The Evolution of Invention in Current-Traditional Rhetoric: 1850-1970

In its classical formulation, invention is the canon that provides a rhetorician with more or less systematic procedures for finding arguments appropriate to the rhetorical occasion that faces her. In most of the composition textbooks written by influential nineteenth-century teachers of writing, however, invention is either greatly transformed from its classical guise or is slighted altogether. By the end of the nineteenth century most popular composition textbooks written in the vein now described as "current-traditional" treat invention as a means of systematically delimiting an area of thought in order that the writer may handle its exposition in discourse with maximum clarity. In what follows I trace the evolution—or better, devolution—of the inventional procedure recommended by influential composition texts written during the last half of the nineteenth century, and follow its course into our own century. The term "evolution" is of course metaphorical; however the continuity and development of the inventional tradition I am tracing is remarkably homogeneous. The first-generation authors in the tradition—Alexander Jamieson, Samuel Newman, H. N. Day, and Alexander Bain are among the best known—cite and use the work of British rhetoricians George Campbell or Hugh Blair, while members of the second generation—John Franklin Genung, Adams Sherman Hill, Barrett Wendell, Fred Newton Scott, and Joseph V. Denney—generally acknowledge at least Bain, Genung, and Day. And after 1900 until about 1940, Wendell and Scott and Denney are the authoritative names in the tradition; they are as routinely cited in early twentieth-century textbooks as were Blair and Campbell in nineteenth-century works.

Early nineteenth-century American school rhetoric is an amalgam of classical and eighteenth-century discourse theory. No American rhetoric text had yet succeeded in creating a satisfactory blend of the epistemological rhetoric formulated by George Campbell in his influential Philosophy of Rhetoric (1776) and the Ciceronian rhetoric imparted by such popular works as John Ward’s System of Oratory (1759). Alexander Jamieson’s popular Grammar of Rhetoric and Polite Literature (1818) nicely represents the confusion of traditions which obtained in the early part of the century. Jamieson opens his treatise with a discussion of language which is an imitation of Hugh Blair’s treatment of
the same topic in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres* (1783). Book II of the *Grammar* is devoted to grammar and usage, while Book III contains a discussion of syntax “treated precisely as Dr. Campbell has treated it” (v). Book IV, “Of Figures,” offers a classical treatment of metaphor, personification, and the like, while Book V treats of “Taste” using Lord Kames’ *Elements of Criticism* (1762), sometimes verbatim. One section of the last chapter of the book—“General Characters of Style”—is reserved for “the Conduct of Discourse in all its Parts.” Jamieson’s treatment of the parts of discourse draws on Cicero’s six-part division of the oration in *De Inventione* (II, 20-109). The final chapters of the Grammar discuss historical, philosophical, epistolary and poetical writing in a fashion reminiscent of Campbell’s use of faculty psychology to determine the kinds of discourse. And, in a bow to the elocutionary movement which was then gaining force on both the continent and in America, Jamieson concludes the book with a discussion of voice and gesture.

H. N. Day stepped briskly into this rhetorical vacuum in 1850 with the publication of the first of a series of remarkable texts on rhetoric and logic, some of which enjoyed great popularity during the third quarter of the century. Day’s books, especially the *Art of Discourse* (1867), are landmarks in the American rhetorical tradition. Day not only organized the “mental sciences”—logic, aesthetics, and ethics—on the grounds of their relation to rhetoric but presented a full-blown invention scheme for expository discourse—a relatively new form—based on informal logic. Day opens the *Art of Discourse* with the general issues of locating rhetoric with regard to her sister arts and of defining the kinds of discourse that lie within her province. Rhetoric “derives its regulative principles . . . from Logic,” that is, the matter of discourses is generated according to logical principles. “In respect of the form of discourse” rhetoric draws “from Aesthetics; and in respect of the end or object of discourse, from Ethics” (7). In Day’s great scheme of things, then, rhetoric participates in the True, the Beautiful, and the Good (8-12).

Day defines three kinds of discourse based on the aspect of the rhetorical act featured by each: “In oratory . . . the exterior aim rules; in Representative Discourse, the matter; in Poetry, the form.” While all three modes of discourse “represent” thought, the three kinds are delineated from one another by the feature of the rhetorical situation which dominates their composition: audience, subject, or form (although mixtures among these elements are possible in any given discourse). That is, poetry and representative discourse differ from oratory in that they “drop the idea of a mind addressed as the ruling idea in the representation of thought”; representative discourse concerns itself not
so much with an audience or structure as it does with presenting a
subject clearly and distinctly; and poetry differs from the other kinds in
its concern with form (28-29).

