Com*position*: Ecocomposition, Aristotle, and the First-Year Writing Course

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Abstract: I see a parallel between the illiteracy I witnessed while working in the court system and the challenges facing first-year writers at the university. In both cases, problems arise due to unfamiliarity with the discourse community into which one enters. In response, because much of the language governing composition and rhetoric is rife with place and journey metaphors (note the metaphor I just used of entering *into* a community, suggesting it is a place), I posit that ecocomposition theory may provide a fresh lens through which to view classical rhetoric. After providing a read of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* focusing on issues of place and ecology, I offer how such theory, which I playfully term "EcoStotle," might be applicable to a first-year composition course. The benefit to this approach to classical rhetoric and ecocomposition is that it is grounded in argumentation, thereby promoting literacy for our students, whatever discourse community they enter.

Before I began teaching composition, I received a crash course in rhetoric through working two years in the legal system as a court clerk, regularly watching defense attorneys, defendants, prosecutors, sundry witnesses, and judges employ Aristotle's three appeals. One of the most popular is the *ethos* appeal, commonly seen when a defendant had a relatively clean record ("Your honor, my client has never had a D.U.I."). Occasionally I would see fumbled attempts at *ethos* appeals; for instance, when a domestic violence defendant was accused of throwing a brick through his girlfriend's window, he denied the charge, vehemently arguing that such an act was not in his character: "Your honor, that's not true! Look at my record! I don't do misdemeanors! I only do felonies!" *Pathos* is most predominant during sentencing. When facing jail time, it is not uncommon for the defendant to bring her/his children to the sentencing hearing, hoping the presence of children will sway the judge to a lighter sentence. Lawyers employ *pathos* as well; one defense attorney remarked to me that if the facts of the case are not on his side, then he plays upon the jury's emotions. However, if the law is on his side, he uses *logos*. As an example, the attorney told me of a client accused of shooting a cougar on his north Idaho property. Defense counsel did not address the facts of the case at all (the attorney did not even contest that his client had shot the cougar); instead, the defense won a not-guilty verdict by simply presenting a rational, logical argument for the unconstitutionality of the law governing the instance. *Logos* appeals, however, can often fail, as they did for a *pro se* defendant accused of traveling 85 in a 25 miles per hour zone. His argument was that cars are designed to go fast (his speedometer tops out at 180), and roads are made for driving; therefore, he should not be penalized for using a car as it is intended in the area where it is intended to be used. The judge, not persuaded by this reasoned argument, imposed the maximum fine upon the lead-footed logician.

In many cases, winning in court hinges upon how well an argument is received. And having a case received well—or even heard at all—is an issue of literacy. The *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* of the courtroom are parties' attempts to be heard by those in power. Sadly, however, many people are not heard at all in the courtroom. When I worked at the courthouse, I was the anti-harassment, domestic

violence, and sexual assault protection order clerk. Petitioners, predominately abused women, came to me to initiate the restraining order process. In order to receive a protection order, first a petitioner writes a paragraph explaining the need for a restraining order; if the written statement rises to the legal threshold, a judge grants a temporary order, and the clerk sets a hearing date. At trial, after hearing both sides of the case, the judge decides whether or not to issue a permanent protection order. I saw countless petitioners seek the court's protection yet not receive it because they could not write that initial paragraph, or even a single sentence, articulating why the order was necessary. Often, I would receive petitions that were a jumbled mishmash of illegible words lacking any sort of sentence structure: "hit," "scream," "bitch," "punched," "threatened," "knife." With no clear indication of who said what, who did what, or even who threatened whom, these petitions containing tragic yet indecipherable alleged acts would not be considered by the judge. Consequently, the judge denies such petitions, and the petitioner leaves the courtroom without the protection sought.

Charles Schuster, in his 1990 "The Ideology of Literacy: A Bakhtinian Perspective," suggests, "literacy is the power to be able to make one-self heard and felt, to signify" (227). In light of that definition of literacy, these petitioners truly are illiterate. In addition to being unable to compose a sentence, the greater issue here is the inability to be heard. Their requests for help are not addressed, perhaps ignored, because they are unable to make those supplications heard, no matter how loudly they plea. Schuster offers a perspective that deftly describes the literacy issues of the courtroom:

> Through acts of social, political, and economic exclusion by the dominant culture, [the illiterate] have been denied genuine listeners, denied response on the part of those whom they are purportedly addressing. … *[T]hey use language with no effect*. In view of their powerlessness to be understood, their inability to influence or signify, it should come as no surprise that they both define themselves and are defined by others as illiterate. (229; emphasis added)

Supposing a petitioner does write a statement legible and coherent enough to get a temporary order and a court date, the petitioner's poor rhetorical skills often hinder her chances of receiving a permanent order, embodying Schuster's observation of using language with no effect. For example, the most popular rhetorical argumentation method used by those unfamiliar with the law is that of *ad hominem*. Yet, when the facts of the case concern whether or not the respondent struck the petitioner on the face, the respondent's criminal history is irrelevant in the eyes of the court. If the petitioner knew what the court valued in terms of evidence and what the statute demands in order to receive a protection order, the petitioner could craft a much more powerful case. As it is, this lack of knowledge contributes to the petitioner's ultimately not being heard, rendered illiterate while the case is dismissed.

