

*from: A Short History of Writing Instruction,  
ed. James J. Murphy, 2nd ed.  
Hermagoras Press 2001.*

## Writing Instruction in Great Britain: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

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**Key Concepts.** Social and political changes • Politics and religion • English vernacular versus Latin • Writing versus oratory • Methods of writing instruction • Early continuity of medieval pedagogy • Imitation and memorization • Study of "Belles lettres" as models • Hugh Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres • Richard Whately's "Argumentative Composition" • George Jardine's objection to dictation • Dissenting academies • Examinations and themes • 1831 Report of the Royal Commission • Introduction of the personal essay • Responses to writing • Composition favored over literature • "Redbrick" universities • Writing instruction for working people • Writing instruction in Scotland, Wales, and Ireland • Scottish universities on continental plan • Three Scottish educators: Aytoun, Bain, and Jardine • Gaelic and Welsh vernaculars discouraged • Improvement of female education • University Extension Lecture movement • Salons • Entrance of women into universities • Foundation of women's colleges

As the preceding chapters have made clear, the reign of classical languages as the medium of scholarship and learning ensured that the study of Latin and Greek would dominate the curricula of schools and universities in Great Britain. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, the sovereignty of the classical languages was increasingly challenged, and writing instruction in English evolved in response to social, political, reli-

gious, and economic developments. Three related linguistic factors altered the way writing was taught: the gradual abandonment of Latin as the language of education and culture; the shift from an oral culture to a basically literate one; that is, from an emphasis on speaking to an emphasis on writing; and the proliferation of books and periodicals. This essay looks at how such developments affected the teaching of writing and rhetoric in schools and universities in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, that territory encompassing England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Although the period and society covered is far more complex than the comparatively uniform culture of the preceding chapter, the generalizations offered here should help readers appreciate the diversity of language instruction of the period. Because of the geographic and cultural breadth of this essay, neither chronology nor topic nor location alone suffices as an organizational principle; thus the exposition deploys all three. The chapter first reviews trends that cut across the period and examines dominant methods of writing pedagogy. It then takes up the educational opportunities particular to each of the British Isles. Finally, it turns to female education since girls did not share most of the privileges enjoyed by boys.

It was a time of great social change. The eighteenth century saw rapid industrialization, and across Britain, the rural agricultural population migrated to cities in large numbers. Between 1700 and 1800, Manchester and Liverpool mushroomed into industrial centers. Between 1800 and 1900, Scotland changed from a poor agricultural society to a relatively industrialized one, whose population increased from 84,000 to 500,000, and Wales became a leading exporter of coal and iron, its population quadrupling. Incensed by the government's economic policies, workers there rioted, contributing to upper-class anxiety about class rebellions. The 1800 Act of Union dissolved the Dublin Parliament, and Ireland came fully under British control. Between 1800 and 1900, Ireland lost half of its population to famine and emigration, with those remaining suffering the hardship of British colonialization; Irish nationalists' agitation also increased ships of British colonialization.

Along with such shifts came economic growth and political reforms that dispersed power beyond the traditional power bases. Preparatory schools and universities were either not available or not adequate to meet the challenges. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, England had only two universities (Oxford and Cambridge), Ireland one (Trinity), Scotland four (Edinburgh, Glasgow, St. Andrews, and Aberdeen), Wales none. By the end of the nineteenth century, dozens had been established. Secondary schools proliferated due to economic stability and the presumption of opportunities. The middle classes, especially the large and powerful merchant class, sought access to education, including training in reading, writing, and speaking the vernacular. A sign of good breeding, "proper

English" was a rung on the ladder of upward mobility for the native English and the provincial alike.

Lectures, coffee houses, clubs, and societies proliferated, providing active forums for such interests. The literary scenes of London, Edinburgh, and Dublin were intellectually lively, giving rise to such journals as the *Spectator*, *Rambler*, and *Edinburgh Review*, all of which helped to standardize and valorize English. They published good prose and celebrated it. Hundreds of other less famous newspapers and periodicals surfaced locally or nationally and encouraged interest in the vernacular. In the middle of the eighteenth century, Adam Smith, Robert Watson, Hugh Blair, and Thomas Sheridan delivered rhetoric lectures at the urging of Henry and Thomas, later Lord Kames, who believed that such refinements were necessary if Edinburgh professionals were to advance. The lectures were well attended and became part of the regular university curriculum. Just so, in towns and cities across the British Isles, in single and serial lectures, specialists (and a few charlatans) lectured men and women, boys and girls, on the proper uses of spoken and written English.<sup>1</sup>

Never separate after the Jacobite defeat in 1746, religion and politics played important parts in the drama of education and writing instruction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Since most eighteenth-century teachers were clergymen and many university students were training for the ministry, education was often connected with religion. Poor children received what little education they could from church-sponsored schools or foundations. Secular educational institutions were rare. Religion was considered the rationale for, and basis of, education; proponents argued that education was a path to virtue. Not surprisingly, then, much writing instruction centered on sermon writing, as young men were trained to marshal the wisdom of the scriptures for instruction in daily living. Such instruction varied radically, of course, according to the propensities of Anglicans, Dissenters, and Catholics. Not only do the most famous rhetoricians of the time take up sermon writing, but it also forms the subject of dozens of current manuals. Collections of sermons enjoyed brisk sales; students of all ages might develop their prose style by studying sermons according to the dictates of imitation exercises.

Those who were not members of the Anglican Church faced serious educational obstacles in Great Britain. The 1662 Act of Uniformity required all students and teachers to swear allegiance to the Church of England, prohibiting dissenters from matriculating at Oxford and Cambridge. Other restrictions applied. While uniting the parliaments of England and Scotland, the 1707 Act of Union allowed Scotland to retain independence in educa-

<sup>1</sup>D. D. McElroy's *Scotland's Age of Improvement: A Survey of Eighteenth-Century Clubs and Societies* (Pullman: Washington State UP, 1969) remains the best first source.

tion and religion. Its well-established universities—highly respected academically in England and on the continent, and with no religious constraints—attracted multitudes of students. At the beginning of the period, students wishing to remain in England turned to the many dissenting academies run by religious nonconformists, which provided a university-equivalent education; later, they might attend one of the “redbrick” universities founded to provide the middle classes with a practical education. Anglicans serious about education often chose one of these options since Oxford and Cambridge were reputed to have become morally and educationally decadent. It is in these academies and in the Scottish and English redbrick universities that disciplinary innovations took place, where English as an academic subject flourished, where instruction in writing came to mean writing in English instead of writing in Latin, topics discussed next.

## THE LINGUISTIC SITUATION

A rise in nationalism also contributed to the growing acceptance of English vernacular language and literature. Although men and women of culture had long read English literature at home, it was still considered popular literature unworthy of formal instruction. But as the demographics of schooling changed, students could no longer be expected to command “proper” English, and thus English became a regular part of the curriculum, English literature serving as, in J. D. Palmer’s words, “the poor man’s classics,” or, we might add, the provincial’s classics, gaining full respectability only in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Nationalism also gave rise to a reverence for the past, hence the nostalgia for local vernaculars such as Scots and Gaelic, manifesting itself in the recovery, study, and promotion of folk literature. The Edinburgh literati, for example, sponsored James McPherson’s “recovery” of the Ossian poems. They longed for a record of a Scots literary tradition, even as they repudiated “Scotticisms” in their own written prose. Some Irish and Welsh cherished indigenous literature, even as their own use of the vernacular was deemed unlearned, vulgar, and an impediment to British nationalism.<sup>3</sup> Local vernaculars were banished from

<sup>2</sup>D. J. Palmer, *The Rise of English Studies* (London Oxford UP, 1965) 78.

<sup>3</sup>The diminishment of Scots, Gaelic, and Welsh has been well documented, including the role played by British educational policies. For example, Parliament’s mid-nineteenth-century educational reforms cautioned against allowing Welsh to be used in school; by century’s end, only half of the population spoke Welsh, and very few could write it. Gaelic also suffered. In 1800, half of the Irish population spoke only Gaelic; by mid-century, only a quarter of the population could even speak Gaelic (of these, only 5% were monolingual). Many families, eager for their children to prosper, supported these early English-only policies. For additional information, see, for example, David Williams’s *A Short History of Modern Wales* (London: J. Murray, 1962), and Sean O’Tuama’s edited collection, *The Gaelic League Idea* (Cork: Mercier, 1972).

provincial classrooms. Such prejudice no doubt helped to legitimize the study of English. Teachers, elocutionists, grammarians, and lexicographers—with Enlightenment faith in rationality and rules—set out to standardize English, firm in the belief that change indicated deterioration and that Latin grammar was the standard by which all languages should be measured. Such beliefs would be increasingly challenged. The eighteenth century saw the publication of Nathaniel Bailey’s *Universal Etymological Dictionary* (1721) and Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755); the late nineteenth of the *Oxford (or New) English Dictionary*, testimony to the growing respectability of the vernacular, even in learned circles.

Interest in national language encouraged reexamination of older English texts stored in libraries such as the British Museum, the Bodleian at Oxford, and the University Library at Cambridge. As Jo McMurry explains, by the end of the nineteenth century, Victorians “had found, edited, and published virtually the entire canon of English literature” in addition to such scholarly tools as concordances and dictionaries.<sup>4</sup> Early in the eighteenth century, university students would hear about word histories as they were schooled in proper usage; by the end of the nineteenth, they would be examined extensively in philology, that is, historical and comparative linguistics. As scholarship broadened, new guidelines for academic writing were developed and passed on.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, schools, dissenting academies, and universities shifted to English, but the shift was gradual and contested, and cultured persons in the eighteenth century read and wrote in Latin. Oxford, Cambridge, Trinity, and many of the oldest grammar and public schools clung to the classical languages. In English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish grammar schools, students learned Latin grammar and wrote extensively—in Latin. Their religious exercises, too, were in Latin, and they sang psalms in the classical languages. At many schools, regulations mandated that all discussions, save those in family groups, were to be in Latin, although it is difficult to determine how steadfastly such rules were observed. What’s more, literacy was defined as the ability to read and write Latin. Objections to the dominance of the classical languages were raised as education began to have more utilitarian ends for merchants and other men of business.

Another consequential shift was that from the spoken to the written, from the oral to the literate. Although most writing instruction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries drew upon rhetorical theory, available rhetorical theories were diverse. Rhetoric had long privileged the study of

<sup>4</sup>Jo McMurry, *English Language, English Literature: The Creation of an Academic Discipline* (Hamden: Archon, 1985).

oratory. Students had engaged in many and varied written exercises to develop their stylistic virtuosity and had often composed themes, but these had been considered scripts for oral delivery or preparatory training for writing speeches. (Indeed, until well into the nineteenth century, most significant examinations remained oral, precursors of today's PhD dissertation defenses.) For most of our period, writing instruction built explicitly on this rhetorical tradition. Although "rhetoric" long referred to "public Speaking alone," Richard Whately explains in *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828), "as most of the rules for Speaking are of course applicable equally to Writing, an extension of the term naturally took place; and we find even Aristotle, the earliest systematic writer on the subject whose works have come down to us, including in his Treatise rules for such compositions as were not intended to be publicly recited."<sup>5</sup>

Whately goes on to observe that

[t]he invention of Printing by extending the sphere of operation of the Writer, has of course contributed to the extension of those terms which, in their primary signification, had reference to Speaking alone. Many objects are now accomplished through the medium of the Press, which formerly came under the exclusive province of the Orator; and the qualifications requisite for success are so much the same in both cases, that we apply the term "Eloquent" as readily to a Writer as to a Speaker [. . .] because *some part* of the rules to be observed in Oratory, or rules analogous to these, are applicable to such compositions. Conformably to this view, therefore, some writers have spoken of Rhetoric as the Art of Composition, universally; or, with the exclusion of Poetry alone, as embracing all Prose-composition. (2-3)

Other theorists, he later notes, confine the term to "Persuasive Speaking" (4) or extend the discipline more widely to include discourses in art, law, logic, ethics, and politics. Indeed, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, theorists and teachers variously defined rhetoric and writing instruction narrowly or broadly, necessitating that generalizations about language theories of the period be grounded in particular cases.