Day reintroduces logic into rhetoric in order to give a full treatment to
representative (that is, expository) discourse, a relatively new form. He
does so admittedly in the face of Richard Whately’s admonition that
rhetoric is an “offshoot” of logic (7). Day argues to the contrary that
“recent systems of rhetoric” err in overlooking “thought” and em-
phasizing style as “the first thing, the second thing, and the last thing in
the study of the Art of Discourse” (RP, iii). Day locates the proper
rhetorical use of logic in invention, although logical principles may be
extended to arrangement as well: “the process of invention cannot
proceed but by order or method; and the very supply of the thought must
therefore include a more or less definite regard to the arrangement”
(AD, 43).

Day is not alone in decrying the contemporary predominance of
stylistic rhetorics. Henry Coppee writes in his _Elements of Rhetoric_
(1859) that most textbooks “have treated Rhetoric as a higher sort of
Grammar, and have failed to recognize its true relaton to Logic.” Coppee
places responsibility for the consequent neglect of invention and
arrangement on Dr. Blair, although he elegantly pardons Blair’s
“charming lectures” for this omission by noting that they have no doubt
been adapted to “elementary instruction, quite apart, it must be
thought, from the author’s original design.” Like Day, Coppee locates
the province of logic within rhetoric in the canon of invention; as he puts
it, “invention implies the finding of Logical propositions and arguments
containing and enforcing the thought which we have prepared: in other
words, all the operations of the reason” (182). Logic, as the art of
reasoning, is one, simple, and universal: it passes from known premises
to justly deduced premises. Rhetoric borrows from logic “the process of
passing from two known judgments to a third which is dependent on
them, and grows out of their union,” and then “clothes these
frameworks of Logic with thought, body and vital language,” and ar-
ranges them in proper order. According to Day rhetoric does not supply
subject-matter for discourse, but it does provide thought (AD, 28-30).
For these early nineteenth-century writers, then, it is not entirely accu-
rate to say that rhetorical invention takes place wholly outside the realm
of the reasoning process; reasoning itself, as a matter of forming
propositions that reflect connections between ideas, is appropriate to
rhetoric. What does lie outside the province of rhetoric is the subject
matter to be reflected by the discourse. The distinction between thought
and the matter it works on, which Coppee and Day inherited from the
intellectual tradition in which they were working, is crucial to the formation of the pseudo-logical inventional theory they created. Later writers in the tradition, however, will blur the distinction while maintaining the inventional model that grew out of it.

The Proposition

Day locates his most thoroughgoing discussion of invention under the head of “explanatory discourse,” beginning his remarks with the conventional starting place of logic, the proposition. For both Coppee and Day the proposition consists of a theme or subject united with the aim of the writer (Coppee, 186; Day, AD, 52-53). Day defines the proposition as a statement which represents the yoking together of two ideas; a true proposition must include both the theme of the discourse and the end desired by its author (49, 52). For example, “the immutability of truth” is a theme, while “the object of this discourse is to prove the immutability of truth” is a proposition. The theme, according to Day, is to the proposition as the logical concept is to the logical judgment: “a concept is a cognition of a mere object; a judgement is a cognition of two related objects in which one of the objects is affirmed or denied of the other” (AD, 58). Coppee couches his discussion of the same operation in terms of a “subject” by analogy with the role assumed by the word term in logic: “suppose, for example, the Subject presented to a student, upon which he is required to write, be Youth. The question at once arises, what is this? Is it what it seems to be, a term? If so, it is not a subject at all, until the student use it in inventing a proposition, of which it is the subject; until he predicate something of it (187-88).” Both authors urge an immediate and clear statement of the proposition.

In his influential English Composition and Rhetoric (1866), Alexander Bain also emphasizes that the two chief discursive elements are the “notion” and the proposition. Notices are apparently those elements which make up propositions, and which are roughly analogous to terms: “the notion is commonly expounded as it appears in some proposition, that is, as coupled with some second notion” (154). Bain notes further that the notion is preparatory to the proposition, “which alone amounts to knowledge.”

Analysis of the Proposition

In keeping with the logical dictates with which they are working, our authors all agree that, following the selection of a theme and its embodiment in a proposition, the next step in invention involves the analysis or division of the proposition. According to Day, analysis is separation of the proposition into and enumeration of its constituent parts; division
and partition involve separation of the proposition into its similar or component parts, respectively (72-73). Day and Bain prefer definition as a means of analyzing the proposition. According to Bain, “the notion often stands in need of explanation. . . . Whatever is necessary either to determine the meaning of a notion, or to render it intelligible, may be included under DEFINITION. . . . We define by producing individual or concrete instances. This is the method of particulars” (149). Bain does list several alternate means of developing the notion: these are contrast (antithesis) and “verbal definition,” which for Bain is the scholastic method of defining by listing the differences among members of the class to which the term to be defined belongs. Day lists and discusses six analytic possibilities at some length: narration, description, division, partition, exemplification, and comparison and contrast.  

