

Composition Studies and Literary Criticism: A Hermeneutic Transaction

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Abstract- *This paper presents a hermeneutic reading (from a Gadamerian perspective) of the complex relationships that tied the two fields of Composition Studies and Literary Criticism within the English department and across the academia. These two academic disciplines have remained in a dynamic, interactive, reciprocal relation throughout the decades. The paper surveys the published scholarship in the field of Composition Studies and presents a reading of the different themes, philosophies, and approaches that have kept the two fields in an interactive, dialogic process of formation. Terms and concepts from philosophical hermeneutics are introduced and employed to explain this relation.*

General Terms- Teaching Writing

Keywords- *Composition Studies; Literary Criticism; hermeneutic relation*

1. INTRODUCTION

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics makes dialogue the essence of language because language is used for communication, which mostly takes the form of a conversation or dialogue. Therefore, any use of language is an involvement in a dialogue to reach (mutual) 'understanding' between parties.

For Gadamer understanding is limited and decided by one's own "horizon," which is the person's already existing understanding (i.e., pre-understanding) of the matter/world. In this sense, any encountered reality, text, tradition, or another person presents a second (necessarily different) horizon. Through interacting with this other horizon, the person reformulates her/his own understanding. Therefore, any understanding is necessarily an act of "fusion" of (at least two different) horizons.

'Fusion of horizons,' then, is understood as what happens when a person interacts with another person, a text, or a reality of the world. When this person modifies or changes her/his ideas to suit a new reality, or when the person adopts the point of view of a counter horizon, what actually happens is a fusion of both horizons. Fusion-of-horizons is for Gadamer the basis for all human understanding and for all human involvement with the world.

This idea of "fusion of horizons" is the foundation of Gadamer's concept of truth. It explains what he means by "Truth" as an "event," which "keeps happening," or "truth as unhiddenness/ unconcealment." Truth as unhiddenness means that truth becomes apparent to people when they uncover it through the process of understanding. As we do

not understand everything at once, then truth keeps happening to us (new things/ideas keep revealing themselves to us throughout our life). We might often need to change our own understandings when we encounter new realities. It follows that understanding itself is also a continuous process that keeps happening.

These terms and concepts from philosophical hermeneutics (dialogue, fusion of horizons, truth as unconcealment, and truth as an event that keeps happening) are employed to explain the complex relations that have existed between Composition Studies and Literary Criticism. Understanding some aspects of the relationships that exist between the two fields will be very helpful.

Composition Studies has incorporated insights and thoughts from all the disciplines that have all along fed English Studies. It has taken much from philosophy, sociology, psychology, science, technology, as well as literary criticism. In fact, and during the past decades, many of the insights that have been polarized in literary criticism have also fed composition studies. In many cases, both fields were working on the same set of thoughts at the same time.

2. PATTERNS OF TRANSACTION/BORROWING

A thorough hermeneutic reading of publications reveals that there are at least three patterns of borrowing and adaptation from literary criticism evident in much of the published scholarship in composition studies. One of these patterns has to do with the fact that many teachers of composition who have had their degrees and training in literature programs continue to teach literary texts in

composition classes. The second pattern shows in how compositionists have borrowed theories, terms and concepts from literary criticism and applied them to their discussions and teaching of composition. Even though these teachers do not teach literary texts to composition students, still their classroom theories and pedagogies are closely related to those of literature classes. A third pattern can be seen in the fact that both literary studies and composition studies have been drawing on and incorporating same philosophies and insights borrowed from other disciplines—even though they have done so in different ways sometimes. These patterns are discussed below in some details.

2.1 First Pattern of Adaptation

The trend of teaching literary texts to students of composition is the first pattern of adaptation. Teachers who have training in literary criticism hold to their tradition and import contents and activities of the literature classroom to their composition class. They continue to teach works of literature but add one segment: writing and the writing process. Janice Haney Peritz (1993)[62] and Mariolina Salvatore (1996)[69] argue that reading and writing cannot be separated, and for this reason, literature is the appropriate kind of readings to use in the composition class.