Prior to the eighteenth century, writing instruction per se had centered upon oratory, letters, and sermons, but as people's interests were increasingly served by government representatives and the legal profession during the eighteenth century, the dominance of oratory decreased as writing became the medium of communication and record. Oratorical exercises lost favor in some schools, yet "elocution"—a truncated rhetoric of delivery (rhetoric's fifth canon or office)—enjoyed great popularity, even as

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critics decried its limitations and excesses.<sup>6</sup> The oral uses of language continued to draw the attention of school and university students, as it did George Drummond, a student in John Stevenson's logic course at Edinburgh, whose theme "Rules of Conversation," dated 25 April 1740, is one of many on such topics currently housed in university archives across Great Britain. Manuals and essays celebrated the virtues of conversation and proffered advice on how to engage in its practice. Thomas De Quincey's "Conversation," which first appeared in 1847 in *Tait's Magazine*, maintained that "[w]ithout an art, without some simple system of rules, gathered from experience of such contingencies as are most likely to mislead the practice when left to its own guidance, no act of man nor effort accomplish its purposes in perfection."<sup>7</sup> Facility in conversation, it was assumed, was linked to facility in writing. To be sure, interest in the oral uses of language changed but did not disappear.

Another factor in the changing linguistic scene was the rapid increase in the reading public, which, in turn, created a large class of writers who wrote specifically for this populace. Spirited exchanges ensued in the numerous printed publications of the period—books, pamphlets, and periodicals, Public and private libraries increased in number and size. Accordingly, more readers wished to write proficiently, if not expertly. Writing manuals and textbooks became more and more numerous to serve this reading and writing public, helped by new printing technologies that cheapened production costs.<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of the eighteenth century Latin was still favored for textbooks; by the end of the nineteenth the trend was reversed. (Lectures follow suit.) At first English and Latin texts were used side by side, since good English textbooks were not available. At some of the academies, Latin textbooks "were abridged and translated by students before being used by them" (McLachlan 22). Often instructors wrote their own; more of-

<sup>6</sup>Wilbur Samuel Howell emphasizes the reductive nature of elocution by quoting the opening line of an elocutionary manual—"Always breathe through the nostrils"—alongside that of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*—"Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic." See Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) 145-256. Howell's criticisms notwithstanding, elocution sometimes constituted a rich component of rhetorical education.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas De Quincey, *Selected Essays on Rhetoric by Thomas De Quincey* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1967) 264.

<sup>8</sup>Ian Michael's *The Teaching of English: From the Sixteenth Century to 1870* (London: Cambridge UP, 1987) documents three centuries of British textbooks dedicated to the study of English and thus serves as an invaluable reference. Although Michael devotes only a dozen pages (303-16) to those texts explicitly teaching "written expression," other sections also pertain to composition instruction. Also see Louis G. Kelly's *Twenty-Five Centuries of Language Teaching: An Inquiry into the Science, Art, and Development of Language Teaching Methodology*, 500 B.C.-1969 (Rowley: Newbury, 1969).

ten still their dictated lectures served as textbooks for the class. By the end of our period, textbook publishing was big business.

## METHODS OF WRITING INSTRUCTION

Though we can draw some generalizations, writing curriculums varied. Scottish Common Sense Philosophy proved especially influential, while classical rhetoric waned in the course of the nineteenth century. It is difficult to document the ways writing was actually taught during this period, since much instruction was oral and since instruction in writing was to some degree integrated into every course, the acknowledged responsibility of every instructor. When classics dominated the curriculum, pupils practiced their language skills as they studied the geography, history, and arts of the ancient world; so too, as English became the language of instruction for studies across the curriculum, students wrote in the vernacular as never before. In the following discussion, we draw from textbooks, lectures, student notes, books on education, and university calendars. Of course, such sources are not infallible because, in some cases, they indicate what individuals felt ought to be done, not what was actually done.

### Language Exercises

Medieval pedagogy lasted well into the period. The trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric provided solid, if somewhat tired, training in communication skills during much of the eighteenth century. Texts such as John Holmes's *The Art of Rhetoric Made Easy* (London, 1739), John Lawson's *Lectures Concerning Oratory* (Dublin, 1758), and John Ward's *A System of Oratory* (London, 1759) reveal typical pedagogical approaches. Instructors believed that in order to learn to read, one first had to learn to spell and that the study of grammar was basic to writing instruction. Thus, students progressed from words to sentences to paragraphs to themes and finally to lengthier compositions or orations. Memorizing and modeling were common methods of improving student writing. Well into the twentieth century, grammar and writing instruction remained inextricably bound.

As earlier noted, at the start of our period, grammar was the grammar of Latin since writing instruction was writing Latin; however, as part of this instruction, students were required to translate "into a good English stile" (Michael 274), and as late as the end of the nineteenth century, proficiency in English was often tested by translation from Latin. Writing and speaking, English and Latin were likely to be taught side by side, instruction in one reinforcing instruction in the other (making the commonplace that classical languages prevailed somewhat misleading). For example, a

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master might dictate a letter for the student to write out in Latin, then transpose into English (Michael 308). Whether in Latin, or English, or Latin and English, medieval exercises comprised an integral part of writing instruction. Eventually, as modern foreign languages came into the curriculum, studying them was also considered a viable means of improving English. In 1867, for instance, a master at Eton urged that French or another modern language be substituted for Latin as a means of improving English (Michael 311). The redbrick universities and academies often taught such languages as German, French, Arabic, and Punjabi, alongside the classical ones, all of which contributed somewhat to the students' abilities in English. True, not everyone approved, since Latin had long been considered paradigmatic, and arguments about what language ought to be primary in school continued throughout our period.

What we today call basic English was sometimes part of writing instruction. Unlike the elitist and exclusive Oxford and Cambridge, the more democratic Scottish universities and redbrick universities served many students who were not proficient speakers and writers in the standard received British dialect. Eradicating provincialisms fell within their educational mission. Language instruction covered fundamentals.

Grammar was considered a necessary part of all composition instruction of the period and was therefore stressed at all levels. Based on the assumption of a universal grammar common to all languages, the Latin system was at first adapted without change to English. In the grammar schools, the students were often expected to know their grammar books by heart; instruction might then proceed in catechetical fashion. Grammar exercises associated with the old rhetoric were also widely used by students at all levels: imitation; varying (which involved changing a sentence into all of its possible forms); paraphrasing; and prosing (turning verse into prose). Transposition, a common exercise, entailed "the placing of Words out of their natural Order, to render the Sound of them more agreeable to the Ear" (cited in Michael 283). Elliptical exercises were sentences with some omitted words that the student was expected to supply. These exercises were used in the nineteenth century, though perhaps less frequently; translation from Latin into "correct English" and later from a modern foreign language continued to be used well into the twentieth century.

The practical benefits of ridding these students of their "rusticisms" and in training them in mechanics of a written standard cannot be overestimated, even as we lament cultural biases. Usage lessons, designed especially for students trying to eradicate traces of a provincial dialect, supplemented textbooks and instruction in writing. In addition to their notetaking, in whatever form practiced, university students often continued the preparatory school exercises, inherited from the medieval universities and the Latin tradition.

Memorizing books and literary passages was common practice even at the university level, for students were expected to have patterns of good writing in their head. Parsing sentences and correcting "false English" were also widely practiced. Students were expected to correct sentences that had errors of spelling, syntax, or punctuation and to cite the rule that had been violated. The master then corrected the exercises orally and returned them to the students, who, with the help of classmates, made their own corrections in writing. Since paper was expensive, students often wrote their first versions on slates and copied the corrected version into their notebooks.

Reading and writing remained closely associated with literature, broadly defined. Literary texts, both classical and English, served the rhetoric course as models for good oratory and writing, what McMurtry describes as a sort of "window display, to be taken in snippets [...] as illustrations for rhetorical techniques" (122). Although there was little attempt to explore or critique, literature served rhetoric in a very real way since students were often required to imitate models. As examples were more frequently drawn from English rather than from classical literature, interest shifted during the nineteenth century from rhetorical effect to an emphasis on the literature itself. Nevertheless, the early teachers of literature considered instruction in writing part of their mission until newer, more "efficient" methods of evaluating proficiency in English (e.g., testing knowledge of philological and historical fact) came to eclipse essay and oratorical forms. English literature came to dominate newly formed English departments, but writing instruction remained a distinctive part of courses. Communication skills, written and spoken, were recognized as central to the entire educational endeavor.

Although classical rhetorical approaches had always relied upon literary examples, belletristic rhetoric foregrounded the study of the belles lettres. Drawing upon continental theorists and upon his own training in classical rhetoric at the University of Edinburgh, Hugh Blair compiled a broad and accessible guide to reading and writing, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783). Steeped in classical theory, for which he professes much respect, but determined to revise it for modern use in view of Enlightenment thinking, Blair has been variously characterized as the British Quintilian and as a bridge between Enlightenment and Romantic theories of writing.<sup>9</sup> For Blair and his followers, all humane writing—whether oratory, philosophy, poetry, drama, science—shared fundamentals and thus might all be usefully studied in the rhetoric course. The teaching of oral and written skills were closely linked. (Not until late in the nineteenth cen-

tury did oral and written skills begin to be separated into different courses and different departments.) What's more, such study profited equally the writer or speaker, and the reader or hearer. Blair's text, in full and abridged form, sold well throughout Great Britain in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It also inspired such other books as William Barron's *Lectures on Belles Lettres and Logic* (London 1806) and Alexander Jamieson's *A Grammar of Rhetoric and Polite Literature* (London 1818). Although the full extent of belletristic rhetoric's reach cannot yet be determined, Blair, along with fellow Scots George Campbell and Henry Homes, Lord Kames, influenced the course of writing instruction in nineteenth-century Britain, broadening the range of texts studied and linking it with literary appreciation. (The work of these Scots was also strongly felt in North America, as Elizabethada Wright and Michael Halloran make clear in chapter 7 of this volume.)<sup>10</sup>

In his "Preface," Richard Whately recalls that *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828) originated for "private use of some young friends" (xxxiii). It went on to serve many boys and young men (and we speculate not a few sisters and wives). Whately was especially interested in student composition, as a tutor at Oriel College, Oxford, as principal of St. Alban's Hall, and when, as Archbishop of Dublin, he worried about cultivating new generations of ministers. Despite Whately's observation that the book was "designed principally for the instruction of unpractised writers" (xxxvi), the book was used in colleges as well as in schools, its practical orientation a welcome relief from more theoretical treatments. He revised and expanded *Elements*, each edition attending more to pedagogical concerns, culminating in the seventh edition of 1846.