I see a similarity between petitioners seeking the protection of the court and students seeking degrees from the academy in that each strives to obtain something from a power structure embodied by a discourse community.{1} [#note1] I do not intend this comparison to be pejorative. Rather, the petitioners and other *pro se* parties in the courtroom are unfamiliar with the discourse community of the courtroom; likewise, first-year students are unfamiliar with the discourse community of the academy, and, more specifically, the composition classroom. When students write with an overly formal tone, it reveals a nascent understanding that the place in which they write plays a role in the invention of discourse; similarly, when parties enter the courtroom dressed to the nines, they too demonstrate a latent recognition of the discourse community in which they perform. Both students and petitioners are *entering into* an established discourse community, moving from one place to another, and although I no longer work in the courts, the courtroom provides an apt metaphor for what many first-year students encounter in the academy: a disorientation that, if not addressed, hinders rhetorical efficacy. In response, I have two projects in this article; the first concerns students' journey

through the academy and the second is a reconsideration of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. In what follows, I hope to connect the two projects. First, I assert that this transition into writing for the academic discourse community is part of a larger place-based paradigm governing composition studies and classical rhetoric as a whole. From there, by offering a reading of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in light of ecocomposition theory (which connects issues of place, ecology, and discourse), I suggest that ecocomposition may provide theory by which not only to guide students through the academy, but also to rejuvenate classical rhetoric within our own field. I close with a brief discussion of the pedagogical applications of this approach to classical rhetoric via ecocomposition theory.

Where to Begin? Lost in the Academy

Because first-year writers are unfamiliar with the discourse community of the academy and its rules and expectations, they encounter a myriad of problems as they begin their academic careers. David Bartholomae, in his seminal 1985 essay "Inventing the University," contends that the main issue these students face is that of being an outsider, and consequently, "Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion" (134). Bartholomae continues:

> The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. …
>
> The student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience, as though he were a member of the academy or an historian or an anthropologist or an economist; he has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language while finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other. (135)

This inventing of the university is no small task, even for the experienced writer. Bartholomae's notion of appropriating discourse valued by the audience echoes Walter J. Ong's central claim in "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction." Published ten years prior to Bartholomae's essay, Ong's essay argues: "If a writer succeeds in writing, it is generally because he can fictionalize in his imagination an audience he has learned to know not from daily life but from earlier writers who were fictionalizing in their imagination audiences they had learned to know in still earlier writers, and so on back to the dawn of written narrative" (11). Ong claims that the successful writer will adopt a discourse style based upon preconceived ideas of the audience stemming from previous interactions with that discourse community, a discourse community that must be invented, according to Bartholomae.

But because many students have limited previous interactions with the academy from which to fictionalize this discourse community, they lack this rhetorical awareness of the unspoken requirements and demands of academic discourse; consequently, their writing does not meet the expectations of the university. Mina Shaughnessy addresses this problem: "[Basic writers] seem to be restricted as writers, but not necessarily as speakers, to a very narrow range of syntactic, semantic, and rhetorical options, which forces them into either a rudimentary style of discourse that belies their real maturity or a dense and tangled prose with which neither they nor their readers can cope" (139). This unfamiliarity with academic discourse and with what rhetorical options a student has when writing results in professors dismissively labeling students as poor writers, when, as Shaughnessy suggests, the true issue is a lack of rhetorical agility manifesting itself as clumsy discourse.

The work of Andrea Lunsford helps to define such discourse. In her 1980 article "The Content of Basic Writers' Essays," Lunsford peruses writing samples from 500 randomly selected writing placement tests. After reviewing the student work, Lunsford concludes, "basic writers have genuine difficulty de-centering or achieving what Piaget refers to as a 'non-egocentric' rhetorical stance. That is to say, the basic writers merge with the topic; they cannot distance themselves in order to gain a variety of perspectives on that topic" (281). Lunsford supports this claim by noting the "high proportion of personal pronouns" (285) in the writing samples, which she claims are symptomatic of an egocentric inability to think critically. This inability to take a rhetorically distanced stance on a topic creates the poor discourse Shaughnessy laments. Attributing these writing issues to an "egocentric stage of cognitive development and the conventional stage of moral development" (284), Lunsford argues that the "real challenge for us as teachers of basic writing lies in helping our students become more proficient at abstracting and conceptualizing and hence producing acceptable academic discourse" (287). Although Lunsford's use of the adjective "acceptable" to describe academic discourse is telling, for it implies producing discourse which is acceptable to the power structure of a discourse community (whether it be the academy or the courtroom), Lunsford's use of the place metaphor of students' inability to "distance themselves" from a topic may be of more value to composition instructors wondering "Where do we begin?" in promoting literacy as the power to be heard in any discourse community one enters.

Because language reveals much about how humans understand a given situation, perhaps the starting point in addressing literacy and first-year writers is an examination of the language surrounding composition. In my teaching, I have noticed the composition classroom to be rife with place metaphors: I need to *gather* my ideas and *collect* my thoughts (which suggests the ideas are scattered about a place). This sentence doesn't *fit* with the rest of the paper and this paragraph is *out of place* (both indicate the gathered ideas need to be put in certain places in order to make meaning). I've *changed directions* with my paper, but I don't know *where* it's heading. This essay doesn't *go anywhere* (all implying that the argument takes readers from one place to another). The most telling place metaphor, however, is also the most common in the composition classroom: I don't know *where* to begin. Not knowing where to begin belies the *disoriented* feelings many students have when *entering* the academy, the feeling of being *lost* within a new discourse community.

Such metaphors have their roots in a larger place-based conceptual framework of understanding, described in detail in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*. Lakoff and Johnson argue, "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical" (3). For instance, Lakoff and Johnson show how we perceive well-being in terms of place and location via the metaphors of GOOD IS UP and BAD IS DOWN: "Things are looking *up*. We hit a *peak* last year, but it's been *downhill* ever since. Things are at an all-time *low*. He does *high*-quality work" (16). A place-based paradigm also appears in the following UNKNOWN IS UP and KNOWN IS DOWN metaphors: "That's still *up in the air*. I'd like to *raise* some questions about that. That *settles* the question. It's still *up* for grabs. Let's *bring it up* for discussion" (137). This place-based understanding is also evident in the common AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY metaphor: "We have *set out* to prove that bats are birds. *When we get to the next point*, we shall see that philosophy is dead. . . . This observation *points the way* to an elegant solution. We have *arrived at* a disturbing conclusion" (90).{2} [#note2]

The AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY metaphor clearly is the basis for many of the metaphors of the composition classroom, with scholars conceiving composition as a fundamentally place-based discipline. In her 1993 "The Limits of Containment: Text-as-Container in Composition Studies," Darsie Bowden notes, "The composition field is especially rife with metaphors because composing involves complex cognitive activities . . . that are difficult to talk about and understand" (364). Adding to Bowden, Nedra Reynolds, in her 1998 "Composition's Imagined Geographies: The Politics

of Space in the Frontier, City, and Cyberspace," elaborates on why spacial metaphors are so prevalent to literacy:

> From bound texts to pages to paragraphs, sentences, and words, we read and write in distinctly spacial ways. We read from left to right (in most languages), and we scan pages up and down or rifle through a stack of pages from top to bottom. We are accustomed to margins and borders that frame texts for us and page numbers or arrow icons that mark our place. How often have you found a remembered passage by its placement on a page, its position in a text? (14)

This spacial understanding of a text and composition is fundamental to how humans perceive the relationship between form and content. Consider Sherman Alexie's autobiographic account of learning to read, clearly playing upon the place metaphors inherent in literacy:

> I can still remember picking up my father's books before I could read. The words themselves were mostly foreign, but I still remember the exact moment when I first understood, with a sudden clarity, the purpose of a paragraph. I didn't have the vocabulary to say "paragraph," but I realized that a paragraph was a fence that held words. The words inside a paragraph worked together for a common purpose. They had some specific reason for being inside the same fence. This knowledge delighted me. I began to think of everything in terms of paragraphs. Our reservation was a small paragraph in the United States. My family's house was a paragraph, distinct from the other paragraphs of the LeBrets to the north, the Fords to our south, and the Tribal School to the west. Inside our house, each family member existed as a separate paragraph but still had genetics and common experiences to link us. Now, using this logic, I can see my changed family as an essay of seven paragraphs: mother, father, older brother, the deceased sister, my younger twin sisters, and our adopted little brother. (4)

Alexie's understanding of the world in terms of paragraphs as fences holding words clearly embodies an A TEXT IS A CONTAINER metaphor,{3} [#note3] but Alexie's connection of the container paragraphs to a place—to the reservation, the neighboring houses, and his own family's home within the reservation—connects place with literacy. By grouping his world into paragraphs located in specific places, Alexie shows how place helps define various communities, differentiating one "paragraph" from another. Alexie lucidly illustrates, in quotidian language, how a place metaphor can be fundamental to becoming literate.

This connection between place and discourse is the cornerstone to ecocomposition, an inchoate school of theory within composition. Ecocomposition theory first appears in Richard Coe's 1975 "Eco-Logic for the Composition Classroom" and Marilyn M. Cooper's 1986 "The Ecology of Writing"; recently, Sidney I. Dobrin and Christian R. Weisser have furthered the theory. Dobrin and Weisser, in *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition*, provide a pithy definition of ecocomposition: "The prefix 'eco' must not be misrepresented as simply 'environmental' as it often is, but instead must be understood specifically as a study of relationships. Ecocomposition is not 'writing about trees'; ecocomposition is the study of written discourse and its *relationships* to the *places* in which it is situated and situates" (10; emphasis added). Ecocomposition recognizes the forces acting upon a writer and acknowledges that through writing the writer in turn influences those forces. Writing is a dynamic process of navigating relationships between writer, audience, and issue, with writer and these environmental forces equally acting upon each other. In addition, ecocomposition holds place as a fundamental element within the rhetorical situation, arguing that it be included in the triumvirate of race, class, and gender (Brown; Connolly; Keller; Plevin). Therefore, I define ecocomposition as having two prongs, one concerning the complex and dynamic relationships between a writer,

audience, and issue, and the other concerning the role of place within discourse. Along those lines, for my purposes here I will define ecology somewhat broadly as a metaphor that celebrates those complex and dynamic relationships, and I will define an ecocompositionist as one who sees these relationships embodied by and within the rhetorical situation.

As a school of theory, ecocomposition gains traction when considering the definition of rhetoric itself. While there are many works tracing the history of rhetoric and attempting to define it (see Fleming "Rhetoric as a Course of Study"), David A. Jolliffe and William A. Covino summarize the most common views of rhetoric as "[buffeting] storms of signification coming from two directions," with the public viewing rhetoric as "bombast, figurative language designed to cover up either deception or shallow substance" and the academy viewing it as "philosophical/theoretical scholarship" (213). While the general public may adhere to a deprecatory definition of rhetoric—such as expressed by John Locke as "that powerful instrument of error and deceit" (827)—returning to an Aristotelian definition of the term sheds light upon rhetoric's relation to issues of place. In 1.2.1 of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle, as translated by George A. Kennedy, defines rhetoric as "an ability, in each case, to see the available means of persuasion" (37). Lane Cooper renders this passage as "discovering in the particular case what are the available means of persuasion" (7), and W. Rhys Roberts translates it as "observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (24). Another possible translation of Aristotle's verb, according to Eugene Garver ("Rhetoric" 307)—and perhaps most useful translation—is that of "finding": finding and utilizing in a given situation the available means of persuasion. Whether translated as "seeing," "discovering," "observing," or "finding," the metaphor is clear: the rhetor must search a *location* for the available means of persuasion, with "finding" perhaps best capturing the notion of this search. The adverbial "in a given situation" taken in conjunction with the search metaphor not only contributes to positioning discourse within a specific place, providing the rhetor the region *where* the search must occur, but also hints at the *topoi*, metaphorical regions where rhetors gather arguments (a theme I address later).