For Day, the qualities of clearness and distinction, which are secured by means of definition and division respectively, are especially appropriate to expository discourse. “Clearness is that quality of thought which characterizes it when its object is viewed as entirely separated or distinguished from all other objects of thought. Distinctness, on the other hand, is that quality which characterizes thought when its object is viewed in all its proper parts” (62). Since clarity and distinctness defined in this way are the same requirements made of rhetorical discourse by Socrates, who insists in the Phaedrus (265d-266b) that rhetoricians ought to begin with definition and move to division, Day displays a sense of appropriateness when he calls upon the topics of classical rhetoric as means of securing clarity and distinction. The crucial point to notice, however, is that throughout their discussions of the proposition both Day and Bain reinforce the notion that minds move in two directions when dealing with a subject: they determine its boundaries or limits, and they divide it up into its constituent parts.

Thus both Day and Bain see the first part of rhetorical invention as entailing three stages: deciding on a theme or idea, stating a proposition which connects the theme to another idea, and defining the area covered by the proposition so it may be divided into its constituent parts. Throughout these discussions both rhetoricians write as though inventive activity is solely a mental process. For all of his attention to invention, for example, Day assumes that it operates entirely within the mind, the place where thoughts are conceived and connected. For Day, a rhetorical definition is always “of an object of thought”; and, as language, it is inadequate to thought (63,65). Thus the re-importation of logic into rhetoric, salient as it was for the perpetuation of invention as a department of rhetoric, had the unfortunate side effect of reinforcing within the rhetorical tradition the logical assumption that thought is an abstract activity to which language is exterior and secondary.
Invention’s Last Stand: John F. Genung

John Franklin Genung, author of a series of popular rhetoric textbooks which endured in some schools until the 1930’s, is the last important nineteenth-century textbook author to pay serious and sustained attention to invention. His discussion of invention in the Practical Elements of Rhetoric (1885) occupies over 250 pages of text, more than is allotted to style. Genung’s system of invention is an elaboration of the three-stage model I’ve been tracing. For Genung, invention involves preparation, deducing a theme from a subject, stating the theme, creating a title, planning, and amplification. Preparation includes exploiting a writer’s natural ability, exercising the mental powers, and drawing upon the mind’s stored knowledge. Once the writer is mentally prepared, the next step in invention involves choosing a subject, a matter on which Genung gives the usual advice that the writer should be interested in and have access to knowledge about the subject under consideration. Next the writer is ready to begin the most crucial step in the inventional process, which is the reduction of the subject to a theme. This step involves “the process of concentrating the whole thought into unity and shapeliness of idea” (249). Genung derives “theme” from the Greek thema, “something placed or laid down,” and subsequently defines it as the “working-idea of the discourse” (248). Genung’s use of “theme” is analogous to earlier writers’ use of “proposition.”

The statement of the theme is to be characterized by qualities reminiscent of definition and division; it should have exactness (“every word should be so accurately weighed, so sharply defined, and its relations so closely discriminated, that it may safely stand as the beginning of a vista of thought in the plan of the discourse”); suggestiveness (“words and phraseology should be so chosen that every main relation of the thought may be provided for”); and brevity (“employ the briefest and crispest expression possible, because this favors unity of idea and subordination of parts”) (254-55). In his treatment of expository invention Genung names two procedures, “exposition intensive, or definition” and “exposition extensive, or division” as means of analyzing ideas “as to their depth or intensity” and “their breadth or extension” (387). The means of definition is “logical” (that is, scholastic); it may be “amplified” by iteration, exemplification, and analogy. The division, on the other hand, must be logically complete, correct, selective, and thorough (387-401). To this point, then, Genung’s scheme is an elaboration of the procedure recommended by Day and Bain.

In the remainder of Genung’s inventional scheme the plan is to be distinguished by the principles of distinction, sequence, and climax. The discourse can be developed by two means: grouping of points according
to the associative principles of contiguity, similarity or contrast, and
cause and effect; or by deductive or inductive movement. Genung is
probably indebted to earlier writers for some of these principles of
planning. Day’s principles of amplification, for example, are unity,
sequence, method, and completeness, while Bain introduced the prin-
ciples of association psychology—contiguity, similarity and contrast—
into American rhetoric. Genung lists amassing particulars, repetition of
the proposition, use of detail, quotations and allusions as means of
amplifying the discourse, all of which he could have found in earlier
American rhetorics, such as Samuel Newman’s Practical System of
Rhetoric (1827), or Jamieson. The point to notice is that all of these
procedures are truly inventional in Genung’s treatment; that is, they are
processes which enable writers to generate arguments for use in dis-
course.