Whately restricted writing instruction exclusively to "Argumentative Composition," "considering Rhetoric (in conformity with the very just and philosophical view of Aristotle) as an off-shoot from Logic" (*Elements* 4). Whately's popular treatise lays out rules necessary to "establish" or "prove" notions "to the satisfaction of another" (5). Whately's concern with written rhetoric is often as a script for spoken rhetoric, but his work formed the bases of much nineteenth-century writing instruction. Along with its companion volume, *Elements of Logic* (1826), it guided teaching practices into the twentieth century.

By the time *Elements of Rhetoric* was published, many writers and teachers were loathe to admit studying "rhetorical" precepts, so excessive had been earlier dependence on detailed artificial systems of rhetoric. While deploring such excess, Whately observes: "The simple truth is, TECHNICAL

<sup>9</sup>See, for example, George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1980) 235.

<sup>10</sup>The essays collected in Lynce Lewis Gaillet, ed., *Scottish Rhetoric and Its Influences* (Mahwah: Erlbaum, 1998) examine the far-reaching dominance of the Scots in America.



CAL TERMS ARE PART OF LANGUAGE" (19, emphasis in original). He presents philosophical and practical principles both general and specific to guide understanding. Despite its limitations—its rejection of a full rhetorical art of invention, its rejection of probable truths, its preference for inference and neglect of empirical knowledge, its relative neglect of forensic and deliberative topics, its embrace of faculty psychology, and so on—the textbook and its author taught generations of students to argue convincingly, if not persuasively. His student John Henry Newman recalled how the prose and reasoning abilities of his Oxford classmates benefited from Whately's uninting attention. Indeed, Newman emulated many of his mentor's methods when teaching school and university in England and Ireland.

### The Lecture System and Writing

There were significant differences between the tutorial system in place at Trinity and Oxbridge (as Oxford and Cambridge were called) and the lecture system favored by the Scottish and English redbrick universities and by the dissenting academies. In the latter, lectures were augmented by the catechetical system whereby the professor lectured for an hour a day and spent an additional hour or two questioning students about the material covered in the lecture. The custom of "dictates," where the professor spoke slowly enough so that the student could take down the lecture word for word, provided accurate textbooks for the student and practiced him in composition. But there were abuses. In a moral philosophy course, one student complained that the professor was dictating "fast enough in all conscience to keep 20 persons writing" and that he "does not feel very morally philosophical."<sup>11</sup> Student notes from David Masson's course, for example, vary little over thirty years. Robert Schmitz tells the story of students who were following Masson's lecture from an earlier set of student notes. Objecting to changes when Masson deviated from their copies, they would shuffle their feet in protest, whereupon Masson, rising, would remark, "Gentlemen . . . as I have been in the habit of saying" and would return to his previous years' notes.<sup>12</sup> But more significant, dictation was a component of writing instruction: it familiarized students with the physical practice of writing and instilled codes of formal English. The methods employed at the dissenting academies are characteristic:

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Some of the later tutors dictated word by word. Others like Doddridge and Priestley read their lectures and then handed over the MSS. to be copied by their pupils at leisure. Belsham spoke from brief hints and imperfect notes. Pye Smith provided pupils with an outline of his principal course.<sup>13</sup>

Working from the broad outline, students then wrote out the details. Sometimes students were given printed lectures, as by Priestley at Hackney College and Warrington. Aided by their small size and in contrast to the ancient English universities, the dissenting academies fostered free discussion. They departed from the traditional lecture course, which, in their case, usually consisted of comment on a text and instead fashioned their courses to suit their own and their students' needs (Smith 263). Students often used their course notes as their text after the medieval fashion. Some embellished their notes with drawings and bits of humor; one set contains scenes from Glasgow in the margins and a reference to Aristotle as the "Rev. J. G. Aristotle" (GUL BC 28-H.3.). Some bound the notes into book form.

Textbooks were expensive, students often poor. Students who could not afford textbooks used their professors' personal libraries although poorly paid academy professors had few to lend. And few dissenting academies had libraries, although university libraries fared better. The redbricks and provincial libraries housed both classical and contemporary guides to writing, as did the better high school libraries. (The work of Hugh Blair, George Campbell, Lord Kames, Lindley Murray, and Richard Whately served as textbooks for almost a hundred years in Britain and elsewhere and were usually available in multiple copies in libraries.)

Some students developed a shorthand in which they took notes (e.g., EUL Ms. Gen 49D), while others used phonetic spellings, a popular movement in the nineteenth century (e.g., EUL Ms. Gen. 700). The professorial practice of dictating notes was indeed common and might well be considered part of writing instruction, drawing on one facet of classical imitation exercises. The extent to which dictates contributed to students' skill in composition undoubtedly varied radically from classroom to classroom. At Glasgow, Jardine objected to this procedure since the student "is constantly occupied with the mechanical operation of transferring the words of the lecture to his note-book." Consequently, his mind is not engaged, and "when he leaves college, accordingly, his portfolio, and not his memory, contains the chief part of the instruction he carries away." He suggested that after leaving the classroom, students immediately review the lecture in their minds and "commit to writing in their own composition,

<sup>11</sup>EUL Ms. Gen. 850). We include manuscript references within the text, employing the following abbreviations: U of Edinburgh Library; EUL; Glasgow U Library; GUL; and National Library of Scotland; NLS. We also include each library's catalogue numbers.

<sup>12</sup>Cited in Robert Morrell Schmitz, *Hugh Blair* (Morningside Heights: King's Crown) 67.

<sup>13</sup>Herbert McLachlin, *English Education under the Test Acts: Being the History of Non-Conformist Academies 1662-1820* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1931) 23.

whatever they judge to be of leading importance."<sup>14</sup> In this way, he asserts, "The students have to remember,—to select and arrange the materials furnished to them, and to express, on the spur of the occasion, their ideas in plain and perspicuous language" (Jardine 289). Jardine's suggestion of summarizing the lectures in a written composition proved invaluable as a productive exercise in selecting and organizing a body of information. (The only extant set of notes of Adam Smith's rhetoric lectures appear to be from two students collaborating in like manner.)<sup>15</sup> Jardine's observations shaped teaching practices elsewhere in the British Isles.

### Examinations and Themes

The catechetical system, whereby students were quizzed on lecture materials, was initially oral, but toward the middle of the nineteenth century the written examination began to replace the oral question-and-answer format. In the description of his course on moral philosophy, Professor Calderwood at the University of Edinburgh asserted that class time was devoted "partly to examinations, written and oral." He added that "subjects are also prescribed for elaborate Essays, as well as for briefer occasional exercises" (EUL Calendar 1859–60). In the same calendar, Fraser, professor of logic and metaphysics, wrote that class hours were devoted to lectures and "also to discipline, by means of Conversations, short Exercises, and Essays, meant to train the members to logical habits and a reflective life. General Examinations, at which answers are returned in writing to questions proposed by the Professor, are held at intervals the course of the Session" (Bryce 4). In general, the practice of writing instruction followed the recommendation of the 1831 *Report of the Royal Commission*: "In addition to Examinations, Exercises and Essays should be required from all the regular Students in each class, and ought to be criticized by the professor" (35). Consequently, instruction in writing was never confined to any single course, though language arts instructors sought to develop students' prose style in particular ways.

Giving evidence before the Commission in 1827, Professor Robert Scott described his class in moral philosophy, which met for two and a half hours during the day. The first half hour was spent in oral examination of the preceding day's lecture "with the students reading aloud their written answers to questions assigned the day before." A considerable part of the afternoon hour was spent "in the practice of composition"; subjects were

<sup>14</sup>George Jardine, *Outlines of Philosophical Education Illustrated by the Method of Teaching Logic, or First Class of Philosophy in the University of Glasgow* (Glasgow: Printed by Andrew & James Duncan, Printers to the University, 1818) 278. See Gaillet (1997) for a fuller discussion of Jardine's instructional practices.

<sup>15</sup>J. C. Bryce, "Introduction" to *Adam Smith Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, gen. ed. A. S. Skinner (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985) 4.

prescribed "and a time fixed, before which the essays must be left by the authors at the Professor's house" (Royal Commission 40). Jardine's approach at Glasgow is described in his 1825 *Outlines of a Philosophical Education*. Themes should be "prescribed frequently and regularly," and the subjects should be "numerous and various." In a four-ordered sequence, he described his assignments. In the first order, during the first two months, there was a theme almost every day, "the subject proposed in the form of a question." The second order used analysis and classification: "How may books in a library be arranged?" The third order suggested a proposition that the student was to prove: "The hand of the diligent maketh rich," "Do holidays promote study?" or "Personal talents and virtues are the noblest acquisition." The fourth and final order engaged the student "in the higher processes of investigation," which "may be said to constitute the envied endowment of genius" (Jardine 291–360).

Whately's pedagogy was student centered, as he reminded teachers to assign relevant writing topics that engage the learner. The young writer "must be encouraged to express himself (in correct language indeed, but) in a free, natural, and simple style; which of course implies (considering who and what the writer is supposed to be) such a style as, in itself, would be open to severe criticism, and certainly very unfit to appear in a book" (*Elements* 23). He goes on: "the compositions of boys *must* be puerile," but "to a person of unsophisticated and sound taste, the truly contemptible kind of puerility would be found in the other kind of exercises": those "*child specimens*" "on any subject on which one has hardly any information, and no interest; about which he knows little, and cares still less" (23). Thus dismissing the traditional subjects of declamations and other composition exercises, Whately urged the teacher instead to

Look at the letter of an intelligent youth to one of his companions, communicating intelligence of such petty matters as are interesting to both—describing the scenes he has visited, and the recreations he has enjoyed during a vacation; and you will see a picture of youth himself—boyish indeed in looks and in stature—in dress and in demeanour; but lively, unfettered, natural, giving a fair promise for manhood, and, in short, what a boy should be. Look at a theme composed by the same youth, on 'Virtus est medium vitiorum,' or 'Natura beatis omnibus esse dedit,' and you will see a picture of the same boy, dressed up in the garb, and absurdly aping the demeanour of an elderly man. (*Elements* 23–24)

Whately and those who follow him ushered in a new kind of writing in Britain: the personal essay (although Whately's goal was argumentative writing).

Specifically, he recommended drawing up an outline, or "skeleton [. . .] of the substance of what is to be said," one from which the writer could



freely deviate, "a *track* to mark out a path for him, not as a *gravoie* to confine him" (25). He also offered detailed guidance for discovering and arranging propositions and arguments"<sup>16</sup> and for forming a natural prose style and delivery.

### Responses to Writing

How teachers responded to student writing is difficult to discern since such evidence tends to be ephemeral. Extant evidence suggests that practices varied and that teachers at both the secondary and university levels paid close attention to student work. Teachers checked traditional writing assignments, like those requiring students to translate from Latin into English, for correctness. Such exercises were intended to inculcate correctness, form a writer's style, and extend a student's stylistic range. The instructor's markings were suited to those ends: sometimes the instructor marked the work; other times students were expected to self-correct it. Exercises and themes were frequent.

