Introduction

"Any fool," wrote the poet Gray, "may write a most valuable book by chance, if he will only tell us what he heard and saw with veracity." This is a nice remark and typical of the kind of thing which might have been said in the ordered society of eighteenth-century England. Today we are told that there is a "writing crisis," and that not only do young men and women of the highest education find it difficult to write decently, but that many do not *want* to write at all. Indeed, some academics appear to hate writing, as David Lowenthal and I discovered in our *Times Literary Supplement* survey. Even within my own lifetime it seems to me that writing has become more of a problem for those who are obliged to write. This may be connected with the insecurity and uncertainty of life today and the confused state of many intellectual disciplines. If one does not know what to believe, or if one feels that so much is meaningless, it may inhibit saying anything in a way which literally leaves its mark on the external world.

Anyway, my conviction in assembling these papers is that it is important to write in order to make sense of experience, regardless of whether one's interests and passions lie in the arts or the sciences, and that the process of writing is consequently uniquely gratifying. Hence, on June 5, 1979, I invited seven friends, all of whom are professionally involved in one way or another with the practice of writing, to contribute to a special issue of *Visible Language;* and, at the last moment, I was tempted to write an essay myself. I declined to restrict the scope of the contributions. For what I wanted to do was attract a number of distinctive articles about different aspects of writing. It would be wrong to suppose that there is one best way to understand how people write, or that one aspect of this process is more deserving of study than another. There is a place for hammering out agreements and disagreements, and we have set up a discussion group at University College London to consider in depth the so-called "problems" of writing. Unlike many such groups, our goal is not just talk, but a collaboratively written document on "the writing task." But this issue pursues a less convergent policy because, without benefit of face-to-face discussion, the problem appears to be open-ended.

I dislike the beguiling tones of an "overview," and so I leave you with these papers in the hope that some may strike a chord of recognition, or provide a spur for further enquiry. I should like to thank all my authors for their work, and apologize to some for the delay in getting this collection into print.

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Arts, Crafts, Gifts, and Knacks
Some Disharmonies in the New Rhetoric

Richard E. Young

Despite sharing assumptions about the value of studying and teaching the process of composing, especially the earliest stages of discovery and invention, those teachers and scholars who have come to be known as the "new rhetoricians" are divided on assumptions about the nature of rhetorical art, some holding a vitalist theory of art and composing, others holding a technical theory. The theories influence judgments about what can be taught in the composing process and how it can be taught. The division creates a dilemma for the rhetorician since the durability of the theories and the pedagogical successes of both groups suggest that in some sense both are right.

Glamour and *grammar* or, in French, *grimoire* and *grammaire* were originally the same word and thus combined, even in the vocabulary, the magical and rationalistic aspects of speech.
Jacqueline de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece*

1 To understand the new rhetoric, at least the new school rhetoric, which is the subject of this paper, we must see it as a reaction to an earlier rhetoric. Hence I would like to begin with a series of statements by the nineteenth-century rhetorician John Genung whose textbooks, most notably *The Practical Elements of Rhetoric* (1892), helped establish the paradigm that has dominated the teaching of rhetoric in the United States for nearly a century. "Rhetoric," he says, "is literature, taken in its details and impulses, literature in the making; . . . it is concerned, as real authorship must be, not with a mere grammatical apparatus or with Huxley's logic engine, but with the whole man, his outfit of conviction and emotion, imagination and will, translating himself, as it were, into a vital and ordered utterance" (1901, p. vii).

However, Genung argues that, in spite of rhetoric's being — in theory — concerned with the entire process of making literature, any *practical* treatment of the subject must exclude those acts we would call creative, particularly those associated with the genesis of the composing process: "All the work of origination must be left to the writer himself; the rhetorical text-book can merely treat of those mental habits and powers which give firmness and system to his suggestive faculty . . . " (1892, p. 8).[1]

Genung makes a similar point in explaining what he means by "practical rhetoric." Certain rhetorical capacities, he says, "though very real and valuable, are not practical because the ability to employ them cannot be imparted by teaching. They have to exist in the writer himself, in the peculiar bent of his nature" (1892, p. xi).