The connection between place and discourse inherent in the term "rhetoric" is all the more potent when considering the etymology of "composition." From the Latin verb *ponere*, meaning "to place" and the prefix *com-* meaning "together," composition is literally a placing together of items, which speaks to the metaphorical act of finding the available means of persuasion and placing them together in a relationship. Com*position*, as its etymology intimates, is the art of positioning. And by virtue of these means of persuasion being placed in relation to each other, they in turn begin to act upon and influence each other within that place. Given our language concerning composition, Aristotle's definition of rhetoric, and the Latin etymology of composition itself, it appears that the basic tenets of ecocomposition theory—place and the interplay between all things concerning those places—are fundamental to how writers understand writing. Because students are in a new place, or perhaps a new ecosystem, when they enter the academy, to neglect place when addressing discourse is to neglect a fundamental characteristic of composition, which, by definition, is a place-based discipline. Likewise, as place is one aspect within the complexity of the rhetorical situation, it is equally negligent to fail to consider the systemic relationships between writer, audience, issue, society, etc., when teaching writing.

Ecocomposition and Aristotle's *Rhetoric*

Aristotle writes, in 3.12.1 of the *Rhetoric*, "A command of the written style will save you from the fate of those who do not know how to write—that is, from being forced to hold your peace when there is something you wish to impart to the pubic" (Cooper 217),{4} [#note4] adumbrating Schuster's definition of literacy as the power to be heard (227). This literacy is what first-year writers, courtroom petitioners, and any other aspiring rhetors need as they enter any discourse community. Keeping in mind the disorientation of students entering the academy, as well as the role of place within

composition, I turn now to Aristotle and posit that ecocomposition theory may provide a fresh take on classical rhetoric that can aid students in this journey.

In *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition,* Dobrin and Weisser propose that "Aristotle was the first ecocompositionist" because he "envisioned all disciples relationally," while viewing communication as an ecological act between the rhetor, audience, and the issue at hand (168-69). Dana C. Elder also briefly touches upon ecocomposition theory in classical rhetoric when suggesting that *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (and other elements of classical rhetoric, such as the three branches of judicial, epideictic, and deliberative rhetoric as well as the five canons) ought to be viewed in recognition of their complex and dynamic relationship. Elder characterizes this relationship as "melistic," a term he coins from the Greek *melos* to describe "an integral part, the changing or loss of which changes the whole" (328). But aside from these brief acknowledgements by Dobrin and Weisser and Elder, scholarship concerning the place metaphor of the *topoi* (addressed later in this paper), and David Fleming's claim that one view of rhetoric is a "situated kind of knowledge" ("Becoming Rhetorical" 95),{5} [#note5] there is a relative dearth of literature to my knowledge offering, or even hinting at, an ecocomposition-based perspective of the *Rhetoric*. In response, my reading of the *Rhetoric* suggests that the themes of ecology and place undergird Aristotle's rhetorical theory.

In 1.1.12 of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle emphasizes the role of community interaction as he delineates the four *teloi* of rhetoric. The first *telos*, that justice will prevail over injustice, immediately introduces concepts of the public good into rhetoric; rhetoric concerns not only the speaker, but the community as well. The second *telos* of rhetoric, that instruction can occur even when the audience is not convinced by scientific evidence alone, concerns audience interaction with the speaker. Likewise, the third *telos*, that the speaker may understand both sides of a case so that fraud will not flourish, concerns the impact discourse has upon the audience and the rhetor's ethical obligation to that audience. Lastly, the fourth *telos*, that rhetoric can function as a means of self-defense, implies interaction between the rhetor and an opponent and/or an audience via its combat metaphor. While based on these four *teloi* alone it may appear that rhetoric is a one-way street concerned solely with audience impact, further reading of the *Rhetoric* shows that the audience equally influences the speaker. For example, in his explanation of epideictic rhetoric in 1.9.30, Aristotle advises, "One must consider [not only the person praised, but] also the audience to whom the praise is addressed. . . . Whatever the quality an audience esteems, the speaker must attribute that quality to the object of his praise" (Cooper 50-51). Here, Aristotle notes that the values an audience holds will influence the values the speaker chooses to praise through discourse, and herein resides the symbiosis of the *Rhetoric*. All the speaker's rhetorical decisions are primarily influenced by the audience, and in turn, the audience is influenced by the speaker. As evident by its *teloi,* which are largely concerned with the relationship between speaker and audience, rhetoric demands an ecology of social interaction.

Aristotle touches upon this relationship between speaker and audience many times throughout the *Rhetoric*. For example, in his discussion in 2.2.3-5 concerning how to incite anger within an audience, Aristotle suggests convincing the audience that they have been slighted. To do so requires knowledge of the audience and their history with the opposition, and therefore, knowing the audience enables the rhetor to provoke the audience; the audience influences the speaker, and consequently the speaker influences the audience. Later, in 2.13.16, Aristotle applies this knowledge of the audience to the construction of *ethos*, concluding, "Now the hearer is always receptive when a speech is adapted to his own character and reflects it. Thus we can readily see the proper means of adapting both speech and speaker to a given audience (Cooper 136). And in 2.21.15, Aristotle provides an illustration of how to do so: "For example, if someone had met up with bad neighbors or children, he would accept a speaker's saying that nothing is worse than having neighbors or that nothing is more foolish than begetting children. Thus, one should guess what sort of assumptions people have and then speak in

general terms consistent with these views" (Kennedy 168). Aristotle continues in 2.22.3: "Our speaker, accordingly, must start out, not from any and every premise that may be regarded as true, but from opinions of a definite sort—the opinions of the judges, or else the opinions of persons whose authority they accept" (Cooper 156). In each of these examples, Aristotle advocates having the speaker make rhetorical decisions based upon her knowledge of the audience so as to persuade the audience.

