform the identity of the academy; if the long-standing territorial boundaries between and among the constituent disciplines of the curriculum do in fact begin to blur, even break down; if the various disciplines do in fact create a common ground for mutual discourse about their discourses, share a common understanding that on the most fundamental level all of their "bodies of knowledge" are constituted of and by their various "rhetorics," there would be little need for exclusive programs in "composition." I doubt very much that such a transformation will take place easily, or soon, if it does at all. But just imagining it is one of the best ways I know for coming to understand the peculiar and surprising forces, from both without and within, that have shaped the maturation of the discipline over the last fifteen years.

Footnotes

1. Plato, "Gorgias," trans. W. D. Woodhead, *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York: Bollingen Series, Random House, 1963), pp. 242-46.

2. Janet Emig, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1971).

3. Ibid., p. 15.

4. This distinction has become very recently a subject for discussion and critique. See, for example, Louise Wetherbee Phelps, "Dialectics of Coherence: Toward an Integrative Theory," *College English* 47 (January 1985): 12-29.

5. For a more complete discussion of these approaches, see Paul Kameen, "Rewording the Rhetoric of Composition," *Pre/Text* 1, no. 1 (1980): 73-93.

6. James M. McCrimmon, *Writing with a Purpose* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950).

7. Ibid., 4th ed., p. 12.

8. Ibid., 5th ed., p. 18.

9. Ibid., 6th ed., p. 5.

10. Gordon C. Brossell, "Developing Power and Expressiveness in the Language Learning Process," *The Teaching of English*, ed. James R. Squire, Seventy-sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 39.

11. Linda Flower, *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), p. 121.

12. Ibid., p. 144.

13. Ibid., p. 149.

14. Ibid., pp. 157-58.

15. Ibid., p. 134.

16. Ibid., p. 123.

17. McCrimmon, *Writing with a Purpose*, 5th ed., p. 4.

18. D. Gordon Rohman appears to be most responsible for popularizing both the concept of prewriting and this tripartite division of the writing process. See D. Gordon Rohman, "Pre-Writing: The Stage of Discovery in the Writing Process," *College Composition and Communication* 16 (May 1965): 106-112.

19. Ann Berthoff, *The Making of Meaning* (Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook, 1981), pp. 48-49. All following page references are to this text of collected works. I have indicated in my argument the narrative sequence of their original publication. Sources for original publication are noted in the book, preceding each article.

20. Ibid., p. 49.

21. Ibid., p. 51.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., p. 31.

25. Ibid.

26. Flower, *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing*, p. 12.

27. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 303-321.

28. William E. Coles, Jr., *Composing: Writing as a Self-Creating Process* (Rochelle Park, N.J.: Hayden Book Co., 1974).

29. Ibid., p. 1.

30. Ibid., pp. 3-4.

31. Ibid., p. 1.

32. Winifred Bryan Horner, ed., *Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 2.

33. Elaine P. Maimon, *Instructor's Manual to Accompany Readings in the Arts and Sciences* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1984), p. 4.

34. Ibid., p. 3.

35. Ibid.

36. Aristotle, *The Rhetoric*, trans. Lane Cooper (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1932), p. 8.

37. Ibid., pp. 4-5.