Edinburgh University Library has in its manuscript library a collection of twelve essays written by John Dick Peddies for William Spalding's course in Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in 1844-45 (EUL Ms. Gen. 769D). Written during his last year in the university, the themes vary from twelve to forty-two pages and cover such topics as "Remarks on Harris' Treatise on Music, Painting, and Poetry" and "Remarks on different points in the Association Theory of Beauty." Professor Spalding's comments, brief and complimentary, were likely augmented by oral comments. It was common for teachers to read the themes, either in class or after, and to discuss the student's work with him. Spalding, for example, corrected errors in agreement and the use of "will" for "shall." Other papers displayed common confusions like "principle" for "principal," "their" for "there." (Popular textbooks of the period reviewed such matters.)

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, then, with few exceptions, responding to student writing was a matter of correction rather than appraisal, and more often than not it was oral. In the lower schools, it was largely correction of mechanical errors, as described in John Walker's "Hints for correcting and improving juvenile composition":

The pupil writes a draft on loose paper. Next day he copies it, with amendments, on the lefthand side of the paper of an exercise book. He reads the theme, without interruption, to the teacher, who then takes it sentence by sentence and shows the pupil where he has erred, either in the thought, the structure of the sentence, the grammar of it, or the choice of words. (cited in Michael 222)

<sup>16</sup>It dealt with methods of proof, not methods of inquiry. The philosopher seeks, the rhetor communicates.

The pupil then made a fair copy on the righthand page of his exercise book. Walker urged that course enrollment be kept as low as possible (cited in Michael 222).

Often students read their work aloud so that it might be criticized publicly either by the professor or classmates or both. In describing his course to the Royal Commission in 1831, Professor Robert Scott reported: "After being examined in private by the Professor, and the inaccuracies, whether of thought or composition, carefully marked, they are returned to the authors, by whom they are read publicly in the class, their inaccuracies are pointed out, and commented on, and an opinion as to their merits or defects publicly expressed" (*Royal Commission* 40). The first set of essays "is generally read by the Professor, without mentioning the names of the authors [. . .] to save the feelings of individuals," Scott added (*Royal Commission* 40).

Jardine's method of responding to themes, outlined in a chapter titled, "On the Method of Determining the Merits of the 'Themes,'" sounds remarkably modern and influenced many British teachers during the nineteenth century. Faced with a class of nearly two hundred students, he contended that "experience and habit enable the teacher to execute his work more expeditiously than might at first be believed" (364). He further suggests for large classes the use of "examinators," ten or twelve students from the class who read other students' written work with the professor selecting works that "abound with defects" for his own inspection, which he returned with remarks "most likely to encourage, and to direct future efforts" (371). (Indeed, he urged that "the professor must touch their [students'] failings with a gentle hand" [365].)

In notes from David Masson's class in 1881, the student jots down the assignment and instructions on the last page of volume four: "Attend to neatness of form, expression, and pointing, as well as the matter" (EUL Ms DK. 4:28-30). Masson, who taught first at University College, London, and subsequently at Edinburgh, commented on both form and content. Somewhat unusually, John Hoppus, a professor at University College, London, for nearly forty years, determined prize essays by student vote.

### EDUCATION IN THE BRITISH ISLES

Eighteenth-century grammar schools, which developed out of a variety of cathedral, abbey, collegiate, parish, and song schools from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, aimed to turn out students who could read and write Latin. As the name grammar school suggests, students embarked on an intensive course of Latin grammar. They went on to study Greek and rhetoric while continuing to improve their proficiency in Latin by writing verse. After attending the equivalent of high school, a privileged few en-

tered university. British students in the eighteenth century who sought out higher education might attend one of the universities—Oxford, Cambridge, Trinity, St. Andrews, Aberdeen, Glasgow, or Edinburgh—or one of the dissenting academies. In the nineteenth century, they might also attend Catholic University, Dublin, the University of Wales, or any of the new English redbrick universities.<sup>17</sup> Students' choices depended largely on religious affiliation, economic status, and the region in which they lived.

### England

By the eighteenth century Oxford and Cambridge had degenerated into a "preserve for the idle and the rich."<sup>18</sup> Their cost—between 200 and 300 pounds per annum in the 1830s—was prohibitive to most citizens. They were also elitist institutions: undergraduates of noble birth wore embroidered gowns of purple silk and a college cap with a gold tassel, which distinguished them from poor students, who donned simple attire. What's more, such students were excused from all examinations leading to a degree (even though test standards were dismally low) and were required to be in residence only thirteen weeks out of the year. "[A]ll the leading men of the eighteenth century—Bentham, Butler, Gibbon, Adam Smith, Vicesimus Knox and many lesser lights," Nicholas Hans points out, "condemned the two Universities from their personal experiences as students."<sup>19</sup> Knox, headmaster of Tonbridge School from 1778 to 1812, called the requirements for the Oxford degree a "set of childish and useless exercises" which "raise no emulation, confer no honour and promote no improvement." Fellows "neither study themselves nor concern themselves in superintending the studies of others" (cited in Barnard 25–26). Scholar R. L. Archer describes Oxford of the time as "a university in which professors ceased to lecture, and where work was the last thing expected." Students "entered the University not to feed on solid intellectual food, but to enjoy a costly luxury." Indeed, Oxford was marked by "extravagance, debt, drunkenness, gambling, and an absurd attention to dress."<sup>20</sup> While

<sup>17</sup>Because females of means were eligible for few of the educational opportunities enjoyed by boys and men of means in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, our discussion here refers to male students only, unless we indicate otherwise. We devote a later section to female education.

<sup>18</sup>H. C. Barnard, *A History of English Education from 1760*, 2nd ed. (London: U of London P, 1961) 24.

<sup>19</sup>Nicholas Hans, *New Trends in Education in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1955) 42. Hans attempts to refute charges commonly made against eighteenth-century Oxford and Cambridge, especially that poor students had deserted them. His arguments are not convincing against substantial evidence to the contrary.

<sup>20</sup>R. L. Archer, *Secondary Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1921) 7.

Cambridge did not fare quite so badly, both southern universities were preserves of the cultural elite.

In the late eighteenth century, class attendance was low. At Oxford in 1850, "out of 1500 or 1600 undergraduates, the average annual attendance at the modern history course was 8; at botany 6 and at Arabic, Anglo-Saxon, Sanskrit and medicine, none" (Barnard 82). Lectures were dubbed "wall lectures" because the lecturers had no audience but the walls. Oxford and Cambridge offered little for students who came well prepared. Preparatory school students beat out university students to capture many of the universities' classical prizes. Reform came slowly in the middle of the nineteenth century under the Oxford University Act and the Cambridge Reforms of 1854–56. Founder's Kin scholarships were opened to competition, and for the first time University business could be carried out in English instead of Latin (Barnard 123). Life fellowships were abolished, and celliacy was no longer required for college fellows. In 1871, religious tests for the degree were finally abolished. New professorships were established, the curriculum was broadened, and examinations were made more stringent.

In spite of these nineteenth-century reforms, however, Oxford and Cambridge continued to be aristocratic and conservative. Under the direction of their college tutor, Oxford and Cambridge students were instructed first in Latin and then in Greek composition. Tutors varied greatly in expertise and commitment, and some colleges offered quite a strong classical education. Both Matthew Arnold (at Balliol) and John Henry Newman (at Trinity) were schooled in classical language studies, going through language exercises like those described by Don Paul Abbott in chapter 5 of this volume. Translation exercises not only developed students' command of Latin and Greek but of English as well. When the tutor was qualified (as the tutors of Arnold and Newman apparently were) and his charges studious, writing instruction was well served. More often, it seems, studies were unfocused, with the student dabbling in Latin and Greek, never understanding the relevance of the classics, never understanding how rhetoric might draw connections between education and life. It was left first to the Scottish universities and English dissenting academies, then to the English redbricks to inspire educational innovations, including the establishment of English vernacular as an academic study. Under pressure and with reluctance, Oxford and Cambridge institutionalized English studies only at the end of the nineteenth century, long after the dissenting academies, the provincial universities, and redbrick universities had done so.

*Dissenting Academies.* Dissenting academies, sponsored by Protestants who opposed the prevailing Anglican-controlled education, were innovative and strong in the eighteenth century. As Thomas P. Miller has es-

tablished, as early as the last quarter of the seventeenth century, English composition and literature were taught to college-age students in purposeful, systematic ways.<sup>21</sup> The academies had begun as a response to the 1662 renewal of the Act of Uniformity, originally passed in 1559, by which all schoolmasters and students were required to take the oath of conformity and to renounce the Scottish covenant. On August 24 of that year, nearly 2,000 rectors and vicars resigned (McLachlin 1). The early academies were illegal, but after the Act of Toleration in 1689, the English grammar schools and high schools were opened to all comers, though the universities maintained religious restrictions. The academies filled the gap by offering education equivalent to that of the universities, but distinguished themselves by being the first to offer modern subjects, including English composition and literature. Founded by fine scholars who were themselves often educated in Scotland or on the continent, the academies were marked by a seriousness and a political activism lacking at the two ancient universities. Originally designed to educate ministers, in the eighteenth century the academies broadened their scope and took on utilitarian purposes. English studies served the dissenters' economic and political reform agendas (see Miller and McMurtry).

In general, the academies were superior to the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, for they boasted much stricter curriculums. Terms were longer, vacations shorter. Students were as young as fourteen since preparatory opportunities were limited: freed from religious restrictions, these institutions served the brightest eighteenth-century British youth, turning out a generation of brilliant men of letters as well as an avid reading public. Students often began to study in early morning, hearing lectures at six and seven, and they continued through the evening (McLachlin 25). Nonconforming academies, which proliferated during the eighteenth century, tended to be small in faculty and students. Students moved from one school to another, taking advantage of each institution's academic strengths. One student attended five academies and studied under five tutors (McLachlin 23–25).

As Miller explains, dissenters embraced a comparative method of instruction, in which "conflicting views of controversial issues were presented, and then students researched and composed essays arguing their positions," a method "consistent with the dissenters' belief that free inquiry would advance political reform and economic and moral improvement" (86). In so doing, they rejected the conservative approaches to classical language instruction then dominant. At John Jennings's early

## 6. WRITING INSTRUCTION IN GREAT BRITAIN

eighteenth-century academy, for example, students were ordered not to draw upon the received truths of tradition but rather, as Philip Doddridge remembered, to focus on "such subjects as are discoverable by the light of nature" (quoted in Miller 89). Liberal reformers, they marshaled the power of language instruction in "the progress of reason toward a utopia of free trade, scientific innovation, and rational religion" (Miller 88). Writing instruction helped to fulfill the pedagogical goals of such teachers as Isaac Watts, Philip Doddridge, Joseph Priestley.

In *The Compleat English Gentleman*, written in 1728, Daniel Defoe recommends studying English along the lines his teacher Charles Morton proposed: each week students, under the guise of public figures, wrote an oration and two compositions. "Thus he taught us to write a masculine and many stile, to write the most polite English, and at the same time to know how to suit their manner as well to the subject they were to write upon as persons or degrees of persons they were to write to; and all equally free and plain, without foolish nourishes and ridiculous flights of jingling bombast in stile, or dull meanness or expression below the dignity of the subject or the character of the writer" (cited in Miller 90). Differences with classical traditions notwithstanding, these new approaches to writing instruction remained strongly rhetorical. Though writing instruction varied by individual teacher, some practices were common. Students often debated orally as preparation for writing, critiqued discourse (including sermons), rejected dependence upon traditional invention and syllogistic reasoning, favored empiricism, promoted enlightenment values like individualism, encouraged student discussion, respected the vernacular, and favored plain styles and practical forms and genres likely to be useful in public life and future employment.