Since creative ability cannot be taught, he argues, a practical rhetoric must be limited to the conventions and mechanics of discourse — for example, to the modes and structures of discourse, the characteristics of various genres, the norms of style and usage — a knowledge of which is valuable primarily in organizing, editing, and judging what has already been produced by more mysterious powers. "Literature is of course infinitely more than mechanism," he says, "but in proportion as it becomes more, a text-book of rhetoric has less business with it. It is as mechanism that it must be taught; the rest must be left to the student himself" (1892, p. xii). For Genung, then, the ability to write with skill requires both a creative gift and a mastery of the craft; but the discipline of rhetoric is, necessarily, concerned only with craft since only that is teachable.

By way of contrast, consider now this statement by Gordon Rohman, written a dozen years ago when "new rhetoric" was becoming a fashionable term:

> Writing is usefully described as a process, something which shows continuous change in time like growth in organic nature. Different things happen at different stages in the process of putting thoughts into words and words onto paper.... We divided the process at the point where the "writing idea" is ready for the words and the page: everything before that we called "pre-writing," everything after "writing" and "re-writing"....
>
> What sort of "thinking" precedes writing? By "thinking," we refer to that activity of mind which *brings forth* and develops ideas, plans, designs, not merely the entrance of an idea into one's mind; an active, not a passive enlistment in the "cause" of an idea; conceiving, which includes consecutive logical thinking but much more besides; essentially the imposition of pattern upon experience (1965, p. 106).

For Genung, rhetoric was a body of information about the forms and norms of competent prose and their uses in the later stages of the composing process — the rhetoric of the finished word. For Rohman, rhetoric includes a craft of writing but goes beyond it, for it also includes — and assigns primary importance to — that effort of origination that Genung argues lies beyond the boundaries of a practical rhetoric. "Students," Rohman says, "must learn the structure of thinking that leads to writing since there is no other 'content' to writing apart from the dynamic of conceptualizing" (1965, p. 107).

In these statements by Genung and Rohman we can see the century-old tradition of school rhetoric and what has become the principal argument against it. And this argument — i.e., the insistence on the importance of what Rohman calls the "dynamic of conceptualizing" and elsewhere "creative discovery" — is for many the distinctive feature of the new rhetoric, at least the rhetoric that is now establishing itself in the schools. W. E. Evans and J. L. Walker describe the difference between the two positions this way:

> While traditional rhetoric was concerned with skill in expressing preconceived arguments and points of view, the new rhetoric is concerned with the exploration of ideas .... The new rhetoric, in short, is based on the notion that the basic process of composition is discovery ... (1966, pp. 53-4).

Much of the recent work of rhetoricians has been devoted to finding ways of teaching the process of discovery, of making it part of a rhetoric that is both new and practical.

2 Yet the new rhetoric is not nearly so homogenous as this characterization suggests, for we can discern in the developments to which we give that name two apparently irreconcilable positions. And the difference between them is as important theoretically and pedagogically as the difference between the new and the old rhetoric.

One of these positions has been called the "new romanticism." The term is Frank D'Angelo's (1975, p. 159) and is, I think, an appropriate one. Though we lack the historical studies that permit generalizing with confidence, the position seems not so much an innovation in the discipline as a reaffirmation of the vitalist philosophy of an old romanticism enriched by modern psychology. It maintains that the composing process is, or should be, relatively free of deliberate control; that intellect is no more in touch with reality than non-logical processes; and that the act of composing is a kind of mysterious growth fed by what Henry James called "the deep well of unconcious cerebration" (1934, pp. 22-3). Above all, it insists on the primacy of the imagination in the composing process. "The mystery of language," says James Miller, an advocate of this position,

> is, in large part, the mystery of the processes of the imagination .... For too long the assumption has been made that language used by an individual originates in the orderly processes of his rational mind, in his reason, in his faculty of systematic logic. Instruction in language-use has therefore been largely aimed at this logical faculty, in the belief that the teaching of orderly processes will result in good writing. The result, though, has too often been not good writing but dead writing, obedient to all the inhibitions and restraints drilled into the reason, but generally dehumanized and unreadable (1972, pp. 3-4).

