DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 371 355 CS 214 358

AUTHOR Gaillet, Lynee Lewis
TITLE Improving the Powers of Taste: An Historical Case for Using Literature To Teach Composition.
PUB DATE Mar 94
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (45th, Nashville, TN, March 16-19, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational History; *Freshman Composition; *General Education; Higher Education; *Literature; Teaching Methods; Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS *Composition Literature Relationship; Composition Theory; Historical Background; *Jardine (George)

ABSTRACT

As the issue of whether literature might be used to teach composition has not been a lively issue of debate among current scholars, those interested in the topic might look to George Jardine, professor of logic and philosophy at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, from 1774 to 1824. As Robert Connors suggests, teachers stand to gain much by turning to the "good-willed" practitioner rather than the giants of current scholarly dialogues. Jardine's design for integrating composition and the study of English literature, titled "Outlines of a Philosophical Education" aims to help students to develop a sense of taste, to improve their own writing, and to acquire skills necessary to succeed in business. In line with his philosophy, Jardine includes chapters on the origin and progress of written language, the improvement of memory, the culture of the imagination, the improvement of the powers of judging and reasoning, the elements of taste and aesthetics as applied to color and emotions received from the reflex sense of beauty, and the study of the beauty and grandeur of external nature. He had three goals before him in promoting the culture of the mind: (1) to accommodate the subject-matter of the lectures to the capacity and actual progress of the students; (2) to awaken a desire for information; and (3) to keep alive their interest in the discussion and investigations brought before them. As Donald Stewart suggests, the teacher who evaluates current educational theories with an historical perspective is flexible: she or he is made aware of contexts. (TB)

Lynée Lewis Gaillet

Improving the Powers of Taste: An Historical Case for Using Literature to Teach Composition

The question of whether literature has a place in the freshman writing class is an old one that keeps resurfacing. In this country in 1901, the Pedagogical Section of the MLA investigated the relationship between reading and writing and asked, "Was good reading alone sufficient to develop good writers, or was additional training necessary? If so, what should the nature of this training be. A majority recommended reading supplemented by good instruction in composition." The next year (1902), the Pedagogical Section also questioned whether the teaching of composition should be "principally a practical business or whether it should by authorship, the production of literature. According to Donald Stewart, the majority attempted to reconcile the two positions" (20). However, the MLA's ground breaking resolution was obviously not acted upon, and the debate continued--or worse yet was ignored--in the scholarship.

We saw these same theoretical and professional concerns resurface in Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap, edited by Win Horner in 1983. This time, scholars responded to the comp/lit issue because of the "widening gulf between research and teaching in literature and research and teaching in composition (Horner 1)." The study and teaching of composition was regarded as a peripheral activity of departments of English while the study and teaching of literature was "supported by research funds

and salaries and rewarded by promotion and tenure" (Horner 1). This gulf has been narrowed, but the issue remains unresolved whether the study of literature has a place in composition classes, evidenced both in freshman composition programs and our current academic journals. Ten years after the publication of Composition and Literature, Erika Lindemann and Gary Tate argue the "Two Views on the Use of Literature in Composition" in the March 1993 issue of College English. Their articles continue to address issues raised in Horner's work, questioning the purpose of freshman English and that of education itself. Perhaps I'm oversimplifying a bit, but in general the first-year writing course currently is viewed two ways: either as a "service" course, valuing academic modes of writing, or as a "humanist" course, focusing on the intrinsic value of writing as an expression of ideas.

In arguing against studying literature in the freshman composition class, Lindemann claims that Freshman English should offer "guided practice in reading and writing the discourses of the academy and the professions" (312). Speaking for this group of scholars, Edward P. J. Corbett explains that they fear that "literature is so attractive to the typical English teacher and can be made so attractive to students that it often turns out to be a distraction from the main objective of a composition course, which is to teach students how to write the kind of utilitarian prose they will be asked to produce in their other college classes and later on in their jobs" (180).