A summary of the history of using literature in composition classes is presented by Christopher Gould (1989)[34], who presents two sides of scholars—those with and those against the use of literature in composition classes. Gould shows that there have always been teachers who teach literature in the composition class for different purposes and in different ways, and he ends the argument by emphasizing the positive power that literary texts could give to basic writers. On the other hand, Sharon Crowley (1998) refutes all these arguments about the importance of literature in teaching composition and opposes them. (Such arguments—with and against the use of literature in composition classes—have continued over the years, but they are outside the scope of this article.)

The arguments for the importance of literature have been enhanced by many stories of success that teachers celebrate in their published scholarship. Some composition teachers take it for granted that literature is the subject matter of the composition classroom, and they use their talents to verify what literature to teach, how to teach it, and what gains are expected as results. For example, Bret Lott (1988)[50] shows how techniques of fiction-writing (plot, characterization, and dialogue) help remedial writers express their personal narrative, and Fredrick Lang (1988)[49] argues that the inexperienced writers learn from the authors they read. John Heyda (1988)[38] actually sees that the objective of the composition classroom is to strengthen reading literature and writing about it. On these same lines, we find Carol Hovanec (1990)[39] very excited about her experimentation with teaching international literature to freshman composition students.

The same trend continues to appear in Composition published scholarship in the twenty first century. Actually, Mark Richardson (2004)[67] calls for “reinventing” writing about literature in the composition classroom while Terry Patrick Bigelow and Michael J. Vokoun (2005)[5] teach literature in their composition class to help students learn literary elements and write about how these elements affect meaning. Similarly, R. V. Young (2011)[90] sees the teaching of freshman composition as an opportunity for the students to learn the basic skills of composition and to increase their understanding of a work of literature. Thomas M. McCann et al (2012)[54] investigate in their composition classes how students connect to the literature they read to help them in their struggle with the real problems that invade their lives, and to compose arguments in which they project their concerns and construct solutions.

The articles presented here, and the many others like them, actually betray the attitude that teachers of literature bring with them to the composition classroom: Students are not authors; Students should read and study authors. This same assumption—not by chance at all—is what composition theory has fiercely fought against. One strong conviction in modern Composition Studies is that students are capable writers who, when offered appropriate preparation, can develop into mature authors.

Gadamer’s discussion of ‘tradition’ and ‘prejudices’ can explain the stand of teachers who promote the teaching of literature to students of composition. For Gadamer, our prejudices and pre-judgements (our ‘historicity’) make understanding possible. Prejudices—or our ‘effective histories’—allow us to have a ‘horizon’ through which our experience of the world is filtered. We do not create this ‘horizon.’ It grows from the connections we have with the elements of our historical situation; it originates in the tradition we happen to exist in.

Therefore, teachers of composition who have been trained in literature come from a tradition of teaching literary texts. Students, in this tradition, are not authors, and they need to be educated in special ways that qualify them to read the texts of authors. These teachers are controlled by their prejudices (the set of their already existing pre-understandings). When they teach composition classes, where students are the would-be authors, they make students read literary texts and learn how to appreciate them. However, in this new context of the composition class, students are required to either write about these texts or imitate them with fresh compositions. Therefore, what happens is exactly what Gadamer describes as fusion of horizons.

The prejudices (pre-understandings) of these teachers are so strong that they find difficulty in opening themselves up to the demands of truth that the new situation makes upon them. The new horizon is not allowed the full freedom of dialogue to speak to them. They only make little adjustment in their teaching practices. The result of this fusion is a hybrid class of literature and controlled writing.

2.2 Second Pattern of Adaptation

Side by side with this first pattern of teaching literature in composition classes, there are other teachers who actually teach composition but keep elements of their literature tradition clear and prominent in the composition class. They represent the second pattern of adaptation from literature. Important features of literature classes remain eminent in the way composition classes are conducted. From a Gadamerian perspective, the first group of instructors have maintained their loyalty to the tradition they come from fused with some elements of the new tradition while teachers in this second pattern adopt the new tradition enriched with elements of the older tradition. Gadamer maintains that there can be no 'clean' break up with the tradition/past. Any new tradition (way of understanding) is in fact a development of an already existent tradition—a 'fusion of horizons:' our own horizon and that of the text/person/tradition/situation we encounter. The adaptation under this second pattern varies from single terms and concepts or individual assignments to whole theories and approaches. Within this pattern of thinking, Patricia Bizzell called since 1986 for "a unified theory of Composition and Literature."