Part of the curriculum at all levels, writing instruction took its place variously alongside the study of elocution and belles lettres, as well as alongside mathematics, geography, classical and modern languages, history, political economy, and science. The practical was valued over the aesthetic, composition over literature. In fact, Joseph Priestley, who taught at Warrington Academy, pioneered forms of scientific and political writing (see Bazerman). Miller credits thinkers like Smith and Priestley with developing "a modern philosophy of public education" (105). During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, however, the academies lost much of their vitality as they became more narrowly practical and abandoned the working classes and the poor.

*The New Universities.* Another development in the nineteenth century was the founding of the "redbrick" universities, whose facades contrasted markedly from the stone characteristic of the ancient universities. The first of these, London University (later University College, London),

<sup>21</sup>See chapter 3 ("Liberal Education in the Dissenting Academies") of Miller's *The Formation of English Studies* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1997) for a discussion of how dissenters taught English. Our account draws upon Miller's work.

was founded in 1828. Not only was there no religious test for admission and degree, theology was pointedly excluded from the curriculum. Although classical studies found an honored place, science, medicine, and other modern, practical studies, including the vernacular, were favored. Indeed, it was here that the first formal professorship explicitly devoted to English was established. In the earliest years, writing instruction in the English courses was modeled after Scottish belletristic pedagogy.<sup>22</sup> Under the Rev. Thomas Dale, college students at University College took "Principles and Practice of English Composition," in which they studied the philosophy of language and the fundamentals of speaking and writing. Earlier as tutor to John Ruskin and other children, and later as professor of English at University College, London, and at King's College, London, Dale drew upon Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, an edition of which he later produced. In Dale's literature course, students also applied these principles to works of English letters and to their own compositions on polite subjects. Decades later when David Masson assumed the English professorship at University College, London, he paid more attention to great literary traditions, to philology, and to classical rhetoric, confirming that classical rhetoric was esteemed by at least some new literature professors. Successors taught much the same way, although as the century wore on philology and English literature came to occupy more course time, composition less.

Although professors of English worked from different philosophies of composition, they all required that students compose frequently. What's more, students wrote in most courses since professors of other disciplines recognized the role of writing in learning and the importance of writing in professional life. Not only did students write constantly in their foreign language courses (ancient and modern), where translation and style exercises sharpened their command of both languages; they wrote in courses like moral philosophy, where for nearly forty years John Hoppus, a dissenting minister, drew explicitly upon the writing-to-learn theories promoted by his mentor George Jardine. Indeed, courses taught by Hoppus and others employed the range of exercises practiced today under the rubric of writing across the curriculum and collaborative pedagogy.

Upset that London was served only by a secular institution, Anglicans founded King's College, London, in 1831. Due largely to opposition from Oxford and Cambridge, neither college was at first allowed to grant degrees, but beginning in 1836, the University of London was chartered to grant degrees, with students from University and King's among those sit-

ting for examinations. From this beginning, other nonsectarian and non-residential institutions were founded during the second half of the nineteenth century as instructional rather than degree-granting colleges, among them, the University of Manchester (1871), Liverpool (1881), Leeds (1877), and Newcastle (1871). Many institutions evolved from colleges of various types, originally supported by funds from private individuals and business and civic institutions. Not until 1898 were these institutions permitted to grant degrees, all such credentialing until that time being through the University of London. All of these institutions departed from purely classical education since proficiency in writing English was now considered an indispensable component of education.

*Writing Instruction for Working People.* Writing instruction figured in diverse adult working-class education in the nineteenth century: public lectures, scientific, philosophical, and literary societies, mechanics institutes, book clubs, reading rooms and libraries, and the like. All sought the mutual improvement of members, most usually middle-class or skilled working men, though unskilled laborers and women sometimes benefited as well.<sup>23</sup> Most often such efforts were led by volunteers (often middle-class men and woman or clergy). Sometimes funded by wealthy donors, the organizations and institutions charged small fees (not insignificant to working people, who suffered poor salaries) to cover expenses. Procedures varied: volunteers taught groups; members formed study groups; individuals engaged in self-study, sometimes guided by another.

Though the diversity of adult education needs to be stressed, some generalizations hold. Liverpool and Manchester boasted large mechanics institutes that drew many of their members from the middle class. Subjects such as English language and literature, botany, history, music, and art were included in the afternoon offerings at Manchester, which attracted older middle-class "ladies" with the opportunity to acquire the "intellectual culture" befitting their station in life, while day offerings attracted daughters of the lower-middle class with the "knowledge and skills" suitable for a "young lady."<sup>24</sup> In the latter especially, English skills were stressed: "considerable attention was given to the spoken word and art of conversation and writing, which included not only letter writing but also writing bills, keeping cash accounts, sealing letters and penmaking," for "[s]uch skills," June Purvis observes, "might help young women become

<sup>22</sup>See Linda Ferreira-Buckley, "Scottish Knowledge and the Formation of Rhetorical Studies in 19th-Century England," *Scottish Rhetoric and Its Influences*, ed. Lynne Gallett (Mahwah: Hermagoras, 1997) 163-75.

<sup>23</sup>Historical inquiries have not yet yielded detailed accounts of writing instruction at such locations. Local histories provide a useful beginning point for primary work; see, for example, W. S. Porter, *Sheffield Literary and Philosophical Society* (Sheffield 1922) and E. K. Clarke, *History of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society* (Leeds 1924).

<sup>24</sup>June Purvis, *Hard Lessons: The Lives and Education of Working-Class Women in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989) 134.

competent in middle-class rituals of "calling" as well as in managerial skills as a future mistress of a household" (135). At Manchester, the superintendent, a Miss Wood, took responsibility for the English Department and taught English reading, grammar, and writing, a sign of the respect accorded the vernacular. Miss Askew assisted. These studies occupied three hours each day. Mr. Daniel Stone taught Biography and Criticism of English literature on Thursdays from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.<sup>25</sup> Despite gains in adult education, literacy remained under guard: "controversial" literature was banned in the reading rooms and from the curriculum for both men and women. Class anxiety could not be dispelled—those running the institutes did not want to incite the working class men and women (Purvis 160). Studies for men focused on rudimentary language skills that might foster the technological expertise useful for their livelihood. Defying the many who believed that the poor should remain illiterate, the evangelical Hannah More pioneered efforts to teach reading to the poor (typically, the aim was to make the Bible accessible), but she refused to teach writing on the grounds that such skill might make them ungovernable.<sup>26</sup>

Working men's colleges were another influential component of adult education. The People's College in Sheffield (1842) and the London Working Men's College (1854) were the first of dozens that would spread throughout Britain. Unlike the institutes, whose focus was practical, the colleges valued "humane culture," "democratic comradeship," and "enrichment of personality" (Purvis 164). Admission was open to any working man who could read and write, the skills upon which their studies were to build. The study of English (including essay writing) flourished—Thomas Kelly compares their curriculums to those offered earlier at dissenting academies.<sup>27</sup> When women were finally admitted, they were refused the composition and elocutionary instruction offered men since such skills were appropriate to the public sphere, not the domestic sphere.

## Scotland

More democratic and with fewer religious restrictions for admission or degrees, the Scottish philosophy of education differed considerably from that of the English and Irish. While the ancient English and Irish universities restricted higher education to a tiny percentage of the population,

## 6. WRITING INSTRUCTION IN GREAT BRITAIN

Scottish universities admitted all able students who sought an education. Because preparatory schools were scarce, allowance was always made for the "lad o'parts"—usually a gifted young man tutored by the local parson in a parish school who then went early to university, sometimes as young as fourteen (Findlay 9–10). Thomas Carlyle, the eldest of five children, walked eighty miles from his home in Ecclefechan to the University of Edinburgh at age fourteen.<sup>28</sup> University courses were designed to fill in deficiencies.

Scottish universities attracted students from the families of merchants, farmers, and factory and land workers, for in the north education was considered a public and state responsibility in addition to an individual and voluntary one. Thus throughout our period all Scottish children received a primary education that stressed basic literacy skills in English (or occasionally the local vernacular). The Scots felt strongly that basic education should be available to all and that the talented student should also have access to higher education.<sup>29</sup> Some Scottish students proceeded to university with no Latin, though with some proficiency in English composition. Those fortunate enough to attend schools like Edinburgh High School came steeped in classical rhetoric, much like their counterparts in England, having gone through style exercises as preparation for writing orations, the pinnacle of their high school experience.<sup>30</sup> So firm was the faith in the universal applicability of classical study that English was not officially made part of the curriculum at Edinburgh High School until 1827, when it was made one of four optional "General Knowledge" classes available to students who paid additional fees, and then largely because the institution feared losing students to other more "modern" programs. Not until midcentury was a regular English master employed.

The Scottish universities of Glasgow, St. Andrews, and Aberdeen, all founded in the fifteenth century, were modeled on the continental rather than the English pattern, a fundamental difference that became particularly significant during the eighteenth century. During that century, their universities attracted students not only from the surrounding regions but also from England and the continent. Scottish universities retained their more broadly democratic flavor and their philosophically based education.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup>See Ian Campbell, *Thomas Carlyle* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974) for details of Carlyle's education.

<sup>29</sup>Hans 31. For a different perspective, see McElroy, who has challenged claims of Scottish superiority in education.

<sup>30</sup>See Linda Ferreira-Buckley and S. Michael Halloran, "Introduction," *Hugh Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2001).

<sup>31</sup>George Elder Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and Her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1961).

<sup>25</sup>*Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Directors of the Manchester Mechanics' Institution* (Manchester: Johnson, 1846) cited in Purvis 135.

<sup>26</sup>On the positive side, her *Cheap Repository Tracts*, published between 1795 and 1798, sold millions of copies, and in so doing, "pioneered female writing for the mass market of the lower classes" (Anderson and Zinsser 126).

<sup>27</sup>Thomas Kelly, *History of Adult Education in Great Britain*, 3rd ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1992) 182.



The Scottish universities had offered a more general education, ordered by the regent system in which a single professor stayed with one group of students during their entire program. He was expected to teach all the subjects in the arts curriculum: Latin, Greek, mathematics, chemistry, natural philosophy, and in the final year, logic, moral philosophy, and rhetoric. Practice in composition—Latin composition—came under the regents' purview and thus did not differ fundamentally from other universities following the dictates of ancient rhetoric. Regenting was abolished in Edinburgh in 1708, at Glasgow in 1727, and at St. Andrews in 1747 but persisted in King's College in Aberdeen until 1798 because of the influence of Thomas Reid. The students seemed not to suffer since professors often had quite able assistant lecturers, who conducted classes, lectured, and commonly assumed their positions upon the chairholder's death.