Authors of the better textbooks written before the last quarter of the
century are inclined to treat antithesis, exemplification, classification,
and the like as means of inquiry. This approach was short-lived, how-
ever; Genung’s full and separate treatment of invention is an anomaly
among current-traditional composition texts composed after about 1870.
Of the classical rhetorical canons, invention is the least amenable to
prescription; and, given a general movement in the late nineteenth
century toward a more prescriptive rhetoric, attention to invention
could be expected to diminish.10 That something like this may have
occurred is indicated by the fact that A. S. Hill, occupant of the Boylston
Chair of Rhetoric at Harvard from 1876 to 1904, was himself the author
of several influential textbooks which, according to Ronald Reid, as-
sume “an over-all tone of dogmatism.” Reid writes that Hill “reduced
rhetoric to lists of principles and rules, set forth ex cathedra,” unlike any
of his illustrious predecessors in the Chair.11

Planning

Hill’s most extensive reference to invention in The Principles of
Rhetoric (1878) appears in the context of his discussion of expository
discourse, where he writes that

it is necessary to choose a subject which can be adequately
treated within the prescribed limits, to frame the title in
words that express or at least suggest the exact subject, and
to make (either on paper or in the mind) a general plan of the
whole. If all this is done at the outset, the foundations are laid
for a successful piece of work; if it is not done, the chances
are that even valuable materials will come to naught. To
secure clearness in detail, it is necessary to present each part distinctly.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus Hill concentrates Genung’s inventional process into three steps for preparation and a bit of advice for presenting the body of the discourse.

Hill’s treatment of invention is typical of late nineteenth-century textbooks, where brief remarks about thinking, planning, and formulating a theme-statement begin to appear with increasing regularity, usually in connection with the composition of expository discourse. Later nineteenth-century writers seem to have lost touch with the logical basis used by their predecessors to create an inventional process, however. While Fred Newton Scott and Joseph Villiers Denney retain definition and division as “logical” principles of expository invention in their \textit{Paragraph-Writing} (1891), the other means for analyzing a proposition listed by Day, Bain, and Genung have become methods of paragraph development in that work.\textsuperscript{13} The temptation to speculate on the reasons underlying Scott and Denney’s decision to transfer the means of analyzing a proposition out of invention proper and into arrangement is irresistible. They note that they are aware of Day’s, Bain’s and Genung’s texts; it is difficult to see, however, how they could have missed the explicit reference made by all three of the earlier rhetoricians to such principles as contrast, classification, exemplification and the like as means of invention. Scott and Denney’s move could have been dictated by their frequently expressed concern that novice writers not be confronted too early in their progress with aspects of composition that are too difficult for them to handle. The transfer could also be a consequence of the general shift of inventive emphasis from the generation of arguments to their management during the period under discussion. In any case, Scott and Denney’s decision to transfer the means of analyzing a proposition out of invention marks but one diminution of its realm in the late nineteenth century.

In their later works Scott and Denney cite Ben Franklin as a source for their scheme of invention. In \textit{Composition-Rhetoric} (1897) and \textit{Composition-Literature} (1902) invention is said to begin when the writer reflects on a first “vague conception,” and subsequently, instead of beginning to write, he therefore begins to ponder, turning the idea over and over in his mind and looking at it from all sides and from various angles. As he does so the idea grows clearer. It separates into parts, and these parts again separate, until there are numerous divisions. As he continues to reflect, these divisions link themselves one to another to form natural groups, and these groups arrange themselves in
an orderly way. In the end, if he thinks long enough and patiently enough, he finds that the first vague idea has taken on a clear and definite form (C-R, 21).

This process might be summarized as moving consecutively through definition, division, and classification, although it is scarcely that clearly delineated. In fact, the advice being given young writers here can be boiled down to something like “Think hard before you write.”

In their New Composition-Rhetoric (1911) Scott and Denney recommend an inventional process reminiscent of Genung’s, involving five stages: selecting a subject, narrowing it, choosing a title, composing a theme, and writing an outline by grouping facts according to the principles of contiguity, contrast, cause and effect, and climax (29-30). Their contemporary, Barrett Wendell, recommends something similar in his long-lived English Composition (1891). According to Wendell,

an idea presents itself to (the writer) in general form. . . . His first task—and often his longest—is to plan his work: he decides how to begin, what course to follow, where to end. His next task is to fill out his plan; in other words, to compose, in accordance with the general outline in his mind, a series of words and sentences which shall so symbolize this outline that other minds than his can perceive it (116).