One example of this pattern is clear in the fact that there has been a large movement to transfer a theory of 'genre' from literature to composition as shown in the use of drama in teaching composition (Edward Rocklin 1991)[68] or the use of interactive fiction (Stuart Moulthrop and Nancy Kaplan 1991)[56]. Moreover, Tremmel (2002)[82] and Tighe (2002)[79] discuss the production of "multigenre" texts in their composition and research classes while Lynn Bloom (1990)[9] calls the kind of writing usually produced in composition classes "a genre of literary nonfiction". Rachel Toor (2007)[80] mentions that this genre of nonfiction is variously called in composition published scholarship as "creative nonfiction," "literary nonfiction," "narrative nonfiction," or "the fourth genre". Alongside this line of thinking, Kirby and Kirby (2010)[48] investigate what they call "Contemporary memoir" as a subgenre of literary nonfiction. In a reversed movement, Paul Skrebels (2003)[73] calls for extending the boundaries of literary studies to include this genre of "nonfiction" alongside the more established "literary" genres—fiction, poetry, and drama.

To suit the special requirements of composition classes, compositionists promote a sociocognitive theory of genre of knowledge that is activity-based (Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin, 1993)[2] and suggest redefining this literary term as a stabilized-for-now site of social and ideological action (Catherine Schryer 1993)[71]. Such extension of boundaries has allowed composition theorists and practitioners to subject all kinds of writing to genre analysis. Patricia Bizzell (1989)[7] considers academic writing (published scholarship) as a complex literary genre, with its own conventions, ideological assumptions, and epistemological implications. Within this stream of thinking lie other attempts of applying genre analysis to

technical books (Elizabeth Tebeaux, 1993)[78], medical record keeping (Catherine Schryer, 1993)[71], environmental impact statements produced by the (USA) Bureau of Land Management (Jimmie Killingsworth and Dean Steffens, 1989)[47], an Amish farmer's writing about nature (Rene Galindo and Constance Brown 1995)[31], and teachers' end comments on students' writings (Summer Smith 1997)[74].

In a more general perspective, David Brauer (2009)[10] incorporates genre theory in order to foster a connection between Composition Studies and literary studies while discussing "The Future of the Humanities," Chen and Su (2012)[16] have utilized a genre-based approach to teach EFL students summary writing. In these examples, we can see that the literary convention of genre analysis has taken a stride, and in some cases, lost many of its original characteristic traits.

In addition to the concept of genre, 'reader-response' theories have been very widespread in composition classes and published scholarship as another important movement from literary studies to composition theory within the second pattern. According to Patricia Harkin (2005)[35], reader-response was popular among compositionists in the 1980s, faded a little in the 1990s, and is back to gaining strong grounds in the twenty-first century as composition classes are back to reconsidering and adapting readings in their curricula.

Nan Johnson (1988) equates theories of reader-response with the rhetorical theories of audience response (or the pathos principle of classical rhetoric) to offer a bridge between analysis of literary texts and the dynamics of formal and social discourse. According to Johnson, this can provide a theoretical foundation for the teaching of reading and writing.

Applications of reader-response theories are various, but the most important one is to study the effect of texts (here written by students) on readers. Marilyn Chambliss and Ruth Garner (1996)[15] examine students' texts from a receptionist point of view and set the standard for the success in the effect these texts leave on readers. Kathleen R. Winter (1994)[87] argues for the benefits gained from using a reader-response approach in composition—such as exposing students to literary terms, building tolerance of various viewpoints, and enhancing discussions. Likewise, Bigelow and (2006)[5] use reader response approach to help students find literary elements and write about their effect on meaning in stories they read and create. On the other hand, Marie Omelia Treglia (2008)[81] applies reader-response theories to analyze students' reactions to the comments of their teachers, showing that students found most helpful commentaries that provided acknowledgment, offered specific suggestions, and gave them choices. On the other hand, her study shows that students were discouraged by directives that did not convey trust in their abilities to revise.

Another direct way that literature-teachers of composition manifest a hermeneutic, dialogic encounter with their revealed situations—and that also falls under the second

pattern— is what Sandra Dutton and Holy Fils-Aime (1993)[24] accomplished in their composition classes. They encouraged students to be writers and to see themselves as writers by producing material for a student-generated literary magazine. In other words, students are encouraged to become writers of literary texts. Several other composition teachers ask their students to write poetry, fiction, or drama to fulfill class requirements.