On the other side of the debate are scholars who believe that literature and composition are inseparable. Anthony Petrosky succinctly defines their position:

> [O]ne of the most interesting results of connecting reading, literary, and composition theory and pedagogy is that they yield similar explanations of human understanding as a process rooted in the individual's knowledge and feelings and characterized by the fundamental act of making meaning, whether it be through reading, responding, or writing...Our theoretical understandings of these processes are converging... around the central role of human understanding--be it of texts or the world--as a process of composing. (26)

Gary Tate, arguing in College English that literature does have a place in freshman English, informs us that the debate concerning literature in the composition class can't be reopened "because no debate occurred in the first place" (Tate 318). He blames the 1960s "Rhetoric Police"--who he compares to the KGB and describes as a "hardy band of zealots who not many years hence were to become the dreaded enforcement arm of the Conference on College Composition and Communication"--for removing literature from the composition classroom. He overstates his case, perhaps on purpose. The responsibility for the current controversy over the pedagogy and purpose of the freshman writing class should not be heaped on the shoulders of Tate's "Rhetoric Police." After all, this issue was raised and a resolution called for MLA in 1901,

and classroom practices still did not change. All composition teachers are responsible for teaching writing in their classes; the rhetoricians of the 1960s and 1970s simply offered a way to teach freshman composition which focused on producing and improving student texts rather than on simply studying literary models divorced from student writing. One problem in the current debate stems from our having neglected to search for historical solutions to our modern problems. Our profession until recently ignored the history of writing instruction, in part because that instruction most often did not take place in departments of English, which we all know are a relatively new phenomenon.

Robert Connors tells us that "we may not always be able to claim that we see far because we stand on the shoulders of giants; we do, however, stand on the shoulders of thousands of good-willed teachers and writers surprisingly like us, who faced in 1870 or 1930 problems amazingly similar to those we confront each time we enter the classroom" (49). One of those "good-willed teachers" who prefigured us is George Jardine, Professor of Logic and Philosophy at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, from 1774 to 1824. Over two hundred years ago, Jardine designed a pedagogical plan for integrating composition and the study of English literature that sheds light on our current debate. Jardine stresses in his published work, Outlines of a Philosophical Education (1818,1825), the value of using literature to help students develop a sense of taste, improve their own writing, and acquire skills necessary to succeed in

business.

Like many modern composition scholars, Jardine too viewed his course as a utilitarian one within a liberal arts education:

> It ought...to be the great object of a first philosophy class to supply the means of cultivation...To secure a suitable education for young men destined to fill various and very different situations in life, the course of instruction... should be made to comprehend the elements of those... other branches of knowledge, upon which the investigation of science, and the successful despatch [sic] of business, are found chiefly to depend. (Outlines 31)

Upon taking over the first year philosophy class at Glasgow, Jardine realized that the traditional lecture method of instruction in the Scottish universities did not meet the needs of contemporary students and that even when the brighter students grasped the abstract principles taught in the class, the material would not aid them realistically in any future profession or employment. As a result of his observations, Jardine radically altered his class to include daily free writing exercises, sequenced essay assignments, peer evaluation, and the study of literary models to facilitate the development of communication skills which would help his students function in and contribute to society. I don't believe that the current debate over whether or not there is a place for literature in the composition classroom has a resolution in sight. However, an examination of

the pedagogical theories and practices of nineteenth-century rhetorician George Jardine reveals a convincing precedent for encouraging our students to study literature as a way of improving their own writing and reasoning skills so that they can, in turn, better succeed in and contribute to society.

Jardine's students came from diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds where the students had limited writing experience and where people spoke in a variety of rusticisms. Jardine encouraged his students to acquire an understanding and appreciation of "correct, chaste and graceful English style" in order to improve their stations in life (Outlines 489). He finds it reprehensible that in the British educational system of his day, Greek and Latin "are taught in their most minute parts, and occupy a great portion of the time allotted for study...while the language we ourselves speak and write receives comparatively little attention" (Outlines 219). Jardine believed that by studying the language, grammar, style, ornamentation, and rhetorical figures of English literature, his students improved their own intellectual powers of reasoning and self-expression. He insisted that in order for his students to improve their powers of taste and their own writing they must study "good models in poetry, eloquence, and history" and learn the "proper method of reading, and of imitating these models" (Outlines 218).

According to Walter Bate, the word "taste" during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "became broadened to include not an unschooled and innately trustworthy feeling,"

characteristic of the seventeenth-century "but a far wider capacity of judgement, which is augmented and directed by experience and learning" (58). Taste became a search for an adequate analysis and explanation of certain basic aesthetic qualities--such as the beautiful and sublime; and an inquiry into the nature and justification of critical judgement. In the eighteenth century taste was a part of faculty psychology and the association of ideas, but its most important aspect was the emotional response to art, literature, architecture, and oratory. In line with this philosophy, Jardine includes chapters in Outlines concerning the origin and progress of written language, the improvement of memory, the culture of the imagination, the improvement of the powers of judging and reasoning, elements of taste and aesthetics as applied to color and emotions received from the reflex sense of beauty, and a study of the beauty and grandeur of external nature.