The writer’s final task, according to Wendell, is revision; yet this is to be done only on a small scale, given that “words and sentences are subjects of revision; paragraphs and whole compositions are subjects of revision” (117). Apparently larger units of discourse can be planned in advance of their composition, while sentences cannot.

The three-stage process involving selecting and narrowing a subject, composing a theme-statement, and planning—which represents about half of Genung’s scheme for invention—is so regular a feature of late nineteenth-century current-traditional rhetoric texts that it can safely be regarded as that century’s gift to our own where matters of rhetorical invention are concerned. Before I can pursue its history into our own century, however, I need to trace the development of two features of this model which appear in embryo in early composition textbooks and which assume increasing importance in twentieth-century works in the tradition.

Narrowing and Outlining

Writing teachers have always been concerned about novice writers’ presumed tendency to overgeneralize. Current-traditional composition texts usually recommend that an early statement of the proposition be
used to narrow the focus of the discourse. In his *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828), Richard Whately warns that if the proposition is not laid down in the author’s mind clearly and in suitable form, the writer may enter on “too wide a field of discussion.” Those writers “who place before themselves a term instead of a proposition; and imagine that because they are treating of one thing, they are discussing one question” fall into this error, according to Whately.\(^{15}\) In America, Samuel Newman notes in his contemporary *Practical System of Rhetoric* (1827) that

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it is common with young writers, that the wider the field of inquiry on which they enter, the more abundant and obvious will be the thoughts, which will offer themselves for their use. Hence, by selecting some general subject, they hope to secure copiousness of matter, and thus to find an easier task. Experience, however, shews that the reverse is true—that as the field of inquiry is narrowed, questions arise more exciting to the mind, and thoughts are suggested of greater value and interest to the readers.\(^{16}\)
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Coppee, too, includes narrowing the field among his more strictly logical recommendations, noting that “a great deal of the vagueness, the trouble, and the discomfort of writing compositions” could be eliminated if only young people would take the trouble to form a proposition, narrow down the subject, and define the object more clearly (188-89).

By the late nineteenth century, such advice has become part of the invention process, as we saw in Genung and others. Genung’s contemporary, John S. Clark, recommends narrowing the field of inquiry by limiting it to one idea and thence to a specific topic in his *A Practical Rhetoric* (1886).\(^{17}\) Clark’s example of the narrowing process runs as follows: “The Arts—the Fine Arts—the Growth of the Fine Arts—the Growth of the Fine Arts in America—the Growth of the Fine Arts in America since 1870.” In his *Talks on Writing English* (1896) Arlo Bates connects the laxness in writing theory with the “moral laxity of the age.”\(^ {18} \) In a valiant attempt to impose both discursive and moral rigor on his students, Bates decrees that “every composition shall be informed with a general intention, shall centre around one fundamental idea,” and that “every paragraph and every sentence shall be dominated by one essential thought or purpose” (33). All writers of the period recommend stating the proposition in some form, usually on the grounds that such a statement will keep the scope of the discourse within manageable limits.

Creating a careful plan for any discourse is first recommended in American rhetoric by Newman, who notes that plans are useful in inculcating mental discipline: “the plan, or the right division of a composition and the arrangement of its several parts” is an aid to forming
"habits of consecutive thinking" and to establishing "a principle of order" in the mind (22). However, planning assumes an increasingly greater role in the invention process as the nineteenth century grows to maturity, by which time it has been transplanted out of minds and onto paper, where it is called outlining. Genung recommends a plan or outline as a means of preserving distinction, sequence, and climax in thought. He warns that the outline should be limited to assisting the writer in planning; it is not intended for readers' eyes (264). Aside from Genung, authors writing before 1890 recommend outlining only casually. Scott and Denney make it a "special exercise" in the appendix of Paragraph-Writing.