Reading, analyzing, and writing about literature in composition classes together with this new surge of encouraging students to write literature, may have helped the surge of creative writing, which resulted in the establishment of several creative writing programs or at least courses taught in the English department. Laura Julier (2003)[45] calls for breaking the boundaries between academic and creative writing, and argues for an academic essay that behaves more like fiction and poetry. In a historical exploration meant to defend the inclusion of creative writing in composition classes, Alexandria Peary (2009)[61] examines nineteenth-century composition-rhetoric textbooks and finds that the academia then allowed the inclusion of creative writing intertwined with composition.

Jacobs et.al. (2004)[40] confirm that having students write narratives inform their reading and writing experiences and powerfully shape learning outcome. In addition, Timothy G. Weih (2005)[83] finds that reading and discussing traditional literature enables students (like real authors) to blend the elements from their own cultures in the narratives they create. Wendy J. Glenn (2007)[33] engages students in writing fiction in the composition class to make them good readers. Students use effective reading strategies because they were motivated to improve their own stories. Similarly, students of David L. James (2008)[41] were able to learn about elements of poetry, fiction, and drama through producing these genres.

Furthermore, Sandra Young (2005)[91] argues that by creatively writing patients' lives, nurses improve their own compositional skills, which they gained from the blending of arts and sciences using creative writing strategies. Along the same lines, Daniel R Meier and Andrew J Stremmel (2010)[55] use narrative enquiry as a research framework to teach early childhood teacher researchers to apply essential forms and functions of narrative in their graduate level early childhood research writing and education.

2.3 Third Pattern of Adaptation

The third pattern of borrowing—or dialectical engagement—between literature and composition studies shows in the fact that both fields have been engaged simultaneously with same interests and same concerns, incorporating same philosophies and insights borrowed from other disciplines. They have both taken from classical rhetoric, Foucault, Bakhtin, feminism, multiculturalism, postcolonial theories, and ecology—in addition to different earlier applications from linguistics, psychology, and science.

The presence of classical rhetoric in Composition scholarship needs no proof or justification. Some composition scholars credit the revival of classical rhetoric in the 1950s and 1960s to be a main step towards the crystallization of Composition Studies as a separate discipline in the English Department. Gerald Nelms and Maureen Daly Goggin (1994)[57] assert that this revival has been the most significant and lasting theoretical system offered for application in the teaching of writing. They observe that classical structure of invention, arrangement and style in addition to the rhetorical norms (of purpose, audience, subject matter), the classical system of persuasive appeals (ethical/ethos, emotional/pathos, logical/logos), and the various strategies of carrying out these appeals still inform much of what we know and accept about written discourse and the teaching of composition.

Kathleen E. Welch (The Contemporary, 1990)[85] argues that classical rhetoric offers theories for the production of discourse, and this is the main concern of the teaching of composition. In addition, Welch shows how the adaptability of classical rhetoric to language situations, its ability to address any situation, and its focus on critical stances to discourse have helped its wide spread in English classes—both literature and writing. Welch also suggests (Electrifying, 1990)[86] that Composition Studies should adapt classical rhetoric ideas to create more effective electronic media to meet the increasing pressure of the digital surge. On these same lines, Ellen C. Carillo (2010)[12] believes that it is important to use and analyze classical rhetoric themes and terms in order to enrich students' rhetorical repertoires and contribute to the understanding of composition as a discipline and its relationship to the field of rhetoric. On the other hand, Paul F. Kemp (2001)[46] thinks that rhetorical analysis is able to “bridge” the gap between literature and composition and can bring both disciplines into a single frame of reference. Foucauldian discourse analysis has been influential in Composition (and literature) scholarship with its focus on power relationships in society as expressed through language. Compositionists (and literary scholars) often look at how those in power use language to express dominance and call for compliance and respect from others. One common example in composition scholarship would be the language used by teachers towards students and the language used by administrators in English departments and writing programs towards composition teachers. In addition, compositionists often use this approach to discuss how language is used—especially by students—as a form of resistance to those in power.