Jardine believed the goal of a liberal arts education was to equip the student with the ability "to arrange the knowledge communicated to him; to discover the connexion of its various parts; to compare opinions, principles, theories; and thus at once to make that knowledge completely his own, by improving the faculties of his understanding" (Outlines 275). Students were to study literature as a way of strengthening their own writing and reasoning skills. Jardine believed his primary teaching goal to be the training of his students to succeed in society. The key to this success was language:

> [In] every period of education, from first to last, the study of language, including, of course, the formation and expansion of those associations which connect thought and feeling with verbal signs, whether as used by the orator, the poet, or the philosopher, gives full scope and exercise to all the intellectual endowments,--calls into play the imagination, the memory, and the judgment--and gives birth to those rapid processes of thinking, speaking, and writing, which distinguish the accomplished scholar and the intelligent man of business. (Outlines 213-14)

In order to produce such "accomplished" and "intelligent" men (all the students were male), Jardine devised a pedagogical plan in the first philosophy class "to promote equally and gradually the general culture of the mind, and the improvement of each separate faculty" (Outlines 243). This pedagogical plan, designed for a six or seven month term, had three goals:

1. to accommodate the subject-matter of the lectures to the capacity and actual progress of the students.
2. to awaken a desire for information.
3. to keep alive their interest in the discussion and investigations brought before them.

Jardine's plan for both improving his students' powers of taste and instilling the "valuable habits of reflection, arrangement, and composition" (Outlines 233) depended of course on lectures and student reading but also--and of equal importance--on

writing:

> One particular still remains to be stated, which the best system of instruction and the most profound knowledge of the subject can neither supersede nor supply; namely, the method of conducting a regular progressive course of exercises, performed by the student, corrected by the teacher, and afterwards returned to them with instruction for directing their future efforts. (Outlines 239)

Specifically, Jardine first instructed his students in the history of the English language, the grammar and syntax of the language, and stylistic choices and "diversity" based on the "character and talents of individuals, or of nations" (Outlines 220-21). Then he moved on to the study of literary models, following the categorical divisions made by Francis Bacon: (1) memory or historical compositions, (2) reason or philosophical treatises, and (3) imaginative fiction. Jardine does point out that these divisions are not ironclad and that it really doesn't matter into which category a composition falls because "there is no composition, under any one of these three heads, which could possibly be executed without the use of all the three faculties (Outlines 221-22). Jardine believes that each kind of composition integrates itself with others in the way the mind integrates certain operations of reason, emotion, and the will in the production of a composition. Jardine leads his students to study four components of all compositions: (1) the author's goal

or thesis, (2) logic and evidence (3) arrangement and (4) style (Outlines 222). Above all else, Jardine stresses that "arrangements are the best, which contribute most to clearness and accuracy of investigation; and that language is the most suitable, which expresses the different processes of the mind with the least possible ambiguity" (232).

Finally, Jardine introduces his students to criticism, "the set of rules...directing what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, and thereby founding, upon the basis of principle, a distinction between good and bad taste" (Outlines 234). However, Jardine insists that students first read the model essays without assistance from the critics in order to develop their own opinions of taste; then compare their own thoughts and feelings regarding the piece with "those which bear the stamp of authority and of established taste" (Outlines 235). Otherwise, he believes the students will always acquiesce to the critics' opinions. The primary object of introducing the study of criticism "is to afford to his pupils, from the various sources which reading and reflection have opened up to him, the means of forming for themselves a standard of taste" (Outlines 237).

CONCLUSION

Jardine's conduct of the first philosophy class was enormously successful during his own time and continued by his successor, Reverend Robert Buchanan (Evidence 38). The obvious question is why do we not know of Jardine's work. Unfortunately, the pedagogical contributions Jardine made to writing instruction

were disregarded before the end of the nineteenth-century in a series of educational reforms which resulted in the Scottish universities modelling the educational philosophies and methods of the English universities. The renunciation of nineteenth-century educational theories and practices in Scotland created a gap in the scholarship of the history of rhetoric, a gap which resulted in the loss of important contributions to educational practices. Robert Connors points out that we are particularly ignorant of the period from 1790 to 1850 (68), the period in which Jardine's work occurred.