The new romanticism presents the teacher of composition with a difficult problem: i.e., how does one teach a mystery? William Coles makes the point well when he says that "the teaching of writing as writing is the teaching of writing as art. When writing is not taught as art, as more than a craft or a skill, it is not writing that is being taught, but something else .... On the other hand, art because it is art, cannot be taught" (1967, p. 111). Like Genung, Coles believes that the art of composing, as opposed to the craft, cannot be taught; but unlike Genung, he does not on that basis regard a concern with the creative process as impractical: "What is wanted, then, for the teaching of writing as writing, is a way of teaching what cannot be taught, a course to make possible what no course can do" (1967, p. 111).

The solution to the dilemma is to change the role of the teacher. He is to be no longer a purveyor of information about the craft of writing but

a designer of occasions that stimulate the creative process. Or to put it another way, the expository mode of teaching is to be replaced by the hypothetical mode (Bruner, 1965, p. 83). In contrasting what he calls the "classroom of correction" and the "creative classroom," Miller (1974, p. 42) says that the latter would be "a place where language would be surrounded not by dogma but by mystery — the mystery of creation . . . ." And, he continues, "the teacher would be free, and would not be telling, but would be exploring with the students, alert for the spontaneous, the intuitive, the innovative." Such a situation need not be devoid of rigor, a frequently heard accusation against the new romanticism. For example, Coles (1978) establishes a kind of apprentice-master relationship with his students, encouraging them to emulate his own tough-minded intellectual probing and linguistic precision. They learn to be good stylists, in the broadest sense of that term, by observing and trying to imitate the way a good stylist works. If, as the new romantics maintain, the art of writing cannot be taught, the teacher can nevertheless offer students situations in which it can be learned.

The primary difference between the new romantics and those representing the second position I want to discuss — those we might call, for want of a better term, the "new classicists" — is a difference in what constitutes an art. For the new romantics, art contrasts with craft; the craft of writing refers to skill in technique, or what Genung called "mechanics," a skill which can be taught. Art, on the other hand, is associated with more mysterious powers which may be enhanced but which are, finally, unteachable. Art as magic, as glamour.

For the new classicists, art means something quite different: it means the knowledge necessary for producing preconceived results by conscious, directed action. As such, it contrasts not with craft but with knack, i.e., a habit acquired through repeated experience. An art, for the new classicist, is the result of an effort to isolate and generalize what those who have knacks do when they are successful. The distinction is apparent in the opening sentences of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*:

> All men . . . endeavor to criticize or uphold an argument, to defend themselves or accuse. Now, the majority of people do this either at random or with a familiarity arising from habit. But since both these ways are possible, it is clear that matters can be reduced to a system, for it is possible to examine the reason why some attain their end by familiarity and others by change; and such an examination all would at once admit to be the function of an art (1959, p. 3).

In the *Rhetoric* we find a clear instance of what R. G. Collingwood (1958, pp. 17-29) called the "technical theory of art" — art as grammar.

Aristotle pursues the distinction between knack and art in the *Metaphysics* (1941), where he argues that art comes to men through experience, emerging as they become aware of the causes of success in carrying out a particular activity. Both the man of experience (i.e., the man who has a knack) and the man who has an art can carry out that activity, but, he says, we view artists "as being wiser not in virtue of being able to act, but of having the theory for themselves and knowing the causes"

(1941, p. 690). One crucially important implication of this difference, he maintains, is that the artist can teach others to carry out the activity, while those who merely have a knack cannot: "It is a sign of the man who knows and of the man who does not know, that the former can teach, and therefore we think art more truly knowledge than experience is; for artists can teach, and men of mere experience cannot" (1941, p. 690). Aristotle is no doubt the most appropriate spokesman for this position, but it is apparent today in the work of rhetoricians such as Richard Weaver, Edward Corbett, Richard Hughes, Albert Duhamel, Ross Winterowd, Francis Christensen, and those of us working on tagmemic rhetoric. As this list suggests, one need not be an Aristotleian to embrace the theory.