As mutually influential as the interplay between speaker and audience is the relationship between speaker and opponent. Just as the audience influences the speaker, likewise the opposition influences the speaker. In 2.18.1, Aristotle claims it does not "make any real difference whether you are addressing an actual opponent or merely arguing against an impersonal thesis. However impersonal the case . . . you have to upset the opposite hypothesis, and you frame your discourse against that as if it were your opponent" (Cooper 141). Aristotle recommends building a case framed against the argument of the opponent, for opposition influences discourse, which again speaks to the interaction between the two. This reciprocity is seen in 2.25.3 in Aristotle's list of possible refutations of an opponent's claim: "Objections . . . may be brought in four different ways: (1) you may attack your opponent's own premise; (2) you may adduce another premise like it; (3) you may adduce a premise contrary to it; (4) you may adduce previous decisions" (Cooper 177). Here too, how the rhetor chooses to persuade depends upon what the opponent has already said. The rhetor does not speak in a vacuum; rather, the rhetor speaks within the rich context of audience and opponent.

Aristotle also touches upon how an awareness of the community at large influences a rhetor's decisions. For example, in his explanation of deliberative rhetoric, Aristotle suggests in 1.4.9 that knowledge of neighboring nations will enhance the speaker's persuasive abilities:

> On war and peace, [it is necessary] to know the power of the city, both how great it is already and how great it is capable of becoming . . . further, what wars it has waged and how (it is necessary to know these things not only about one's native city but about neighboring cities) and with whom there is probability of war, in order that there may be a policy of peace toward the stronger and the decision of war with the weaker may be one's own. . . . Additionally, it is necessary to have observed not only the wars of one's own city but also those of others, in terms of their results; for like results naturally flow from like causes. (Kennedy 54)

Through knowledge of the affairs of neighboring states and their relations to one another, the effective speaker can make rhetorical decisions to better persuade the audience to a course of action. Here too, Aristotle claims the speaker is influenced by the community at large and in turn uses that knowledge to persuade the audience.

Aristotle again hints at reciprocal relationships when describing his metaphor theory in 3.4, which is based primarily upon how metaphors transfer meaning from one word to another. Meaning, according to Aristotle, comes from how words interact with each other (an argument echoed by Coe). In 3.2.12, Aristotle claims a good metaphor "is an apt transference of words" (Kennedy 201). Transference is a key term, because it speaks to the dynamic relationship between vehicle and tenor, and Cooper uses it as well in his rendering of 3.4.1: "When [Homer] says of him, 'The lion sprang at them,' it is a metaphor; here, since both are courageous, the poet has transferred the name of 'lion' to Achilles" (192). In both instances Aristotle portrays metaphor as the transference of meaning from one object to another, creating an exchange between vehicle and tenor.{6} [#note6] Because of the give and take relationship between vehicle and tenor inherent in the creation of a metaphor, which results in the metaphor's utility as an instructional and persuasive device, in 3.2.7 Aristotle reminds us, "metaphor is of the utmost value in both poetry and prose" (Cooper 187).

The ecology of rhetoric is perhaps most evident in Aristotle's frequent divisions of rhetoric into its melistic parts. Building upon Elder's initial observation of how the elements of rhetoric interact with each other (329), here are further examples from the *Rhetoric* (which are by no means exhaustive):

- In 1.2.3, Aristotle divides rhetoric into *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* appeals, three individual parts of a greater whole.

- In 1.3.1, Aristotle separates a speech into the interrelated parts of speaker, subject, and objective.

- In 1.3.3, Aristotle provides three branches of rhetoric concerning the judicial, epideictic, and deliberative, again showing the intertwined relationship of the three.

- In 3.1.1, Aristotle explains how the parts of discourse—its argument, style, and organization— are united.

- In 3.5.1-7, Aristotle breaks the clarity of language into five heads that function melistically.

- In 3.13.1-5, Aristotle claims that all speeches have two parts—a statement of a case and a proof —and a speaker cannot have one without the other.

- In 3.14.1-11, Aristotle dissects the speech, showing how the introduction connects to everything that follows.

In all these instances, Aristotle categorizes a complex phenomenon into manageable pieces; he shows how rhetoric is composed of many smaller organisms that interact to create a sum much larger than its parts. Elder's coinage of "melistic" truly characterizes Aristotle's view of rhetoric and the rhetorical situation, a system that, if it were to lose one component, would be dramatically altered.

As ecocomposition is two-pronged in that it addresses both the complex interplay of the elements of the rhetorical situation as well as the role of place within discourse, so too does the *Rhetoric* lend itself to a reading concerning both facets of ecocomposition. In addition to the recurrent theme in the *Rhetoric* of how relationships between speaker, audience, opponent, and issue govern discourse, conceptions of place are fundamental to Aristotle's presentation of rhetorical theory. As previously noted, Aristotle's very definition of rhetoric employs a place metaphor. This place metaphor also appears in Aristotle's treatment of style in 3.2.2-3: "These deviations from ordinary usage make the style more impressive. Words are like men; as we feel a difference between people *from afar* and our fellow townsmen, so is it with our feelings for language. And hence it is well to give ordinary idiom an air of *remoteness*; the hearers are struck by what is *out of the way*, and like what strikes them" (Cooper 185; emphasis added). Both Kennedy and Cooper use "deviations" in this passage to describe figurative language, the word choice suggesting a departure from an established path, which when coupled with Cooper's language of "from afar," "remoteness," and "out of the way," hints at the AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY metaphor.