Outlining seems to have been given real impetus by Wendell's ingenious system for organizing topic headings onto cards, which the writer then studies and sorts as she would "a hand at whist." Wendell's awareness of the vagaries of the composing process lead him to adopt this means of planning since "ideas that really stand in the relation of proof to proposition frequently present themselves as co-ordinate," while "the same idea will sometimes phrase itself in two or three distinct ways, whose superficial differences for the moment conceal their identity; and more frequently still, the comparative strength and importances, and the mutual relations, of really distinct ideas will in the first act of composition curiously conceal themselves from the writer." A few minutes' shuffling of the cards, Wendell continues, "has often revealed to me more than I should have learned by hours of unaided pondering" (165). Wendell apparently assumes that the graphic display of ideas afforded by his little cards helps writers to make palpable the heretofore hidden connections between them. A similar assumption seems to underlie the increasingly ubiquitous advice about outlining given their students by early twentieth-century textbook authors. Generally they recommend that students prepare an outline which represents a literal map of the discourse; it is to be constructed prior to writing, and it is to dictate the placement and location of main ideas and their subdivisions. John Hays Gardiner, George Lyman Kittredge, and Sarah Arnold (1907), for example, suggest that the function of the outline is to help the writer arrange topics in their proper order, number them, and find subtopics for each. Writers should use notecards on each of which one "topic" has been written. These topics "should correspond to the natural divisions of the subject," and for each such division there should be a "group of related facts." They further recommend the construction of a "key-sentence" which will help to reduce a mass of topics to an intelligible order (171).

During the twentieth century the outline becomes an end in itself: by
the 1940’s many current-traditional textbooks, such as Hodges’ venerable Harbrace College Handbook (1941) and McCrimmon’s successful Writing With a Purpose devote entire sections or chapters to it. Planning entered current-traditional rhetoric as a part of the stage of invention usually called amplification, and was generally presented as a device for insuring that novice writers got plenty of practice in disciplining their minds. By the middle of our own century, the discipline lies in the arranging of topics and subtopics in suitable order. Sheridan Baker’s rationale for outlining is that people “think and write largely by free association, but to explain these thoughts fully to our readers, and to ourselves, we need to discover and outline their logical pattern. With the logic down on paper, we can write from heading to heading, sure of our direction, and our order of ascending interest.”20 That is, if “ideas” can be represented on paper by “topics” then the externally imposed structure afforded by the outline will insure that random or unconnected ideas are worked out into an orderly progression. That minds, let alone discourse, sometimes flow in other channels, seems never to occur to authors of current-traditional composition textbooks.

Prewriting

While twentieth-century authors distinguish a variety of stages for the invention process, most tend to prefer the three-stage procedure which, increasingly throughout the century, becomes a set of prescriptions for activities to be carried out before writing begins. Gardiner, Kittredge, and Arnold recommend that “before you begin to write, therefore, be sure that you know just what you wish to write about, that you know something about your subject, and that your ideas about it are clear and well-arranged”(9). In his Expressive English (1918) James Fernald adopts the three-stage process and, in a faint echo of Genung, advises that the statement of the theme must be characterized by distinction, relation, and unity. Louella Cook (1927) recommends selecting, limiting, and composing a controlling idea as means of invention, as do Mervin Curl (1931) and countless other authors.

Some later twentieth-century writers again elaborate the three-step model into a multi-stage process; for Rudolf Flesch, the process has five (or six) stages:

1. When you have collected your ideas, make a list of them.
2. Sort your ideas out in groups. Leave out those that don’t belong. 3. Then put your ideas in order. A good order is this: a. Bait for your reader. b. Your subject in general. c., d. (e). Main body of your piece of writing, divided according to your point of view. e. or f. Main idea in a nutshell.21
To call this an inventional procedure is to stretch the meaning of the term “invention”; it is a formula for getting through the composition of a piece of discourse in much the same fashion in which Sherman must have burned his way through Georgia. Flesch’s list is however one of the few I found for the period that hints that readers are part of the discursive process; this probably has to do with his main interest, which was measuring readability. Graves and Oldsey’s list in their From Fact to Judgement (1957) is more typical of the period in that they recommend deciding on a subject and tentative purpose, jotting down initial thoughts, collecting needed materials, restating purpose and arranging major ideas (that is, making an outline), and selecting details as means of invention. This model became a litany in textbooks written after 1940: it appears in the Macmillan Handbook (John Kierczak, 1939), Scribners’ Handbook (Albert Marckwadt, 1940), the Harbrace Handbook, and the Prentice-Hall Handbook (Glenn Leggett et al., 1951); and early editions of Brooks and Warren (1949), McCrimmon (1950), Sheridan Baker (1966) and Frederick Crews (1972). All have had multiple editions; most are still going strong.

Conclusions and a Rant

My study of composition textbooks has convinced me that invention was not always absent from current-traditional rhetoric, as some scholars have implied. Indeed, early current-traditional rhetoricians made a valiant effort to revive rhetorical invention in a theoretical discursive milieu that forbade such an innovation. Critics who decry the absence of invention from current-traditional rhetoric are reading backwards from contemporary textbooks which are indeed pale reflections of the vigorous works by Day, Bain, and Genung which inaugurated the tradition. Later works in the tradition seem to have been written in imitation of their predecessors rather than growing out of current rhetorical theory, logic, or psychology, as did the early works.