Related to the concept of discourse-analysis is the Foucauldian concept of the ‘author,’ which has engrafted a strong presence in composition theory. While in literary criticism the term author almost always refers to a well-known and well-established—or at least published—writer, compositionists apply the term daringly to beginner writers who have just started to learn how to put their thoughts in writing. There is Kurt Spellmeyer (1989)[75]

who does not only encourage students to feel like authors, but also treats them as ones. He studies and analyzes students' texts in the same way a literary critic would study a poem or a novel. Stephen North (1987)[58] has encouraged composition teachers to do exactly so—to view students' writings as texts of value and subject them to literary-criticism theories of reading and analysis. On the same grounds, Jeffrey Carroll (1991)[13] argues that it is important for composition teachers to increase students' claims to 'authority' in the Foucauldian sense, and Paul Heilker (1994)[37] discusses how classroom design, process pedagogies, and the construction of the field can bring increased author visibility in the texts students write. These articles (and many others) are especially interesting cases that present clear examples in which literature's high regard to established authors is transferred and conferred on novice students.

Bakhtin's ethics has been prominent in the discussions of composition and literary studies. Helen Rothschild Ewald (1993)[27] stresses the relevance of the Bakhtinian concepts of "ethical action" and "answerability" to composition studies. Anne C. Coon (1989)[19] and Christy Friend (1992)[29] argue that negotiating ethical issues, and having students read, speak, role-play, and write on ethical questions sharpen and strengthen the research component of composition.

The trend of discussing and employing ethics in composition studies has become so strong that Elizabeth Flynn (2007)[28] and Ellen Barton (2008)[1] refer to an "ethical turn" in theory and practice in composition and literature scholarship. While Barton discusses this ethical turn in Composition within a double fold framework showing a principle-based ethics of rights and a context-based ethics of care, Flynn argues that Louise Rosenblatt affected—if not actually started—an ethical turn in literary studies comparable to that in Composition.

Feminism is, by all means, another tradition that literary criticism and composition studies share. Feminist thinking in Composition is intertwined with issues like agency, collaborative writing, language function, racism, identity, writing program administration and the concept of authority, computers, writing across the curriculum (WAC), and history. Shari J. Stenberg (2013)[76] has reasons to argue that feminist scholars have made Composition Studies a more inclusive and innovative field. Louise Wetherbee Phelps and Janet Emig (1995)[64] tried to make clear the complex contributions that women have made to Composition Studies as a field by presenting women teachers and learners at work in their edited collection of essays.

Feminist compositionists make students' experiences the core for their teaching in their attempts to create a supportive, nurturing class environment. They provide chances for students to develop critical thinking and to voice their perceptions and desires as they focus on issues of difference and dominance in order to de-center power in the classroom.

Such topics are clear in the collection of essays one reads in *Feminism and Composition Studies: In Other Words* edited by Susan C. Jarratt and Lynn Worsham (1998)[43]. The essays show how the personal and cultural are actually inseparable, and attempt to understand what modes of learning and teaching may conform to the definitions of gendered subjectivities by uncovering and analyzing what factors shape these subjectivities. Issues of gender and equity have been mainstays in composition scholarship and practice. Compositionists have been talking of masculine discourses as opposed to feminist dialogues, and of gender and equity standards that accommodate and nurture differences (see Cynthia Caywood and Gillian Overing, 1986).

One obvious impact of feminism on Composition Studies is the continuing interest in personal writing. The feminist interests in expressive writing, autobiography, and personal narratives are still the most obvious links between literary criticism and Composition Studies. Scholarship in both fields abounds with examples. Linda Peterson (1991)[63] transfers feminist criticism's characterization of autobiographical writing as a women-genre to the teaching of writing, and Krisite Yager (1996)[89] and Patrick Bizzaro (1999)[6] set the historical roots of Peter Elbow's (2002)[26] thinking in his literature training and particularly its relation to English Romanticism in their attempt to reveal more connections between expressivism in composition theory and literary tradition.

Another effect that feminism left on composition studies and literature classes is the trend to teach thematic classes especially on feminist issues. In 1991, Janice Wolf described impassioned writings produced in response to the challenges the assigned (feminist) texts presented to students. It becomes easy, after that date, to see how feminist thoughts and scholarship have affected composition and literature classes to the point that any teaching against feminist thinking has become unwelcome in the two fields. This is what Elizabeth Savage (2011)[70] notices in her description of the different reactions she received from students and colleagues when she taught Melville's *Moby-Dick*, which is conventionally unfavorable to feminism.