Place metaphors are perhaps most prevalent within the *topoi*, and although much of the *Rhetoric* concerns the *topoi*, Aristotle never explicitly defines them. Consequently, according to Michael C. Leff, "among modern authors we find conceptions of the topics ranging from themes in literature, to heuristic devices that encourage the innovation of ideas, to regions of experience from which one draws the substance of an argument" (23-24). In his introduction to the *Rhetoric,* Cooper provides a more thorough explanation of the *topoi* as a heuristic, clearly employing a place metaphor to do so:

> To Aristotle *topos* means a place, and when with him it is a live metaphor, he thinks of a place in which the hunter will hunt for game. If you wish to hunt rabbits, you go to a place where rabbits are; and so with deer or pheasants. Each kind of game has its haunt to which you go when you wish to fetch that sort of creature out. And similarly with arguments. They are of different kinds, and the different kinds are found in different places, from which they may be drawn. (xxiv)

Cooper's remarks are strikingly similar to those of Quintilian, who, writing thousands of years earlier, unpacks (somewhat heavy-handedly) the metaphoric definition of the *topoi*:

> Let us now investigate the Places where Arguments are found … the areas in which Arguments lurk and from which they have to be drawn out. For just as all things do not grow in every country, and you would not find a particular bird or animal if you did not know its birthplace or its haunts, while even kinds of fish differ in preferring a smooth or a rocky bottom, or a particular are or coast (you would not land a sturgeon or a parrot-wrasse in our waters!)—so every Argument is not found everywhere, and we have therefore to be selective in our search. (5.10.20-21)

Modern scholarship has latched onto this conception of the *topoi* as a metaphoric location wherein the rhetor searches for arguments. Kennedy, in his 1963 *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, offers this pithy definition: "*Topos* means place and may be translated into Latin as *locus*, the place where the orator finds the needed argument" (102). Donovan J. Ochs's 1974 "Aristotle's Concept of Formal Topics" builds upon Kennedy's simple definition by offering a sampling of the ways other scholars have defined the *topoi* as "logical forms," "lines of argument," "headings," "hunting grounds," "a store of something, and the store itself," and "a department," among others (194). While Ochs never arrives at a definition to sate himself, his sampling of *topoi* definitions does show that central to the *topoi* is a place metaphor for where one can find the available means of persuasion; thus, place impacts invention, as Carolyn Miller shows in her 2000 "The Aristotelian *Topos*: Hunting for Novelty." Offering a slightly different take on the *topoi*, Thomas Cole, in his 1991 *The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece*, argues that *topos* refers not metaphorically to a geographical place, but rather literally to a textual place—texts written on papyrus—where rhetors gather arguments (88). While the place metaphors within the *topoi* connect place with argumentation and invention, Cole's read of the *topoi* directly links place with literacy (in this case, the literacy needed to read papyrus texts), another example of ecocomposition theory appearing in classical rhetoric.{7} [#note7]

However, while much scholarship explores the place metaphor ofthe *topoi*, little addresses the place metaphors within the *topoi*.{8} [#note8] For example, consider the fourth *topos* in 2.23.4:

> Another *topos* is that of *a fortiori* [from degrees of more and less]. Thus you may argue that if not even the gods are omniscient, much less are men; on the principle that, if a thing cannot be found where it is more likely to exist, of course you will not find it where less likely. . . . [You may argue that] if a thing does not exist where it is more frequent, it does not exist where it is less frequent; or that, if it exists where it is less frequent, it exists where it is more frequent. (Cooper 161)

This *topos* is built primarily upon recognizing the characteristics of an item, and Aristotle couches it in metaphorical terms that the characteristics of things exist in certain locations: if a thing exists where it is not expected to, it is likely it will exist where it is expected. A place metaphor holds together both this *topos*, with the rhetor understanding the traits of the issue at hand in terms of place and location, as well as the ninth, articulated in 2.23.10: "Thus you may argue: 'All men do wrong from one of three motives, A, B, C. In my case, the first two of these motives are out of the question; and as for the third, C, the prosecution itself does not allege this'" (Cooper 163-64). There are two

place metaphors here; the first is articulated in the motives for wrongdoing stemming from three possibilities. The use of the preposition "from" paints A, B, and C as metaphorical locations from which one may argue that people commit evil. The second place metaphor is in the phrase "out of the question," which metaphorically situates the question as a location, and because A and B are not in that location, they are out of consideration for why a crime was committed. This subtle metaphor aids the rhetor in persuading the audience through placing the argument out of sight and out of mind. A similar place metaphor appears in the twenty-third *topos* as Aristotle again portrays an argument as appearing in a location. Aristotle, in 2.23.24, suggests that rhetors under suspicion of wrongdoing "state the reason why the facts appear in a wrong light; for then there is something that accounts for the false impression" (Cooper 170). As he did in placing an argument metaphorically out of the question in the ninth *topos*, here Aristotle addresses an argument that, because of its location in the wrong light, is slanderous to the rhetor. If the rhetor can provide proofs explaining why the facts are in that location, the rhetor can metaphorically move the argument out of the wrong light into a favorable light. By doing so, the rhetor shifts the location in which an argument takes place while suggesting that where (i.e. in a poor or favorable light) an argument occurs is equally as important as what is said.

The previously discussed AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY metaphor also appears in the twenty-fourth *topos*. Aristotle explains in 2.23.25 that a rhetor may argue "from the presence or absence of the cause to the existence or non-existence of the effect" (Cooper 170), characterizing an argument as a trek which starts at a specific point and ends at a specific destination. The AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY metaphor is of the utmost importance in understanding the application of the *topoi*, and Aristotle employs this metaphor in his closing remarks on the subject in 2.23.30: "But of all syllogisms, whether refutative or demonstrative, those are most applauded of which we foresee the conclusion from the outset—so long as it is not too obvious, for part of our pleasure is at our own sagacity—or those that we just keep up with as they are stated" (Cooper 172). Aristotle also remarks that audiences are pleased when they can follow an argument to its conclusion, when they are able to keep pace with the speaker. For the use of the *topoi* to be effective, then, according to Aristotle, the audience must be able to see their conclusion, their destination, from the outset of the argument; the audience needs to know where the rhetor is taking them. And, along that journey, the conclusion must not be too obvious, for the audience enjoys their own genius as they strive to stay alongside the speaker during the journey.