3   Specifically, what is it that the new classicists teach? The question is worth answering in detail, partly to clarify their conception of art and to dispel misconceptions, which abound, and partly to elaborate on what is in practice a fundamental difference between the two groups of rhetoricians. But a detailed answer also suggests that there may be a basis for accommodation between art as grammar and art as glamour.

What is taught? The answer is "heuristics," that is, explicit strategies for effective guessing. Heuristic procedures are not to be confused with rule-governed procedures; for if we fail to make the distinction, we end by rejecting the use of explicit techniques in composing since there are few rule-governed procedures possible in rhetoric. A rule-governed procedure specifies a finite series of steps that can be carried out consciously and mechanically without the aid of intuition or special ability, and if properly carried out always yields a correct result—for example, the procedure for making valid inferences in syllogistic reasoning. On the other hand, a heuristic procedure provides a series of questions or operations whose results are provisional. Although explicit and more or less systematic, heuristic search is not wholly conscious or mechanical; intuition, relevant knowledge, and skill are also necessary.

The use of heuristic procedures implies certain assumptions about the process they are designed to facilitate. First, their use implies a generic conception of the process. For to use a heuristic appropriately the writer must see the situation he is confronting at the moment as a specific variant of the *kind* of situation for which the procedure was designed; he must behave as though in some sense he has been there before. If he regards each situation as unique, he has no reason to believe that a technique that was useful once will be useful again. Second, the use of heuristic procedures implies that some though not necessarily all phases of the process he is trying to control can be carried out deliberately and rationally. That is a condition for using a heuristic procedure, at least while it is being learned and before it becomes a habitual way of thinking.

If the creative process has generic features, if some of its phases can be consciously directed, and if heuristic procedures can be developed as aids,

then it can be taught. Or to be more precise, certain aspects of the creative process can be taught. We cannot teach direct control of the imaginative act or the unanticipated outcome. But we can teach the heuristics themselves and the appropriate occasions for their use. And this is important, for heuristic procedures can guide inquiry and stimulate memory and intuition. The imaginative act is not absolutely beyond the writer's control; it can be nourished and encouraged.

These generalizations about heuristics and the technical theory of art become clearer if we recall Francis Christensen's generative rhetoric of the sentence (1967), a technique that uses form to produce ideas. After a close examination of the practice of modern writers who have a knack for good prose—Hemingway, Steinbeck, Faulkner, et al.—Christensen identified four principles operating in the production of cumulative sentences, i.e., sentences whose modification is primarily right branching. First, that we make a point by adding information to the noun and the verb, which serve as a base from which the meaning will rise. Second, that the modifiers usually follow the base clause rather than preceding it or being embedded in it. Third, that complexity and precision arise from various levels of generality in the modifiers. Finally, that density and richness are the result of the number of modifiers used.

A heuristic procedure enables the writer to bring such principles to bear in composing by translating them into questions or operations to be performed. A procedure for producing cumulative sentences might look something like this: study what is being observed, write a base clause about it, try piling up at the end of the clause analogies, details and qualities that serve to refine the original observation. The result, if the writer is observing well and has reasonable control of the language and the heuristic—and is lucky—is a sentence like

> He dipped his hands in the bichloride solution and shook them, a quick shake, fingers down, like the fingers of a pianist above the keys (Christensen, 1967, p. 9).

"In composition courses," Christensen says, "we do not really teach our captive charges to write better—we merely *expect* them to. And we do not teach them to write better because we do not know how to teach them to write better" (1967, p. 3). What can one teach if he is interested in his students writing elegant and original sentences of this type? One answer is Christensen's four principles and the heuristic derived from them, along with whatever else is necessary to make their use effective.

Consider another example, this time from tagmemic rhetoric (e.g., Young, Becker, Pike, 1970). The conception of the creative process in tagmemic rhetoric draws heavily on the extensive psychological literature on creativity and problem-solving—on the work of Graham Wallas, John Dewey, George Miller, and Leon Festinger in particular. Although the creative process may seem mysterious and beyond analysis, certain kinds of activity do recur from instance to instance. The writer feels some sort of difficulty or dissonance and makes an effort to understand it. He explores data related to the difficulty and seeks more. He intuits tentative solutions, and he evaluates them. Interspersed are periods of unconscious activity,

most notably between the exploration of problematic data and the intuition of possible solutions. Notice that this conception does not insist on the primacy of reason nor does it repudiate non-rational activity; instead it assumes a subtle and elaborate dialectic between the two. In the conscious phases of the process, heuristics can be used—for example, a heuristic for exploring problematic data.