In addition, much discussion that is going on under the rubric of feminism has to do with 'multiculturalism' and issues of cultural dominance, minorities, and racial interrelationships. These discourses have left strong impacts on composition teachers' attitudes and their teaching practices—comparable to the ways they affected literature classes. In composition, they affected, for instance, which types of writing students are required—or allowed—to produce. What language forms are accepted in students' writings and in the classrooms have undergone a dramatic evolution. Teachers have moved from strictly demanding correct, standard English into considering, and sometimes embracing, local dialects, black American slangs, Spanglish and others. In both fields, much scholarship is produced about the reading, writing, and responding to multicultural literature and culture. In

addition, much scholarship discusses dealing with, accepting, and embracing different cultures in composition and literature classes—or understanding and accepting the ‘other’.

Prevalence of feminist and multicultural thoughts helped the acceptance of colonial-postcolonial theories, which have become of interest in literary criticism and composition theory almost simultaneously. Composition and postcolonial theories share the goal of providing power to the words and actions of the marginalized or oppressed. As early as 1993, Pamela Gay advocated a pedagogy of voice to “decolonize” the composition classroom. It is in the 1990s that Compositionists embraced a critical-cultural approach to the teaching of writing. James Berlin (1992, 1996)[4][3] and others were trying to draw the role composition could play in helping students understand and see how they can take part in civic affairs to encourage them to feel that they can actually change their world.

While postcolonial studies remains highly theoretical and composition studies highly practical, it is still the concern of both fields to discuss issues related to negotiating identities and subjectivities in their attempt to understand bi-cultural identities and alternative literacy practices. A volume like *Crossing Borderlands: Composition and Post-Colonial Studies* (edited by Andrea A. Lunsford and Lahoucine Ouzgane, 2004)[51] presents in clear terms the goal that both fields share: giving legitimacy to the voices of those who have been marginalized and kept out of the mainstream discussions and teaching theories and practices.

Interest in environmental issues, like feminism, multiculturalism and post-colonialism, infiltrated into composition studies early though on a more limited scale. It was in 1975 that Richard Coe published “Eco-Logic for the Composition Classroom” and in 1986 Marilyn Cooper’s essay “The Ecology of Writing” appeared while in the 1990s Donald McAndrew (1996)[52] considered the application of chaos theory (from ecology) in Composition and borrowed the characteristics of nonlinearity, adaptivity, and the “butterfly effect” principle of complex systems (McAndrew, 1997)[53]. However, in the new millennium after the year 2000, Questions concerning the significance of initial factors no matter how small, issues of sustainability, and the inherited variability and turbulence within a complex system that can lead to highly systematic changes, all these ideas resonate high in composition scholarship (Owens, 2001[60] and Yagelski, 2011[88]).

Eco-composition—comparable to eco-criticism and ecofeminism—is now discussed as an approach to the teaching, and understanding the teaching, of writing. Ecomposition adds place to the categories of race, class, and gender—which compositionists are usually concerned with when discussing what affects writing and reading. Compositionists now talk of writing as happening in place and writing as taking place (see Reynolds, 2004[66] and Dobrin, 2001).

Compositionists are engaged in investigating the implications of environmental ethics and environmental pedagogy. They consider the effects of place on the writer’s identity and how this may affect the writing process, taking into consideration the social relations that bind readers and writers as elements of the ecology of writing. Christian Weiser and Sidney Dobrin (2001)[84] tried in their edited volume to explore such possibilities by focusing on the intersections they and their collaborators see between composition studies and ecostudies. In their following volume (*Natural Discourse* 2002), they clearly place ecomposition in relation to ecofeminism, ecocriticism, and environmental ethics. On these same lines, Heather Bruce (2011)[11] reviews pedagogical doors that ecocriticism and ecomposition could open for an environmentally directed teaching possibilities in English language arts.