EcoStotle in *Praxis*

Approaching classical rhetoric via ecocomposition in the manner discussed here enables instructors to obviate two main issues plaguing ecocomposition theory as it is commonly employed. The first is that, despite the great promise it holds, ecocomposition theory is difficult to be adopted by instructors whose pedagogical hands are tied. TAs, adjunct faculty, and other instructors working within rigid department curricula are often unable to design syllabi, select readings, craft assignments, choose a focus for a course, or designate a course as service-learning. Consequently, the "Greening of Identity" assignments proposed by Christian R. Weisser, the place portraits of Derek Owens, the "Applied Composition" of Paul Lindholdt, the civic agenda of Greta Gaard or Margaret Earley Whitt, and the service-learning of Paul Heilker or Annie Merrill Ingram—all excellent pedagogies—are difficult to adapt when an instructor is limited to a standard department curriculum. When much of ecocomposition theory advocates rewriting curricula, redesigning assignments, and incorporating service-learning into a course, instructors who do not have the pedagogical freedom to design courses cannot easily implement ecocomposition theory in the manner most scholarship recommends.

A second problem with current ecocomposition theory is that it often, according to David Sumner in his 2001 "Don't Forget to Argue: Problems, Possibilities, and Ecocomposition," tends to emphasize

environmental concerns too heavily and rhetorical discourse not heavily enough. After analyzing a collection of ecocomposition syllabi for the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, Sumner shares that he is "not convinced [ecocomposition courses] concentrate heavily enough on the rhetorical skills of written reasoning to fulfill the more general goals of composition" (268). Sumner contends that many ecocomposition courses are evangelistic, hoping to convert students to the instructor's green political views, and consequently such courses become focused on environmental issues rather than composition. Sumner argues, "The fact that composition is often the only class required of all students rests on the assumption that the skills a student learns in composition are foundational to the rest of his education," and, "If the primary focus of composition strays from written reasoning, it will be difficult to justify composition as a general requirement in the curriculum" (268). Emphasizing the environment, or any other issue for that matter, at the expense of rhetoric belittles a composition course, the objective of which needs to be to teach rational inquiry through writing. As Sumner claims, all composition courses, regardless of the theory by which they are taught, must ultimately be a course in argumentation.

Current ecocomposition theory is limited in that it is often too drastic for many instructors to employ and often too heavily focused on the instructor's pet causes, but the approach to ecocomposition theory discussed here can be appropriated easily into the classroom through a revision of how instructors present the rhetorical situation. Neither classical rhetoric nor ecocomposition alone has thrived in the composition classroom{9} [#note9]; a conflation of the two, however, may provide fruitful if undertaken not as a revision of an entire curriculum, but rather as a reconsideration of how we teach the rhetorical situation. This amalgamation of ecocomposition and classical rhetoric, which I playfully term "EcoStotle," moves away from the literal, material concept of place and ecology prevalent in many ecocomposition courses and instead uses ecology and place as metaphors by which to form the foundation of composition courses. Departing from literal definitions of these terms affords instructors an opportunity to incorporate an ecological model of classical rhetoric that heavily emphasizes argumentation into first-year composition without necessarily rewriting curricula. As I have been a pedagogically restrained teacher myself, I use the following questions to guide my teaching:

- How can I present the rhetorical situation—the symbiotic interplay between speaker, audience, issue, purpose, medium, and message—via the metaphor of ecology, teaching students of the vital role each element plays within discourse?

- How can I teach texts through a lens that takes into account the complex factors contributing to the production of the text as well as the factors influencing how both the original audience and current readers interpret the text, thereby emphasizing the ecology within rhetoric?

- How can I, recognizing the classroom as a place of its own with its own ecology, position myself via my language and actions to establish a course conducive to learning, wherein students are agents of their own education in an environment to which they contribute meaningfully?

- How can I ground the course in argumentation so that students can apply elements of ecocomposition theory to any rhetorical environment, academic or otherwise, that they encounter?

An ecological model emphasizing the role of place within discourse is an accessible way to introduce rhetorical awareness to writers stepping toward literacy; using the questions listed above, instructors can easily appropriate such theory into their own classrooms in order to promote literacy. The benefit of these questions for instructors without the liberty to craft their own curricula and select course texts is that students do not necessarily have to read the *Rhetoric* themselves for this approach to work;

instead, instructors can use these guiding questions to reshape how they understand and teach the rhetorical situation, applying the principles outlined here to any text the students read during the term.

Rather than approaching classical rhetoric as a prescriptive and lifeless set of rules, viewing the *Rhetoric* through a lens that recognizes the roles relationships and place play within Aristotle's rhetorical theory opens pedagogical opportunities within the composition classroom. Because rhetoric, by Aristotle's definition, is a fundamentally place-based paradigm, understanding discourse through this lens can help students, first-year writers specifically, *enter into* the discourse communities—the ecosystems—of the academy and elsewhere. If a writer is able to recognize the places, both rhetorical and physical, she occupies, the writer can then find and utilize the available means of persuasion in that given situation. The student who does not know *where* to begin can now *situate* him/herself within the given situation, thereby crafting effective discourse. In terms of literacy, this *orientation* is of paramount importance. Able to create discourse which *turns away* from the egocentric, underdeveloped writing Lunsford laments, first-year writers with the rhetorical ability to *approach* an issue from a variety of perspectives can become more keenly aware of the discourse community in which the discussion *takes place* while partaking in a composition course firmly *grounded* in classical rhetoric.