The inventional scheme whose history I have pursued through composition textbooks written over a period of 120 years presumes a set of assumptions about the relation of reality, thought, and language that appear in H. N. Day and persist through the latest editions of contemporary current-traditional rhetorics. The influence of Lockean empiricism upon current-traditional rhetoric is obvious in its easy separation of knowing subject from perceived object, and of both from language. In 1859 Henry Coppee can write as if the subject of the discourse—reality—is at once separate from its object—affecting an audience—and from its author’s thought process. H. N. Day bases his grand scheme for rhetoric on the assumption that language is a representation of thought,
and that thought is a distillation of the mind's perception of reality. For all of his attention to invention, Day assumes that it takes place entirely in the mind where thoughts are conceived and connected. Language literally re-presents thought, which in turn represents the author's perception of reality. This assumption is explicit in Wendell, who writes that "if we once know what ideas we wish to group together, the task of finding words for them is immensely simplified" (29-30). And Wendell's position is not merely the quaint relic of a dying century. C. Merton Babcock, writing in 1957, argues that ideas must be translated into words, which are "signals invested with meanings by which ideas can be transferred from one person to another. Words are not the ideas themselves; they are the vehicle by which the thoughts are transported."23 Thus it is that writer after writer in the tradition cautions that thinking is done "before the first definite sentence is written" (Clark, 248-49).

The view that language represents thought was reinforced by the introduction of logic into rhetoric as a means of invention. Eighteenth-century discourse theorists had been inclined to remove the inventional process from rhetoric and to house it within logic, whose proper sphere was the discovery of arguments. But when Day and his contemporaries reimported invention into rhetoric, they brought with it the logicians' assumption that thought is an abstract activity to which language is exterior and secondary. Too, as later textbook authors lost touch with the intellectual context from which the logical terms and their uses had been drawn, the inventional procedures advocated by the early writers came to be treated more and more as required structural features for any discourse rather than as means of inquiry.

While I was completing the research for this paper I was continually struck by the disparity between the formulaic composing process recommended by current-traditional composition textbooks and the messy procedure that writing is for most people. The paradigm of discourse recommended by current-traditional textbooks, with its neat formula for roping off a topic, stating a thesis, listing and developing (usually three) supporting ideas and repeating the thesis can only be described as a bizarre parody of serious discourse and the process by which it is produced. And if Clinton Burhans' recent survey of college catalogues accurately reflects what is going on in classrooms across America, current-traditional rhetoric is still going strong, which means that we are teaching students a writing process and a set of assumptions about discourse which have nothing to do either with how writing gets done or with contemporary thinking about the relation of language to thought.24 Each time I see a funnel or a keyhole chalked on the blackboard of a writing classroom, I wonder what those figures have to do with the
composing processes of the students who are staring at them. I can only hope that a fuller understanding of the historical underpinnings of current-traditional rhetoric will help us to devise a more appropriate rhetoric with which to replace it.