3. COMPOSITIONISTS’ METADISOURSE AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Many compositionists tried to justify fusing literary knowledge into teaching (and writing about teaching) composition in an attempt to answer the question of how literature and composition are related. This metadiscourse aims at keeping the relationships that bind the two disciplines together foregrounded. For example, Roger Cherry (1988)[17] shows how the two common terms for describing self-representation in fictional and nonfictional written discourse—(rhetorical) ethos and (literary) persona—are often conflated.

Bryan Short (1989)[72] argues that Composition (rhetoric) and literature share history and origin since Aristotle gave rhetoric a middle-ground status, making it relevant to all other arts. In a similar attempt, Susan Jarratt (1989)[42] confirms the interrelation of the histories of rhetoric and literary while Martin Nystrand (1993)[59] makes the emergence of the field of Composition Studies in the 1970s a part of a broader intellectual history—including the revival of classical rhetoric—affecting Composition, Literature and Linguistics. On these same lines, Burton Hatlen (1988)[36], uses Michel Foucault’s concept of ‘interaction among sub-discourses’ to present the two fields as divisions of one discipline (English).

In these examples, Gadamer’s argument about traditions, and how they develop from older ones, is very helpful to understand the process. For Gadamer, our relation to tradition is actually a process of retrieval. It is not complete revival, and it is not complete rejection. We have tradition with and in us all the time; there is no way that we can do without it because we always learn to use things and see them the way our culture teaches us. However, we also keep adding and changing this tradition through our daily experience with the world. Tradition in this sense keeps evolving, and we keep modifying it.

Without the help of philosophical hermeneutics, it would have been impossible to chart and analyze the three

patterns presented above. Some scholars have complained about the messiness of composition studies. I did—and for quite some time. At a first look, the field seems—with all its theories, approaches, and philosophies—extremely chaotic, and often contradictory. Not until I started to view it from a philosophical hermeneutic perspective did I start to see patterns of order, levels of adaptation, and a continuous process of formation.

It is obvious, though, that I have been working mainly on publications from Composition Studies. The paper, in this sense, is a one-sided perspective. For a more comprehensive view, a survey of recent works in literary criticism will be necessary. A few of the examples that I have come across in my search show that literature classes have also taken and adopted some insights from composition theory.

George Pullman (1991)[65], for example, argues for the integration of rhetoric and literature and advocates introducing rhetoric into the literature classroom as a useful way of explaining how interpretation works. In a similar, but reversed, move, Louie Crew (1993)[21] shows how students majoring in technical writing can use the professional vocabularies of their own disciplines (engineering, business, and computer) to explain literature and gain fresh insights into how writers write.

Not only that, but we find that Patricia Sullivan (1991)[77] has argued that literary criticism is a form of composition. She discusses literary and composition theories and their pedagogical implications including writing in graduate literature courses, rhetorical invention, tradition, individual talent, and academic genres. She hopes that graduate programs will arrive at the point when they find it imperative to incorporate both literary and composition theories within the same courses. Moreover, here is Peter Elbow (2002)[26] complaining of “being torn between ... identities as a literature person and as a composition person” (534), and declaring out loud that he misses Literature. He shows with details how the two fields can actually benefit from each other.

Despite calls and attempts like these, the fact remains that literature and composition studies see themselves different. When it comes to actual practice, students and teachers of both disciplines find themselves face to face with their differences and are forced to deal with them. This is what Lisa Ede (1991)[25] reports when describing the difficulties she encountered in a graduate class she taught on “Composition, Literature, and Literacy.” The students came from two very different backgrounds (literary-criticism and composition-teachers practitioners). She tries to promote the idea that it is fine to be different, and that being different cannot mean that cooperation and coexistence are not possible.

And, that is the point of dialogue—and the essence of hermeneutics. Composition and literary criticism are partners in an ongoing dialogue. It goes unnoticed sometimes, unacknowledged other times, but it exists. It is imperative, however, to realize that one important feature of Gadamer’s hermeneutic dialogue is that it gives priority

to the question—the subject of the dialogue—over any of the answers. Like in Plato’s dialogues, there is no conclusive argument in any dialogical interaction. Truth remains hanging between the participants, and the question remains open for more insights. The continuation of this dialogue is a healthy sign that keeps our vision of English teachers—to quote Hatlen above—not as critics, composition people, or poets, but as men and women of letters—real people who exist in an always evolving tradition that they try to understand and cope with—in the hermeneutic sense.

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