While some may dismiss it as a trendy appropriation of the "green" movement, classical rhetoric read through ecocomposition theory can enable students to see that while there are many forces acting upon them, they too have the ability to influence those forces, for "writers act as they are acted upon" (Bawarshi ix). Yet I am not the first to suggest that ecocomposition theory can be a means by which to promote literacy. Indeed, Dobrin and Weisser, in claiming, "An ecocomposition pedagogy thus encourages political activism, public writing, and service learning, and student writing can be directed beyond the limited scope of classroom assignments to address larger, public audiences" ("Breaking Ground in Ecocomposition" 580), link ecocomposition with civic engagement and, ultimately, literacy. For this new pedagogy to work, however, for it to bring the literacy it promises, the conflation of ecocomposition with classical rhetoric must remain alive. The reification of classical rhetoric, turning it from description to prescription, sucked the life out of a vibrant model of discourse; Quintilian, in the *Institutio Oratoria* 2.13.1-2, is aware of this danger and advises against reducing rhetoric to a litany of rules. Despite Quintilian's admonishment, however, Edward P. J. Corbett contends that many instructors when considering classical rhetoric are "chilled to the very marrow of [their] bones at the mere suggestion of a return to such a rigorous, disciplined system" (164). A similar codification occurred when process theory was reduced to a lockstep series of tasks to complete in order to produce an "A" paper; it "dwindled to dogma" according to Marilyn Cooper (364). Robert M. Gorrell traces how this dwindling occurs: "Theory develops, is taken seriously, is confused with precept, is translated into dogma, and develops into absurdity" (140). It is that shift from theory to absurdity that prompts Dobrin to claim, "we must resist defining ecocomposition because defining suggests codification and hegemony" ("Writing Takes Place" 14). Therefore, with these concerns in mind, when we feature classical rhetoric complemented by ecocomposition in our classrooms, we must resist the pendulum swinging from abstract theory toward dogmatic absurdity and find a golden mean between the two. In doing so, the two projects of this article can be furthered, as both we and our students reconsider the *Rhetoric,* while navigating through the various discourse communities—courtrooms, classrooms, and otherwise—we each inhabit.

Notes

1. For my purposes, I will define "discourse community" as a specific group that values a specific type of communication. See Vandenberg for a nuanced exploration of the term. (Return to text. [#note1-ref])

2. The AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY metaphor is also evident in the term "trope," referring to figurative language and deriving from the Greek *tropos*, commonly translated as a *turn*, suggesting, metaphorically, the meaning of a word turns, or changes direction, when employed figuratively. (Return to text. [#note2-ref])

3. See Bowden for further analysis of the A TEXT IS A CONTAINER metaphor, such as, "*Pick out* one example from that poem that illustrates enjambment" (366). (Return to text. [#note3-ref])

4. As I reference multiple translations of the *Rhetoric* (primarily Lane Cooper's 1932 *The Rhetoric of Aristotle* but also W. Rhys Robert's 1984 *Rhetoric* and George A. Kennedy's 2007 *On Rhetoric*), for the sake of clarity, I will reference the book, chapter, and section of each quotation from the *Rhetoric*, as well as the translator and page number parenthetically. (Return to text. [#note4-ref])

5. In making this argument, Fleming draws upon Eugene Garver's 1985 "Teaching Writing and Teaching Virtue," which suggests that classical rhetoric largely depends upon the rhetor's place within Greek political life, thereby marking classical rhetoric as a highly situated, particularly contextual discipline. (Return to text. [#note5-ref])

6. See John T. Kirby's 1997 "Aristotle on Metaphor" for more on the transference of meaning metaphor enables, a character of metaphor embedded in its very etymology, according to Kirby (532). (Return to text. [#note6-ref])

7. The notion linking place with the gathering of ideas is also evident in Microsoft's *Internet Explorer* and Apple's *Safari* web browsers, both using the metaphors of exploration to describe surfing the web. (Return to text. [#note7-ref])

8. The remainder of this section relies upon a textual argument stemming from the word choices in an English translation of Aristotle's Greek text, and I acknowledge the inherent problems this creates; there are variations in the translations of Cooper, Kennedy, and Roberts which may work either to support or undermine my argument, as much of it is built upon the place metaphors inherent at the word level of language. As I am not fluent in Greek, the best I can do is compare various translations of the *Rhetoric*, yet that is somewhat unfruitful. For example, the AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY metaphor so prevalent in the composition classroom appears in Cooper's rendering of 2.22.3—"Our speaker, accordingly, must *start out* not from any and every premise " (156; emphasis added)—as well as Cooper's translation of 2.22.9: "Thus, in arguing whether justice is or is not a good, we must *start from* the facts about justice and goodness" (157; emphasis added). Roberts also translates these respective passages using the journey metaphor: "We must not, therefore, *start from* any and every accepted opinion" (140; emphasis added) and "we must *start with* the real facts about justice and goodness" (141; emphasis added). Kennedy, however, eschews the journey metaphor in his translations of these two passages: "one should not speak *on the basis* of all opinions" (169; emphasis added), "whether justice is a good nor not *on the basis* of the attributes of justice and the good" (170; emphasis added). Via his language of "basis," which suggests a foundation and structure, Kennedy's translation uses the AN ARGUMENT IS A BUILDING metaphor rather than the journey metaphor offered by Roberts and Cooper. I do not want these differences in translation to derail the focus of my argument. For my purposes, although Kennedy's work has superseded all previous translations of the *Rhetoric*, because I am arguing that classical rhetoric can have a

place within a first-year composition course, I aver that Cooper's translation, as it is more accessible and readable, may prove fruitful for instructors asking students to interact with the text itself; the place metaphors discussed in the following paragraphs are an example of that accessibility. I do acknowledge that this argument may be based more on Cooper's word choice than Aristotle's, but if our ultimate goal is to introduce first-year writers to the rhetorical situation via a greater awareness of how place and ecology influence discourse, Cooper's text better serves that aim. ([Return to text. [#note8-ref]](#))

9. Although the 1960 revival of classical rhetoric provides many options for composition courses, David Fleming, in his 2003 "Becoming Rhetorical: An Education in the Topics" claims, "Recent reports of a rhetoric revival in the academy have turned out to be premature" (93). Indeed, the rhetoric revival seems to have died out. Likewise, although Erika Lindemann, in her 1995 "Three Views of English 101," identifies "writing as system" as a possible framework for a first-year composition course, I do not believe many in the academy see ecocomposition as viable a pedagogical approach as product or process theory. ([Return to text. [#note9-ref]](#))

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