



Alex Stout

Synthesis: Final Draft • Salt Lake Community College • English 1010 • Whicker • April 29, 2009

Over the past few decades, the educational community has debated upon a common argument: what style of composition do we teach our students to better prepare them for their future? W. Ross Winterowd, a modern college professor, brought about the argument stating that rhetoric is where the focus needs to be in college classrooms and romanticism, simply, can't be taught. This brings us to our common conflict. In the red corner, I give you the Rhetorician: the face in this match, possessing credibility that is very popular among formal communities and is claimed to comprise content and purpose. In the blue corner, I present the Romantic: back by popular demand for its style and flattering voice.

Backing rhetoric, we have notable writers ranging from the previously mentioned, W. Ross Winterowd, hailing from the University of Southern California, all the way back to the magnificent and masterful Aristotle. Aristotle is, of course, known for his philosophies and writings on the many subjects including physics, metaphysics, poetry, theater, music, logic, rhetoric, politics, government, ethics, biology, zoology and—most importantly for the sake of this paper—rhetoric.

Aristotle, the father of rhetoric, taught rhetoric as a derivative of dialectic, a form of persuasion in discourse. A simple quote from Aristotle's treatise, titled Rhetoric,

presents his belief that writing can't be open-ended and aimless. Aristotle wrote "[a] whole is that which has beginning, middle and end" (Aristotle, Rhetoric). Winterowd would certainly agree with Aristotle with his personal belief when he states that one should first ask "what do [i] want this piece of writing to do?" (Winterowd, 342).

Winterowd suggests in his paper, "A Philosophy of Composition" that rhetoric is the most significant style of composition a student can learn. He lists the most important characteristics of modern composition:

Here, then, is my philosophy of composition:
 Composition is doing, symbolic action, not finding or making;
 consists, like all arts, in large part of craft;
 belongs to the literature of fact;
 finds its power in community;
 challenges the belief in presence. (347)

Explaining each bullet point, Winterowd insinuates that romanticism confuses students and misleads them in their overall goal. His main claim of confusion really surfaces when speaking of Donald Murray when Murray suggests "[t]opics rise from within in a constant flow, and there is no need to think of ideas" (qtd. in Winterowd, 344). Murray goes on to bore us explaining how his writing style is the result of his depressing childhood "[w]riting is my way of achieving sanity...I came from a background that was filled with sin, guilt, and threats of Hell and damnation...I was a sickly, only child in a world filled with the threat of disease and death, punishment and retribution, and much of my writing is a psychological necessity" (qtd. in Winterowd, 344)...ouch. Winterowd follows these confusing, absurd words of Don Murray with "[t]he attitude expressed in [this quotation] must demoralize students who want and need to create texts that do not spontaneously boil up from the depths of turbulent psyches. The pervasive Romantic

attitude strips rhetoric of invention" (Winterowd, 344). This is the epitome of Winterowd's claim that romantics confuse students.

Winterowd, Aristotle, the rest of the rhetoricians claim that Rhetoric is the ultimate element in discourse. They claim that Rhetoric must be taught because it doesn't just come about through some cogitation the way expression does. They also claim that romanticism need not be taught in school because it is something from within the writer which they teach and learn themselves how to express.

Romanticism is said to have originated in the Elizabethan era, but significantly emerged in the eighteenth century as a resistance to the aristocratic standards of the Age of Enlightenment. Famous romantics include Immanuel Kant, Edgar Allen Poe, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Regarding our conflict, a modern Romantic, Peter Elbow, in his essay "A Method For Teaching Writing," expresses that voice is the most active ingredient in composition suggesting that it is the element that differs one writer from the next.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was very talented in discourse. He was a public speaker—one of those guys shouting out to the people of the streets convincing them to follow him in his beliefs on controversial subjects—for some time which shows he was, indeed, a talented 'persuasionist.' But Emerson's true beliefs fell on writing from within. He expresses his opinion on the value of subjected writings when stating that "[t]he highest class of books are those which express the moral element; the next, works of imagination; and the next, works of science." (Emerson, "Thoughts On Modern Literature", par. 1). He values writing of nature and philosophy over science and fact.

Elbow, Emerson, and their team of Romantics mostly claim that expression needs to be encouraged in college. They want teachers to encourage their students that it is

often necessary to incorporate expression into the already commonly practiced foundational principles. I know Aristotle's position today would be with Mr. Winterowd on the side of the Rhetoricians, but there is another famous quote from his writings that sides heavily with the Romantics. Here, Aristotle implies that art is deeper than what you see; within the words, there is a greater meaning. Aristotle states "[t]he aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance" (Aristotle, Poetics). This shows how every individual, no matter their beliefs, still has the desire to use expression in art and/or writing.

All in all, I have a dream that Rhetoricians and Romantics can coexist. The further and deeper I research this subject the more I begin to understand the points W. Ross Winterowd is making "A Philosophy of Composition." I initially interpreted him as a hater of expression. But now I understand his standpoint. He thoroughly enjoys Romantic writings, but all he suggests is focusing the classroom's attention on rhetoric. Romantics just want to focus the classroom's attention on expression. They don't want to fill valuable time with the foundational principles anymore.

Today, the foundational principles are taught much more in the middle and high school classrooms and we may be getting to the point where we don't need to focus on the principles anymore. Maybe, we're getting to the point that we can create two separate classes, both required at the entry level: one that focuses attention toward rhetoric and dialectics (possibly a prerequisite in the direction of business), and one that focuses attention toward expression (possibly a prerequisite in the direction of arts). I can see it now. Teachers and students glowing with glee that they all agree and understand that rhetoric and expression are both important factors of modern composition. Someday,

Romantics and Rhetoricians will unite and teach a style of writing never taught before...
someday. As Rodney King once said, "Can't we all just get along?"

Works Cited

Aristotle. Rhetoric, Books I – III. (350 B.C.E).

Elbow, Peter. "A Method For Teaching Writing." College English, Vol. 30, No. 2.
(Nov., 1968): 115–125.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Thoughts On Modern Literature." Uncollected Prose: Dial
Essays (1840), (1996),
<<http://www.emersoncentral.com/thoughts-on-modern-literature.htm>>.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, and J. Donn Vann. "Five Uncollected Reviews of
Emerson's Essays, First Series." The New England Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 1
(Mar., 1978), 91–99.

Winterowd, W. Ross. "A Philosophy of Composition." Rhetoric Review 9.2 (1991):
340–348.