To be sure, during both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Scottish universities and dissenting academies were distinguished by able professors who wrote widely in the journals of the day and were innovators in philosophy and rhetoric, among other fields. Although Adam Smith is better known today for *Wealth of Nations* (1776) than for his course in rhetoric, for example, his influence in language education was consequential. The importance of Hugh Blair and George Campbell, whose books were used on both sides of the Atlantic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has been well documented.<sup>32</sup>

In the nineteenth century, Scotland had less well known but nonetheless influential educators who had a profound effect on the future of English studies and writing instruction at both British and American universities. Three deserve special note: Edward Edmondstone Aytoun, Alexander Bain, and George Jardine. The following brief sketch underscores the range and variety of writing instruction in nineteenth-century Scotland and should thus caution against overgeneralizations.<sup>33</sup> Edward Edmondstone Aytoun, who held the chair of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at Edinburgh from 1845 to 1865, did not believe in instruction in classical rhetoric: "I believe the ancient systems to be unsuited to the circumstances

<sup>32</sup>See the critical introductions to British rhetoricians provided in Michael Moran, ed., *Eighteenth-Century British and American Rhetorics and Rhetoricians* (Westport: Greenwood, 1994) and the description of nineteenth-century Scottish educators and curriculum in Horner's *Nineteenth-Century Scottish Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1993). Also see the essays collected in Gaillet.

<sup>33</sup>Our characterizations of Scottish universities are based on lecture notes taken by students, which are housed in the manuscript sections of Scottish libraries. These notes are "dictates" and represent, in many cases, word-for-word representations of a professor's lectures. For a more detailed account see Winifred Bryan Horner, "Rhetoric in the Liberal Arts: Nineteenth-Century Universities," *The Rhetorical Tradition and Modern Writing*, ed. James J. Murphy (New York: MLA, 1982); and, especially, Horner, *Nineteenth-Century Scottish Rhetoric*, which documents the archives in the Scottish universities.

of our time" (NLS MS 4913, fol. 29v).<sup>34</sup> Aytoun covered the principles of vernacular composition with an examination of style as exhibited by eminent English authors, along with the rules of spoken discourse. He also offered a critical review of British literature and occasional lectures on ancient and medieval literature. His course did come to include more and more English literature, however, a trend popular with students, who paid course fees directly to Aytoun. At his request, the title of his chair was altered to Professor of English and Literature. The study of English literature was an increasingly significant part of the curriculum. In fact, when in 1861 a Royal Commission recommended that English be offered by all four Scottish universities, and since none but Edinburgh had a course at the time, writing instruction was assigned to professors of logic. At the outset, the "English" course might well include English history and geography, itself reminiscent of the way such disciplines comprised classical studies. At the time, the concept of literature was broad enough to include historical and scientific essays as well as "works of the imagination" and students usually wrote themes, with varying degrees of instruction. In writing to a friend about his teaching, Aytoun complained that he had enough themes to read to "roast an ox," wry testimony that his students did write frequently.

Professor of Logic and Rhetoric from 1860 to 1880 at Aberdeen, Alexander Bain moved writing instruction in a markedly different direction. His 1864 course description indicates his emphasis. The Professor of Logic, the Calendar reads, "has two classes, one in English Language and Literature, and the other in Logic." The English class would include "the higher Elements of English Grammar; the Principles of Rhetoric, applied to English Composition, and some portion of the history of English literature."<sup>35</sup> Drawing students from northern districts, Bain faced problems different from those of his Edinburgh colleagues. The students who went to Aberdeen were in general younger, less well prepared, with dialects marked by rusticisms. The perceived duty of the universities became to teach such students to speak, read, and write "cultivated" English (at the time the London received standard). Coming from just such a background, Bain took as his own the responsibility of educating these students. An immensely popular psychology teacher now recognized as a leader in the discipline, he was

<sup>34</sup>According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, thirty students were enrolled in his classes in 1846; an astonishing 1,850 by 1864. Aytoun's lectures in his own hand are contained in manuscripts 4897-4911 in the collection of the National Library of Scotland. These manuscripts attest that Aytoun was constantly changing and updating his lectures and was a lively and informative lecturer. Excerpts from his lectures are published in Erik Frykman, *W. E. Aytoun, Pioneer Professor of English at Edinburgh*, Göttenburg Studies in English 17, Göttenburg, 1963). Also see Horner *Nineteenth*.

<sup>35</sup>Alexander Bain, *English Composition and Rhetoric: A Manual* (London: Longmans, 1866) n. page.



an immensely unpopular rhetoric teacher, for he conceived of the rhetoric course largely in terms of grammar and basic composition, a remedial course in English. Many characteristics of early twentieth-century rhetoric can be traced directly to his influence: the modes of discourse, which he delineated as narration, description, exposition, argument, and poetry; the topic sentence; and the organic paragraph. His textbook, *English Composition and Rhetoric* (1866), went through six editions in ten years; his several grammar books also sold well. Bain felt strongly that the way to good English, written and spoken, was primarily through a knowledge of grammar, which he conscientiously drilled into his students. His pedagogy reduced composition to the teachable forms that are his legacy.

Like Bain, George Jardine recognized Scottish students as ones "who are not qualified, either in respect to age or previous acquisitions," but he approached this challenge in a very different way, his enlightened teaching methods prefiguring those of modern composition.<sup>36</sup> During his long tenure as Professor of Logic and Rhetoric at the University of Glasgow from 1774 to 1824, Jardine was deeply involved in the educational issues of the day, a strong champion of the Scottish system. While formerly education was preparation for church and state, he recognized that modern Scottish universities were designed for young men "destined to fill various and very different situations in life" (Jardine 31). He understood that knowledge was not enough and admonished his students that "a man may be capable of great reflections but if he cannot communicate it to others, it can be little use" (GUL Ms. Gen. 737, vol. 2, 157). His remarkably enlightened teaching methods, described in his book *Outlines of Philosophical Education Illustrated by the Method of Teaching Logic, or First Class of Philosophy in the University of Glasgow*, urged peer evaluation, promoted writing as a way of learning, and made frequent sequenced writing assignments. Writing instruction was necessarily dispersed throughout the curriculum. The extent of his influence is only beginning to be understood.

### Wales and Ireland

Irish and Welsh students had fewer options open to them. Wales had a few grammar schools but no universities; Ireland, with its largely Catholic population, did not fare much better. Illiteracy was pervasive in Wales. The Registrar-General reported in 1864: "In south Wales, an average of 64 per cent of men and 48 per cent of women were able to write their

<sup>36</sup>George Jardine, *Outlines of Philosophical Education Illustrated by the Method of Teaching Logic, or First Class of Philosophy in the University of Glasgow* (Glasgow: Printed by Andrew & James Duncan, Printers to the University, 1818) 427. See Lynce Lewis Gallett, "George Jardine's Outlines of Philosophical Education: Prefiguring 20th-Century Composition Theory and Practice," *Scottish Rhetoric and Its Influences* (Mahwah: Hermagoras, P 1997), 193–208, for a fuller discussion of Jardine's instructional practices.

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names. In North Wales, the corresponding figures were 64 per cent of men and 48 per cent of women."<sup>37</sup> As in Scotland, much Welsh education issued from provincial linguistic anxiety. Middle-class parents often wished their sons and daughters to lose telltale signs of Welsh in written and spoken language, the well-off sometimes sending their children to England to "finish" their schooling. As W. Gareth Evans remarks, "as elsewhere, the ethos of the middle-class girls' schools was English rather than Welsh" (Evans 60). By the middle of the nineteenth century girls studied French, the only language permissible, on designated weekdays at the best schools. Welsh was strictly forbidden. H. M. Bompas, who authored the eighth volume of the Taunton Report, expresses the common view that the native language "interferes with education": "It would appear that it is beginning in some parts to be considered unfashionable for girls to know Welsh, and this feeling is likely to make the language die out rapidly, at least among the middle classes."<sup>38</sup> Since boys, at least those of means, were also expected to acquire the classical languages, they were even less likely to study Welsh in school.

Not until the end of the nineteenth century did some citizens reclaim the right to study their home language. In her prize-winning essay on the set topic, "The Higher Education of Girls in Wales with practical suggestions as to the best means of promoting it," student Elizabeth Hughes argued for the study of Welsh in schools and colleges.

Let us have a national education to preserve and develop our national type [...] An ideal Welsh education must be national. It must differ from an ideal [...] English education primarily because of the difference of race [...]. Different English education primarily because of the difference of race [...] Difference of race, far from being a subject for regret, as far as possible should be deepened and perpetuated. The differences of race found within the bounds of the British Empire can become a source of strength and completeness.<sup>39</sup>

The language spoken by a million people was not to be so honored until well into the following century, however. The University of Wales in Aberystwyth was not founded until 1872.

Irish education also suffered under colonial control. Irish or Gaelic, the indigenous language, was not a school or official language and languished correspondingly. Well-off Protestants founded so-called "English schools" to promote British education, not least of which was a command of the King's English. As Miller points out, such efforts affected not only schools but university study as well. John Lawson, professor in oratory and history,

<sup>37</sup>W. Gareth Evans, *Education and Female Emancipation: The Welsh Experience, 1847–1914* (Cardiff, Wales: U of Wales P, 1960) 53.

<sup>38</sup>Report of the Taunton Commission, vol. 8, cited Evans 61.

<sup>39</sup>Transactions of the Liverpool National Establdgpol, 1884, 40–62, 49–50; cited in Evans 137.

whose *Lectures Concerning Oratory* (1758) draws upon classical precepts in discussing rhetoric and poetry, was the first university professor in Ireland to publish language lectures in English, Miller notes.<sup>40</sup> In this regard, Lawson typified Protestant educators in Ireland of our period who felt the pressures of residing in a cultural province and thus sought to "meet the" Irish gentlemen's need to know the language and literature of England" (Miller 118). Anglicans in Ireland continued to attend Trinity College, Dublin, whose classical curriculum and academic seriousness offered a solid if somewhat old-fashioned education in writing. A full archival record documents instruction in rhetoric and writing there, including curriculum records and prize essays.<sup>41</sup> Founded in 1592, Trinity College introduced students to rhetoric in a variety of contexts, including in the lectures of the "Professor of Theological Controversies," and, beginning in 1724, in the lectures given by the holder of the Erasmus Smith Chair of Oratory and History. In formulating instruction in rhetoric, holders of the chair, John Lawson beginning in 1750, but especially Thomas Leland beginning in 1761, drew upon classical rhetoric but sought to correct and enrich it in light of the new rhetoric. Both Lawson's *Lectures Concerning Oratory* (1758) and Leland's *Dissertation on the Principles of Human Eloquence* (1765) suggest the coming together of the old and new rhetorical principles and eloquence's broadening to include both oratory and poetry.

Students practiced classical language exercises, written and oral, as part of their formal study, but, just as important, they fostered those language skills in extracurricular societies. In 1747, for example, Edmund Burke founded the "Academy of Belles Lettres" at Trinity, a forum for lively debate (it would lead to the Historical Society and the College Historical Society, the latter for the expressed purpose of the "Cultivation of History, Oratory, and Composition" (qtd. in Moss 407). Students longed for "practical experience." Jean Dietz Moss, quoting from the club's early minutes, makes clear that its "business" was "speaking, reading, writing and arguing, in Morality, History, Criticism, Politics, and the useful branches of philosophy" (403). In *Chironomia* (1806) Gilbert Austin writes that "The speaking societies set up at various times in London and in Dublin, and perhaps in other cities, have had the practice of declamation for their object. Imaginary subjects have been discussed and debated with all the interest of real occasion, and with all the efforts of declamation; and not infrequently with considerable powers of eloquence. These societies operated as incentive to oratory, and awakened love of eloquence, if they

did not teach it" (212). (At various times and places, however, anxious administrators banned student debate about controversial contemporary issues.) About such efforts at the University of Dublin, Austin writes that they are "flourishing in all the acquirements of classical knowledge, classical eloquence, morality, loyalty, and religion; a nursery of oratory, learning, and taste" (212).