If we give a very young child an object that is for him interesting and enigmatic he will use all his physical abilities in an effort to understand—touching it, smelling it, shaking it, breaking it, putting it in his mouth, and so on. More mature minds, when confronted with problems, do not abandon physical manipulation, but we do rely more heavily on its intellectual equivalent. Rather than things, we manipulate symbols, which immensely increases the range, subtlety, and efficiency of exploration. We compare, contrast, classify, segment, re-order, shift focuses of attention, and so on. By these means, we try to coax intuitions of reasonable solutions. To paraphrase a line by William Stafford (1962, p. 17), we do tricks in order to know.[2]

But I am concerned here not only with what we do when engaged in intellectual exploration, I am also concerned with what we can do to increase our control over the activity, to make it more effective than it might otherwise be. The answer offered by tagmemic rhetoric is a heuristic based on the principles on tagmemic linguistics, a linguistic theory developed primarily by Kenneth Pike. These principles, Pike maintains (e.g., 1964, p. 129), are universal invariants that underlie all human experience as characteristic of rationality itself. For example, one such principle (there are twelve of them) is that to describe any unit of experience we must know its contrastive features; otherwise we could not distinguish it from other units. We must know how it can vary without losing its identity; otherwise we could not recognize it again. And we must know its distribution in various systems, since all units exist in contexts, and a knowledge of such contexts is what enables us to discuss roles, make definitions, predictions, and assumptions about appropriateness of occurrence, and in general perceive systemic relationships that are part of what the unit is.

A heuristic based on these principles (Young, 1978) might ask the inquirer to change his mode of perception of the same unit, viewing it as a static, sharply defined particle, as a wave of activity, and as a field of relationships. In each mode he is asked to note the unit's contrastive features, variations, and distributions. In this way he is led through a set of complementary lines of inquiry that direct his attention to features of the unit he might otherwise overlook, help him bring to bear information that he already has in his memory, and identify what he does not yet know. "Discovery," Jerome Bruner observes, ". . . favors the well-prepared mind" (1965, p. 82). We can see the exploratory procedure as a way of moving the mind out of its habitual grooves, of shaking it loose from a stereotypic past that wants to be retrieved, of helping the writer get beyond the superficial to levels tapped by the romantic's muse.

The great danger of a technical theory of art, of art as grammar, is and has been in the past that it may over-rationalize the composing process. In their preoccupation with analysis and method, those holding the theory may ignore our non-rational powers, inadvertently trying to turn heuristic procedures into rule-governed procedures and devising strategies for carrying out processes that are better dealt with by the unaided mind. It is a danger, but it is not an inevitable consequence of the theory.

4 I have been arguing that two conflicting conceptions of art are discernable in that conglomeration of developments that we call the "new rhetoric." The conflict, however, is not new. De Romilly has explored it in the rhetorics of Gorgias, Plato, Aristotle, Longinus, and others; it is clearly apparent in the work of the new rhetoricians of the eighteenth century and romantics like Coleridge in the nineteenth. It reemerges every time men think seriously about the discipline. "After all," de Romilly remarks, "it amounts to a struggle between the spell of the irrational and the desire to master it by means of reason . . ." (1975, p. 85).