Perhaps if we had been aware of Jardine's pedagogical plan earlier, the story of American writing instruction would read a little differently. Both Jardine at Glasgow and Alexander Bain at the University of Aberdeen adapted their teaching practices to accommodate poorly prepared students. In fact, in an inaugural address to his 1860 logic class, Bain applauds Jardine's contributions to education. He quotes from William Hamilton's Lectures on Metaphysics, in which Jardine is credited for doing "more for the intellectual improvement of his pupils than any other public instructor in [Scotland] within the memory of man" (Aberdeen 6). Bain goes on to quote extensively from Jardine's Outlines concerning the practical education of students. Although Bain admittedly builds on Jardine's earlier theories of education, he specifically excludes essay writing from his classroom. Bain believed that assigning essay assignments excuses the teacher from actively instructing the students and

"ranks among the crude devices of the infancy of the educational art" (On Teaching English 24). In criticizing the practice of essay writing, Bain says that "under some of the most celebrated and successful teachers, as Jardine, of Glasgow, the pupils were kept incessantly at work in Composition" (On Teaching English 24). Ironically, Bain's critical **reading** text, English Composition and Rhetoric, a Manual (1866) was widely adopted as a **composition** textbook in this country following the 1890's Harvard Report rather than Jardine's enlightened theories of using writing to teach both subject matter and social responsibility described in Outlines. Why?

First, Bain's work is accessible for classroom use. The text is written in an abbreviated form intended to be used by the students. Bain numbers and states his principles outright, and then adds brief explanations. He also includes excerpts from contemporary English authors upon which the students can apply the principles in the textbook. Jardine's Outlines, on the other hand, is a philosophical treatise written primarily for teachers.

Second, Bain's prescriptive delivery was convincing. Shelley Aley explains that Bain's authoritative tone in English Composition contributes to the success and acceptance of the work as "truth" by the "keepers of the language," who found Bain engaging during the period, and later. Because of its format, the work was easily translated into a writing text, although Bain designed it as a critical reading text. Then as now, busy practitioners are drawn to clear-cut handbooks for teaching

subject matter, not philosophical treatises. Jardine's theoretical discussion, although accessible and punctuated with practical teaching advice, was not as immediately employable as Bain's English Composition.

Finally, Bain delivered many public addresses and published extensively, not primarily in the field of logic and rhetoric but in natural philosophy and psychology--popular subjects of his day. Jardine was not self-promoting, nor did he publish a great deal. He developed his theories about how students learn out of his own observations. We would currently label Jardine's work "practitioner research," a form of inquiry which has historically been undervalued.

Donald Stewart asks, "How can historical knowledge liberate composition teachers from theory and practice which are dated and ineffective?" He says the answer is obvious, "that the composition teacher who has it is flexible. She knows the contexts in which theories have been put forth and applied; she knows those who put them forth; and she is able to detect their modern counterparts and to anticipate the appropriateness and potential effectiveness of old ideas in new garments" (22). Most importantly, by studying historical solutions to what we believe are modern problems, we give "theoretical depth and philosophical breadth" to our own classroom practices (22).

Works Cited

Aley, Shelley. "Reconsidering the Work of Alexander Bain." Dissertation. Texas Christian University, 1994.

Bain, Alexander. On Teaching English. London: Longmans, 1887.

-----. "The Position and Province of Logic." Aberdeen Free Press and Buchan News. 9 Nov 1860: 6.

Bate, Walter Jackson. From Classical to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1949.

Connors, Robert J. "Writing the History of Our Discipline." An Introduction to Composition Studies. Ed. Erika Lindemann and Gary Tate. New York: Oxford, 1991: 49-71.

Corbett, Edward P. J. "Literature and Composition: Allies or Rivals in the Classroom?" In Horner's Composition and Literature: 168-184.

Evidence, Oral and Documentary, Taken and Received by The Commissioners Appointed by His Majesty George IV. July 23rd, 1826; and Re-Appointed by His Majesty William IV., October 12th, 1830; for Visiting the Universities of Scotland: Volume II. University of Glasgow. London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1837.

Horner, Winifred Bryan. Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983.

Jardine, George. Outlines of a Philosophical Education, Illustrated by the Method of Teaching the Logic, or, First Class of Philosophy in the University of Glasgow. Glasgow: A&J Duncan, 1818. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1825.

Lindemann, Erika. "Freshman Composition: No Place for Literature." College English, 55 (1993): 311-16.

Petrosky, Anthony. "From Story to Essay." College English 33: (1982): 19-36.

Stewart, Donald. "Some History Lessons for Composition Teachers." The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook. Ed. Gary Tate and Edward Corbett. New York: Oxford UP, 1987. 16-23.

Tate, Gary. "A Place for Literature in Freshman Composition." College English 55 (1993): 317-21.