The Irish Catholic population did not fare as well. Some risked punishment by relying on illegal "hedge" schools, which educated students in Gaelic culture and the classics (Moss 385). Catholic aristocracy in Ireland employed private tutors and sent their children to continental universities. As government restrictions eased in the nineteenth century, Catholics were permitted to attend state schools (Trinity had begun admitting Catholics in the 1790s), but as John Henry Newman argued, British Catholics needed an institution of their own. "Robbed, oppressed, and thrust aside, Catholics in these islands have not been in a condition for centuries to attempt the sort of education which is necessary for the man of the world, the statesman, the landholder," he observed. "Only advanced and rigorous study"—liberal education that aimed at "cultivation of the mind" and thus fostered thinking, speaking, and writing—would politically empower Catholics.<sup>42</sup> When, in the 1850s, Newman helped to found the Catholic University in Dublin, he insisted that students be immersed in classical language study, much like that which he had enjoyed at Trinity College, Oxford. Grammar and rhetoric were central in writing instruction in Latin and Greek. They studied English language and literature as well, a sign of the vernacular's acceptance in higher education.

## FEMALE EDUCATION

No matter what their class affiliation, British girls were not permitted the level of education afforded boys of their class.<sup>43</sup> A few eighteenth-century girls attended grammar schools, but those fortunate enough to receive an education usually received it at home, often under the tutelage of their

<sup>42</sup>John Henry Cardinal Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Garden City: Image Books, 1959) 12.

<sup>43</sup>Although literacy statistics are not wholly reliable (not least because definitions of what constitutes "literacy" differ radically) historians have arrived at rough estimates: "While women's ability to read and write trailed behind men's (by twenty to twenty-five percentage points in this era), literacy became standard for girls above the working class. By 1750, 40 percent of Englishwomen and 27 percent of French women could sign their names—not an adequate test of literacy, but one of the few ways of assessing it before the nineteenth century." Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) 139.

<sup>40</sup>Our discussion of Irish education draws upon the helpful accounts offered by Thomas Miller in *The Formation of College English* (1997) and by Jean Dietz Moss in "Discordant Consensus: Old and New Rhetoric at Trinity College, Dublin," *Rhetorica* 13.4 (1996): 383–411.

<sup>41</sup>See Moss's rich account.

mother or governess. Boys could go away to school—a move toward intellectual and social independence. "School parted us," lamented George Eliot, looking back on her own brother's exodus.<sup>44</sup> The distance was both physical and psychological, of course, for the boy would be immersed in Latin and eventually Greek, in reading, speaking, and writing—intellectual activities made to foster in him a public sense of self. Indeed, traditionally the purpose of secondary and higher education was to train young men for service to church and state, roles then unthinkable for women. Some girls might study from a brother's books, but most parents discouraged the practice. Some might go to an academically weak finishing school, where writing instruction would be limited to discursive forms suitable for social occasions or to composing light verse. Very early on, Quakers and a few nonconformist schools defied cultural mores to offer girls serious academic educations and deemphasize "accomplishments."<sup>45</sup> Although some men became advocates of women's education—Daniel Defoe decried the "barbarous custom of denying the advantages of Learning to Women" as early as the seventeenth century, observing, "We reproach the Sex everyday with Folly and Impertinence, while I am confident, had they the advantages of Education equal to us, they would be guilty of less than ourselves"<sup>46</sup>—the Defoes were few, and their arguments went largely unheeded until the end of the nineteenth century.

Prohibitions against female education were made on both biological and cultural grounds. One commonly held fear was that rigorous study led to infertility and insanity—a woman thus defying her God-given limitations would be unsexed, dehumanized.<sup>47</sup> Medical officials warned that females were ill-equipped to handle the rigors of study: overtaxed by the demands of learning the classical languages, for instance, a female might be driven insane. Even Darwin and Herbert Spencer believed that scientific evidence confirmed such lore (Anderson and Zinsner 151–52). Society feared that educated women would be "argumentative wives" who would undermine the institution of marriage. They "would join in discussions of public affairs and disturb the household by challenging the opinions of their husbands and sons." Accordingly, learned women were undesirable,

<sup>44</sup>Ruby V. Redinger, *George Eliot: The Emergent Self* (New York: Knopf, 1975) 61.

<sup>45</sup>Gillian Avery, *The Best Type of Girl: A History of Girls' Independent Schools* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1991). Also see 159–66.

<sup>46</sup>Quoted in D. P. Leinster-Mackay, *The Educational World of Daniel Defoe* (U of Virginia, 1981) 37.

<sup>47</sup>Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) and "Good Wives and Little Mothers: Social Anxieties and the School Girls' Curriculum 1890–1920," *Oxford Review of Education* 3, 1: 21–35. Stowalter, Elaine, "Victorian Women and Menstruation," in *Suffer and Be Still: Women and the Victorian Age*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1972) 38–44.

destined to become "old maids."<sup>48</sup> Would a man be happier "if he were mated with a 'being' who, instead of mending his clothes and getting his dinner cooked, had a taste for a literary career upon the subject of political economy?" asked a *Saturday Review* writer in 1864. Decidedly not. "There is a strong, an ineradicable male instinct, that a learned, or even an over-accomplished young woman is one of the most intolerable monsters in creation."<sup>49</sup> High-level literacy—especially the skills of rhetorical education—endangered the domestic ideal.

Even advocates of female education disagreed on its end: some, like Emily Davies, argued that females must have a liberal education identical to that enjoyed by males in order to avail themselves of professional opportunities. Others, like Hannah More and Dorothea Beale, argued for a distinctly female education that prepared them to fulfill the special role God ordained for "the fairer sex." Still others, like Frances Mary Buss, under whose leadership the North London Collegiate School and Camden Girls' School flourished, emphasized modern subjects likely to help women find full employment.<sup>50</sup> All of these orientations specified a type of writing instruction.

Given the state of female education, it is remarkable that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries produced so many strong female writers. Many were self-taught, using manuals such as those by Hugh Blair, Alexander Jamieson, and Lindley Murray. Many wrote prolifically in diaries and letters, two discursive forms readily available to them. Harriet Martineau rose early to write in secret.<sup>51</sup> The woman who dared write publicly risked censure.

As capitalism expanded the middle classes and increased free time, women became more avid readers and writers. For the first time, large numbers of women could distance themselves from the physical work necessary to running a household (a lower-middle-class woman would have a servant, an upper-middle-class woman might have a dozen), and polite learning marked class membership.<sup>52</sup> Girls of means deigned not prepare

<sup>48</sup>Joan Bursyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (London: Croom Helm, 1980) 42.

<sup>49</sup>"Feminine Wranglers," *Saturday Review* 18 (1864) 112; cited in Bursyn 42.

<sup>50</sup>Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas* (London: Pandora, 1988) 449.

<sup>51</sup>Francis Basch, *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel*, trans. Anthony Rudolf (New York: Schocken, 1974) 106.

<sup>52</sup>In 1746, Eliza Haywood advised readers of *The Female Spectator* to learn only enough housekeeping to supervise the servants; more, she warned, might earn her "The reputation of a notable housewife, but not of a woman of fine taste, or in anyway qualify her for polite conversation, or of entertaining herself agreeably when she is alone" (qtd. in G. E. Fussell and K. R. Fussell, *The English Countrywoman: A Farmhouse Social History* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1953) 106, emphasis mine). Not long after, Hugh Blair would preach similar virtues for his young male students at Edinburgh.

themselves for the workplace but rather for their role at home and in society. In such households, literacy and manners were closely linked, and girls studied courtesy manuals and language books that taught them the conventions of letter writing and other appropriate forms. Periodicals (some now edited and written by women) catered to the female at home, offering advice and entertainment, often in essay form. Less expensive periodicals (priced at about sixpence in 1800) targeted the women of the working class (Anderson and Zinsner 139).<sup>53</sup> Such entries served as models to be absorbed and emulated. One among many such organizations was the Edinburgh Essay Society (founded in 1865), "a galaxy of youthful maidens, eager for self-improvement."<sup>54</sup> For all of the eighteenth century and most of the nineteenth, girls received a poor primary education that favored the domestic arts over academic ones—some girls received none at all. Even girls from well-off families received an inadequate education, for, as Joan Burstyn observes, "Schooling was considered a way for girls to obtain social rather than intellectual skills." Parents chose schools accordingly, paying more attention to the other pupils' social backgrounds than to curricular matters (22). Girls were trained "to behave as contenders in the marriage market, and as social hostesses" (Burstyn 22). Any writing instruction they received—from their mother, governess, private tutor or private school—was suited to these purposes: letters of all kinds, meditations, and the like.

Girls of the lower classes, who attended the public elementary schools (as did six-sevenths of the working class, male and female) did not fare well (Avery 65). According to Annmarie Turnball, before the 1870 Education Act, working-class children suffered much the same education: basic reading, perhaps some rudimentary writing, religion; they often left school at a young age, as soon as they could work or mind younger siblings. At those schools not under the auspices of the state—including dame schools (run by women) and charity schools—curriculums were more gendered, with most of the girls' time spent on sewing, needlework, and cleaning, the activities presumed to be most useful in their adult life (Turnball 84). During the closing decades of the nineteenth century, girls of all classes in England, Wales, and Ireland received free primary education from the state (Scottish girls had long benefited from such). For most of the poor, working, and lower-middle classes, the education was still inadequate and included only minimal instruction in reading and writing. A significant portion of "writing" time was devoted to penmanship and to

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the most basic dictation skills; very little was given to composing original themes. Women philanthropists also recognized that their poorer sisters needed to be educated if they were to secure an honorable living. Some, like Jessie Boucherette, founded institutions like the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women (1859) to offer "a solid English education to young girls and teach older women to write a letter grammatically" (qtd. in Anderson and Zinsner 185). While poorer girls might be taught to read, they were rarely taught to write more than their name. If, after 1870, attention to academics increased somewhat for all children, the reading and writing assignments given girls and boys were gender-specific. Boys were to be independent (although obedient to authority) and brave; girls, submissive and meek.

The middle class did not fare much better. In response to Frances Buss's 1865 testimony, the Schools Inquiry Commission (i.e., the Taunton Committee) concluded:

It cannot be denied that the picture brought before us of the state of middle-class female education is, on the whole unfavourable [...] want of thoroughness and foundation; want of system, slovenliness and showy superficiality; inattention to rudiments, undue time given to accomplishments, and these not taught intelligently or in any scientific manner; want of organisation [...] a very small amount of professional skill, an inferior set of school books, a vast deal of dry, uninteresting work, rules put into the memory with no explanation of their principles, no system of examination worthy of the name [...] a reference to effect rather than to solid worth, a tendency to fill rather than to strengthen the mind.<sup>55</sup>

Change came slowly.