Notes
1 Daniel Fogarty coined the term “current-traditional” in *Roots for a New Rhetoric* (Columbia: Teachers’ College, 1959), 118. See Vincent Bevilacqua, “Philosophical Influences on the Development of English Rhetorical Theory: 1748-83,” *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society* (Leeds: W. S. Money and Son, Ltd., 1968), 191-215, for an account of eighteenth-century alterations in the classical treatment of invention, and James A. Berlin’s discussion of current-traditional treatments of invention in *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges* (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1984), especially pp. 64-68. Both authors use the term “managerial” to describe them influential theory of epistemological rhetoric. Berlin argues that managerial invention is merged with arrangement via the forms of discourse, each of which was assumed to appeal to a specific mental faculty. (For an account of how the shift from a classification based on aim to a generic scheme may have occurred, see my “Response to Robert J. Connors,” *College Composition and Communication*, 45 (February 1984), 88-91; on the influence of association psychology on the formation of the modes of discourse see Frank D’Angelo, “‘Nineteenth-Century Forms/Modes of Discourse: A Critical Inquiry,’” in the same issue of *CC*, especially pp. 36-40.) Berlin’s argument is correct as far as it goes; however he does not take account of nineteenth-century treatments of invention, such as Day’s, which appear independently of discussions of the modes in many textbooks.
2 See Warren Guthrie, “The Development of Rhetorical Theory in America, 1635-1850,” *Speech Monographs*, 15 (1948), 61-71, for an account of where and how Campbell, Blair, Ward, and others were used in American colleges during the early part of the century.
3 I’ve cited from the twenty-fourth edition of the *Grammar* here (New Haven: A. H. Maltby, 1844). Jamieson’s was of course not the only popular American rhetoric text in use during the first half of the nineteenth century. Among those I’ve not discussed are W. T. G. Shedd’s translation of Franz Theremin’s *Eloquence: a Virtue* (1850), which influenced Day’s work; James R. Boyd’s *Elements of Rhetoric and Literary Composition* (1844), and Richard G. Parker’s *Aids to English Composition* (1845).
6 Michel Foucault’s account of the neoclassical assumption that the reasoning process is separate from the material it works on is the best available. See *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1970).
7 Alexander Bain, *English Composition and Rhetoric: A Manual* (London: Longmans Green, 1866), 154. The edition from which I cite is dated 1877; page numbers of reprints of this text vary.
8 Day notes that the principles of division listed above may serve as means of arranging explanatory discourse as well as inventing it. He devotes only three pages of the *Art of Discourse* to arrangement in its classical sense, borrowing from Aristotle the notion that the proposition and discussion are “essential” parts of the discourse, while the
introduction and conclusion are "subsidiary." His relative inattention to the second
canon of rhetoric is accounted for, I think, by his use of the logical concept of method to
organize his entire discursive scheme. The intrusion of method into rhetoric may also
account in part for the confusion about the relation of invention to arrangement in
current-traditional composition texts, a confusion noted by Berlin, pp. 64ff. The issue
of the influence of method on current-traditional thought is far too large to deal with
here; I have made a beginning, however, in my "Invention in Nineteenth-Century
Rhetorics," *College Composition and Communication*, forthcoming.

9 John Franklin Genung, *The Practical Elements of Rhetoric* (Amherst, Mass: J. E.
Williams, 1885). I have used the third edition (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1895) here.
Genung's other composition textbooks are the *Outlines of Rhetoric* (Ginn, 1893) and
*The Working Principles of Rhetoric* (Ginn, 1900). The paper cited in the previous note
contains an extended account of the preparation stage of invention as this is presented
in current-traditional composition texts.

10 That invention is the most difficult part of rhetoric is generally agreed; and that rhetoric
has historically been studied by young people may account for the tenuous position of
invention in rhetoric throughout its history. At least Walter Ong seems to think so. See
his *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University

11 Ronald F. Reid, "The Boylston Professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory, 1806-1904: A
Case Study in Changing Concepts of Rhetoric and Pedagogy," *Quarterly Journal of
Speech*, 45 (October, 1959), 257.

12 Adams Sherman Hill, *The Principles of Rhetoric and Their Application* (New York:
Harper and Brothers, 1878). I have cited from the revised enlarged edition (New York:
American Book Company, 1895), 310. Hill's other historically important textbook is

13 Fred Newton Scott and Joseph Villiers Denney, *Paragraph-Writing* (Ann Arbor, MI:
Register Publishing Company, 1891). Scott and Denney's other texts include
*Composition-Rhetoric, Designed for Use in Secondary Schools* (Boston: Allyn and
Bacon, 1897), *Composition-Literature* (Allyn and Bacon, 1902), and *The New
Composition-Rhetoric* (Allyn and Bacon, 1911).

Bob Connors nominates Maurice Garland Fulton's *Expository Writing* as the longest-
lived textbook of the twentieth century, but Fulton's forty-one years are put to the pale
by Wendell, even if Wendell's nine nineteenth-century years are not counted. *English
Composition* was reprinted at least as late as 1963. Wendell's record is being threatened
by John Hodges' *Harbrace College Handbook* (nine editions, 1941-82) and James
McCrimmon's *Writing With a Purpose* (eight editions, 1950-1983), both late but game
starters.


17 John S. Clark, *A Practical Rhetoric for Instruction in English Composition and

18 Arlo Bates, *Talks on Writing English, First Series* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and
Company, 1896), 30.

19 Gardiner, Kittredge, and Arnold, *English Composition and Rhetoric* (Boston: Ginn
and Company, 1907), 164. This is the textbook attacked by I. A. Richards in the
*Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), which is, as far as I can tell, the earliest scholarly
expression of doubt about the worth of current-traditional rhetoric. Kittredge is one of
a number of well-known professors of literature to have written a current-traditional
rhetoric. The list also includes Norman Foerster and of course Cleanth Brooks and
Robert Penn Warren.

Baker has hung on to the outline much longer than most of his contemporaries; it has its own chapter in the third edition of The Complete Stylist (1984), although it was relegated to a subsection in the second edition.


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