The durability of these two fundamental conceptions of rhetorical art and the effectiveness of the pedagogical methods based on them suggest that in some sense both are true—in spite of the fact that they seem incompatible. We can respond to this conflict by partisan denial of one of the truths, as some have done, though the price of partisanship strikes me as excessively high. Or we can cultivate a Keatsian negative capability and live with the conflict, exploiting one or the other of the conceptions as it suits our needs as teachers. Such a strategy is not necessarily an evasion of intellectual responsibility. "Both-and" may well be, for the moment, a more appropriate response than "either-or." For as Niels Bohr (1958, p. 66) once observed, the opposite of a correct statement is an incorrect statement; but the opposite of a deep truth may well be another deep truth.[3] Or we can consider the possibility that behind art as glamour and art as grammar there may be a more adequate conception of rhetorical art that does not lead us to affirm the importance of certain psychological powers at the cost of denying the importance of others. If we choose this last course of action, we might begin by investigating more carefully than it has been investigated the role of heuristic procedures in the rhetorical process, since they call into play both our reason and our imagination.

1. Compare Genung's more detailed statement that "The first stage [of invention], the finding of material by thought or observation, is the fundamental and inclusive office of invention, the distinctive power that we designate in the popular use of the term. Herein lies obviously the heart and centre of literary production; it is what the writer finds, in his subject or in the world of thought, that gauges his distinction as an author. Yet this is, of all processes, the one least to be invaded by the rules of the text-book. It is a work so individual, so dependent on the peculiar aptitude and direction of the writer's mind, that each one must be left for the most part to find his way alone, according to the impulse that is in him" (1892, p. 217).

2. The original (Stafford, 1962, p. 17) is

> I do tricks in order to know:
> careless I dance,
> then turn to see
> the mark to turn God left for me.

3. Bohr comments that "In the Institute in Copenhagen, where through those years a number of young physicists from various countries came together for discussions, we used, when in trouble, often to comfort ourselves with jokes, among them the old saying of the two kinds of truth. To the one kind belong statements so simple and clear that the opposite assertion obviously could not be defended. The other kind, the so-called 'deep truths,' are statements in which the opposite also contains deep truth. Now, the development in a new field will usually pass through stages in which chaos becomes gradually replaced by order; but it is not least in the intermediate stage where deep truth prevails that the work is really exciting and inspires the imagination to search for a firmer hold" (1958, p. 66).

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"I don't see writing as a communication
of something already discovered,
as 'truths' already known.
Rather, I see writing as a job of experiment.
It's like any discovery job;
you don't know what's going to happen
until you try it,"   William Stafford

Conformity and Commitment in Writing

Peter C. Wason

It is argued that conformity to stereotyped styles of writing tends to conceal a sense of commitment to what is being said. The effect is both to alienate the individual from the practice of writing, and to encourage a kind of obscurantism which may be inimical to clear thinking. The conditions for recovering a committed voice and the benefits of so doing are described.

1   CONFORMITY

"You a member of the establishment then?" I was talking to a small group of trainee managers from a leading computer firm about a pet deductive problem of mine. "It's those funny words you use in your writing. When you talk to us it all becomes clear." Remote and forbidding, my prose had apparently been perceived as an example of what Claire Lerman (1981) calls the "institutional voice," cultivated over about twenty-five years to fit the constraints of learned journals. I defended myself by saying that if I were to unpack my words for an untutored audience, then my articles would have to be very much longer, but this argument didn't satisfy my managers at all. Still, they had a point. They felt, and I think a lot of us would agree, that a great deal of what lands on our desks is impenetratably obscure. Furthermore, they implied by the term "establishment" that it was needlessly and perhaps deliberately obscure. Increasingly, it would seem, the voice of a person with something to say is lost.

In some cases one would be inclined to think this is a good thing. Consider technical reports which purport to provide no more than factual information, e.g. "The Loads Exerted by Grass Silage on Bunker Silo Walls"—surely to write about that in a committed way would be inappropriate. And yet I am unsure. In the nineteen-fifties a flourishing group, The Presentation of Technical Information Group, was set up at University College London, led by the late Professor R. O. Kapp, precisely to study ways of rendering such information more interesting and palatable. I am reluctant to draw a limit between different kinds of writing, although I suppose that a philosophical paper allows more scope for commitment than a technical report. What I try to do in this essay is to sketch the forces which induce conformity on style, and speculate on how commitment may be recovered through writing.

At its very worst, a peculiarly offensive style does seem to infect the literature of the social sciences and relatively new disciplines which borrow concepts from a variety of older ones, e.g., semiotics and design. This style