Many girls of the upper-middle classes studied under governesses before being sent off to a finishing school. Girls were educated according to the changing whims and fortunes of their family. "Girls changed schools often, but the progression from one establishment to the next was not logical except in the social sense," writes historian Joyce Senders Pederson.<sup>56</sup> Toward the end of the century, the education of female elites improved markedly. Pederson writes: "The public schools and colleges prepared women for public life most obviously in transmitting many of the intellectual skills required for effective functioning in the public sphere. In the

<sup>55</sup>Frances Buss, "Evidence to the Schools Inquiry Commission (1865)," *The Education Papers: Women's Quest for Equality in Britain, 1850–1912*, ed. Dale Spender (New York & London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987) 140–41.

<sup>56</sup>Joyce Senders Pederson, *The Reform of Girls' Secondary and Higher Education in Victorian England: A Study of Elite and Educational Change* (New York: Garland, 1987) 48. Also see Margaret Bryant, *The Unexpected Revolution: A Study in the History of Women and Girls in the Nineteenth Century* (Windsor, Eng.: NFER, 1979).

<sup>53</sup>See also Alison Adaburham, *Women in Print: Writing Women and Women's Magazines from the Restoration to the Accession of Victoria* (London: Allan, 1972).

<sup>54</sup>Quoted in Gillian Avery, *The Best Type of Girl: A History of Girls' Independent Schools* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1991), 64.

old-fashioned, private schools even elementary skills often had been either badly taught (as with arithmetic) or taught so as to be of little use in public life (as was the case with the spiked, illegible handwriting favored by some school mistresses for its supposedly decorative effect). In the new public schools, on the other hand, the children routinely acquired at least the basic arithmetic and literary skills required in the conduct of virtually all sorts of public business, while in the upper school forms and in the women's colleges they were introduced to more arcane disciplines which they had to master were they to compete with men in academic and professional pursuits" (350–51). In order for women to participate effectively in public, they had to reject the affective ploys they had been taught to rely upon. Reforming headmistresses and college heads worked to instill independence in their charges (352). Types of writing and topics for writing changed accordingly—from social forms to the professional, from the personal or light moral topics to serious often historical, economic, or political topics. At Kensington High School in 1873, girls were asked to write an essay on the following question: "Which does more for the promotion of industry and commerce, he who expends a given amount of wealth on his own direct personal enjoyments, or he who profitably invests the same, and why?" At Shrewsbury High, students competed every year for best essay on the British Empire. The first issue of North London Collegiate's *Our Magazine* contained essays on the Irish question (Pederson 354). Schools also formed debating and literary societies to foster the writing and speaking talents of their charges. Thus schooled, the female graduate of a public school thirsted for further academic training and showed a distinct interest in public affairs.

Thanks to the pioneering efforts of the Girls' Public Day School Trust, the education of upper-middle-class girls improved markedly in England and Wales.<sup>57</sup> Its standards were rigorous: schools under its supervision were staffed with teachers and a headmistress trained in high academic standards and teaching methodology; their curriculum was comparable to boys' public schools, although in addition to Latin, modern studies like French, German, and English (composition, grammar, and literature) were deemed important. The schools were inspected regularly. Its girls sat successfully for examinations, including the Oxford and Cambridge Local Examinations.

But not until the end of the century when two sisters, Emily Shirreff and Maria Shirreff Grey, "laid the foundation of a national education system for girls at the secondary level, a valid teacher-training pattern for that level of education, a revamped, in fact a new national system of early childhood education and the teacher-training structure to sustain it" did all

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British girls receive regular instruction in writing (Spender 454–55). Until then the language education of girls and women was spotty, varying greatly by class and family. Of course, the pattern of improvement in female education was erratic and differed within a given city, and, of course, many women and men not mentioned here contributed to those efforts. In *The Best Type of Girl: A History of Girls' Independent Schools*, Avery observes that "English was traditionally a woman's subject and was despised on that account by boys' public schools, who would not recognize as a serious discipline something that they felt was part of the heritage of any well bred gentlemen" (251). Avery maintains that "until there was an abundance of specialist teachers for other subjects, it was probably the best one taught." Instruction was given in literature, composition, and in grammar, the latter being "the girls' substitute for the Latin complexities with which their brothers wrestled." The result, she maintains, was that "girls often emerged as far more fluent on paper than boys, though the content of their essays may not have been particularly apt or informative" (Avery 251). They learned to recite literature, and they frequently listened to it being recited. Arguably, as students acquired an ear for the language, they became more able crafters of the vernacular. The institutionalized study of vernacular literature often required students to compose essays.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, higher education gradually became available to women.<sup>58</sup> At North London Collegiate in 1883, students were drilled in French, which they had to translate painstakingly. Doing so was thought to improve their command of standard English. The teaching of English language was similarly uninspired: students "had to be word-perfect in the footnotes given in their texts, these consisting of the paraphrasing of lines thought to be obscure" (Avery 247). They also parsed, analyzed clauses, memorized poetry and prose, all in the service of mind training (Avery 248).

In the nineteenth century, the gradual influx of women, first to instruction in universities, then to examinations, and finally at the end of the period to degrees, was perhaps inevitable and helped to bring political and economic recognition to women. The first women's college was Queen's, founded in 1848 thanks to the lobbying of the Governesses' Benevolent

<sup>58</sup> In 1848–49, Queen's College and Bedford College for Women were founded in London, although examinations and degrees were still denied them. In 1865, Cambridge, Edinburgh, and Durham opened their local examinations to women, and the University of London followed in 1868. It was not until 1871, however, that a house of residence was opened for women at Cambridge, and, although in 1874 the University of Edinburgh issued a certificate for women, it was not until 1887 that Victoria University, formed from the union of colleges at Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds, admitted women to degrees. The four Scottish universities followed suit in 1892 and the Federated University of Wales in 1893. Not until 1920 did Oxford grant women students full university status.

<sup>57</sup> Josephine Kamm, *Indicative Past: A Hundred Years of the Girls' Public Day School Trust* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971) 50.



Institution, which recognized the grave need for competent teachers. In situations like the Ladies' College (Bedford) followed soon after, mostly to provide teacher training. In 1858, Dorothea Beale, a graduate of Queen's College for Women, became principal of Cheltenham Ladies' College, founded several years earlier to provide middle-class women a rigorous education (but not one equal to that boys received in the public schools). Instruction in female "accomplishments" was replaced by serious training in language and science.<sup>59</sup> Other institutions followed the bold example. Beale also helped to found St. Hilda's College, Oxford, in 1893. Such institutions offered serviceable if not rigorous instruction in writing.

Another advancement in women's education came with the University Extension Lecture Movement, inspired by Anne Jemima Clough, born in Liverpool but receiving her childhood education in South Carolina before returning to her country of birth to teach, first in Ambleside, then London and Liverpool. Frustrated by the poor quality of female education, she organized what became the University Extension Lecture movement and the North of England Council for Promoting the Higher Education of Women. The circuit ensured that girls from dozens of schools enjoyed high quality lecturers (Spencer 449–50). Training in the vernacular—appreciation of the belles lettres, practice in elocution, instruction in composition—was featured.

### Salons

A consideration of women's writing instruction would be incomplete without a glance at salons.<sup>60</sup> Importing a tradition begun by the Marquise de Rambouillet in France (not unrelatedly, the birthplace of belletristic rhetoric), British city dwellers took to the salon as "a space in which talented and learned women could meet with men as intellectual equals." "By insisting on tastefulness, courtesy, and polite behavior," Rambouillet shaped "a genteel environment where aspiring authors of both sexes were encouraged to share their work, comment on each others' productions, and participate in elaborate discussions and conversational games" (Anderson and Zinsner 104). The woman orchestrating such a circle did much to nurture the literary aspirations of the intellectual and social elites who met in their salon or drawing room. One such woman in mid-eighteenth-century London was Elizabeth Montagu, who, tired of trivialities like card playing, organized a salon at her home. Such groups became known as "Bluestock-

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ings," an appellation that played off the white and black stockings that were de rigueur for Englishmen attending formal events (Anderson and Zinsner 109).<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, women's entrée to writing was often through training in arts, either through manuals in rhetoric and belles lettres or courtesy manuals, which schooled them in the necessary social forms of writing, just as it taught them to discern and appreciate the moral virtues of beautiful style. The patroness of the salon, the "salonieres," also sponsored poor women like Elizabeth Carter, whose literary talents would have otherwise gone unrecognized and unsupported. The majority of women received no such opportunities, however, and society continued to deem them intellectually inferior. What's more, as hotbeds of culture, learning, and politics, salons became suspect in nineteenth-century Britain, especially for women (Anderson and Zinsner 114). Accordingly, "bluestocking" became a derogatory epithet for learned women who violated the norms of female domesticity.<sup>62</sup>

Middle-class women (viewed as guardians of culture by scholars from Cicero to modern linguist William Labov) constituted a significant portion of the audience in the popular city lectures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. English literature was accessible to them as the classics were not. Their interest contributed to the illegitimacy of literature as an academic discipline, for as they filled lecture halls and (later) classes, women became, as Jo McMurry points out, "an implicit liability when it came to demonstrating how hard the subject was" (McMurry 13). Such forums did expand women's participation in literate culture and thus precipitated opportunities for writing.

One final note: the charitable activities of Victorian women also contributed to their literacy skills. True, many women simply dabbled in philanthropy, but for others these projects became serious work. Letters of solicitation had to be written, as did speeches, reports and records. Such activity constituted a form of professional writing that merits further study.

### CONCLUSION

Clearly, writing instruction in Great Britain varied greatly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, although this essay draws broad

<sup>61</sup>Feminist Mary Wollstonecraft observed, "[W]omen seem to take the lead in polishing the manners everywhere, that being the only way to better their condition" (*Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P. 1976) 181; qtd. in Anderson and Zinsner 110).

<sup>62</sup>In 1825, *Ladies Magazine* opined, "Magazines, journals, and reviews abound with sarcastic comments upon the blue-stockings and their productions. Intellectual acquirement, when applied to a woman, is used as a term of reproach" (Cynthia L. White, *Women's Magazines: 1693–1968* [London: Michael Joseph, 1970] 39; qtd. in Anderson and Zinsner 116).

<sup>59</sup>Dorothea Beale, *History of the Ladies College, 1853–1904* (London, 1905).

<sup>60</sup>Peter Quennell, ed., *Affairs of the Mind: The Salons in Europe and America from the 18th to the 20th Century* (Washington, DC: New Republic, 1980) provides a useful overview of the salon



generalizations, we do not mean to suggest that the period's instructional practices were limited to those discussed here; we hope that this chapter has suggested the range and diversity of writing instruction.

Some generalizations can be safely drawn, however. At most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century schools, academies, and universities, writing was taught by precept reinforced by intensive practice. Students wrote frequently in all courses and at all levels. In the grammar and high schools, in addition to exercises, students wrote fables and stories and composed verse. At the university level the students wrote essays and orations on a variety of subjects in addition to summaries of and responses to the lectures.

Precept guided intense practice in the form of examinations, exercises, and essays. Instruction in writing and speech continued side by side within the same courses. Since Oxford, Cambridge, and Trinity Universities and most grammar and public schools preserved the classical tradition until the end of the nineteenth century, and thus taught writing through the old rhetorical and grammatical methods, it is to the dissenting academies, to the Scottish universities, and to the redbrick universities that we must look to see the beginnings of the modern tradition in English studies.