Toward a Hermeneutic Model of Composition History: Robert Carlsen’s “The State of the Profession 1961-1962”

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Historical interest in composition studies has yielded a significant body of scholarship in recent years. Scholars from diverse corners—critical theorists, researchers, practitioners, and historians—all offer investigations which attempt to refigure the discipline. This work is motivated by many factors, not least of which is an internal effort by composition studies to identify itself as a professional community that regards the teaching of writing as a serious endeavor. In efforts to historicize its development within the academy, the field relies on three distinct narrative patterns to frame the state of its theory and practice: works which revitalize the discipline by preserving teaching practices and theories informed by Greco-Roman influences; accounts which focus on aspects of institutional history—handbook usage, textbook publication trends, the impact of nineteenth-century rhetorical models; and texts which authorize composition studies based on the work of empirical and theoretical researchers.

Despite the multiplicity of focus and approach, all of these narratives share a linear and teleological mode of representation. For example, the classical pattern typically links composition to a glorified heritage of ancient rhetoric, seeing composition's written discourses as translations of antiquity's oral ones. Institutional or naturalistic histories examine the discipline's artifacts and pedagogical trends, reading them as gauges of informed contemporary practices. Narratives offered by proponents of empirical and theoretical research, on the other hand, meld theory and practice, using findings from diverse methods such as quantitative experiments, ethnographic studies, and protocol analyses in an attempt to improve the future of composition. Whether they situate composition in light of past, contemporary, or future movements, these modes tend to depict history as a seamless chain of events. As authorized narratives, their positions as dominant discourses are predicated upon and sustained by their ability to exclude contradictions, forge causal links, and silence disruptive voices. As Susan Miller says of neoclassical reformulations of composition, “In almost every
account of the history of composition, incidental issues are mentioned whose thorough investigation would at least partially destabilize the arguments in which they are embedded" (43).

The result is a view of composition history which often glosses over composition's politicized and ideologically grounded influences, neutralizing their powers and, at times, omitting them entirely from received narratives. Classical renderings such as the three editions of Edward P.J. Corbett's *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, Robert Connors et al.'s *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse*, or James J. Murphy's *The Rhetorical Tradition and Modern Writing*, for example, are based on a tradition that privileges argumentation. To advance their case, such classical histories often adopt an agonistic stance themselves, pointing to the inadequacy of previous movements within composition or reinforcing the relevancy of classical rhetoric for today's students and teachers. The terms *rhetoric* and *composition* are elided, giving the impression of an undisturbed continuum of a gloried past and honorable future.

What is absent from classical narratives is a sustained engagement with the social and cultural factors that have informed composition's development and the development of writers. While some texts do acknowledge the existence of other rhetorics, these "others" are often seen as challenges to classical rhetoric's "strategy of appealing to the rationality, the reasonableness, the moral consciousness of the human animal" (Corbett viii). In his Preface to the third edition of *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, Corbett explains how recently we were exposed to an even stranger kind of rhetoric, the rhetoric of the Middle Eastern World, exerted by the people of countries such as Iran, Lebanon, and Israel. This was a rhetoric that seemed to play by none of the rules that had come down to us from a tradition of rhetoric that had been practiced by the reigning nations of the Western World.... But those are rhetorics that we still have to study and analyze and codify. (viii; emphasis added)

Here we see "the other rhetorics" as strangers, threats to the hegemonic dominance of the Western rhetorical tradition. If the Western tradition is to maintain its control, it must subdue the foreign rhetorics (and Corbett includes Asian rhetorics here, too), submitting them to the "civilizing" forces of study, analysis, and codification. Efforts to diminish the political and ideological tensions between traditional histories and other accounts only underscore the very tensions which would effectively disrupt the seeming continuity of the dominant narratives.

From a different vantage, empirical and theoretical narratives attempt to give us a selective view of the discipline based on quantitative evaluations and measurements. These works operate as historical narratives to the extent that they situate themselves within the field with respect to the scholarship of their predecessors. We value such individual work as Janet
Emig's *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, Carol Berkenkotter's "Decisions and Revisions: The Planning Strategies of a Publishing Writer," along with the collective efforts of Charles Cooper and Lee Odell's *Research on Composing*, or George Hillocks' *Research on Written Composition* as evidence of the ways in which we have come to learn and think about such integral concepts as recursive writing, revision, collaborative composing, and ethnographic inquiry. Yet, these representations of composition's development make some of the same progressive claims that characterize the classical narratives. In this case, the rationality and reasonability of science replaces Greco-Roman rhetoric as the means by which composition may be revitalized. According to Cooper and Odell, composition studies is in need of "vigorous research on written discourse and the composing process" (xi).

To its credit, empirical and theoretical research has grown both in terms of methodological diversity and influence within the composition community. But because researchers are often disposed to pursue new modes of inquiry or ask new questions about old problems, the contributions of early researchers are, at times, subsumed under the efforts of their contemporary counterparts without an extended consideration of the connections between them. Introducing *Research on Written Composition*, Richard Lloyd-Jones adopts a now-is-better stance in assuming that current research is, because of its very currency, somehow more authorized than that of its predecessors. While he praises the Hillocks text, he indicts the efficacy of *Research in Composition*—his own earlier work:

> Possibly researchers have simply become more fastidious in writing their reports, and possibly they have been more careful in designing studies. Whatever the cause, the more recent studies are persuasive simply because the researchers seem to take themselves more seriously. (xiii)

What seems overlooked here is the way in which contemporaneity (that is, "more serious," "more scientific") is employed as a timeless standard of evaluation. The result of this kind of retrospective assessment is a devaluation of the seriousness and dedication with which the first researchers undertook their projects based upon what we now know of their project designs, measurement standards, and research methodologies.

Naturalistic histories, on the other hand, do fill in many of the gaps within composition histories in their specialized examinations of various aspects of writing theory and practice. Close examination of such facets of the discipline such as James Berlin's history of American college writing instruction, Robert Connors's work on textbooks, journals, and mechanical error, and Sharon Crowley's study of current-traditional rhetoric broaden our sense of the field's complexity while acknowledging the cultural and ideological strategies which underpin them. For instance, in *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985*, Berlin argues against a reading of the history of rhetoric as a monolithic field. Rather, his task is to
demonstrate how the differences among various competing rhetorical systems are less a matter of emphasis on a particular rhetorical feature than a difference in the epistemological assumptions upon which each system is grounded (3). Still, the necessarily restrictive scope of naturalistic investigations precludes their extensive examination of composition as a whole.

My project here is to explore the possibilities of a hermeneutic model of composition history. Rather than viewing historical events as links in a chain, a hermeneutic model regards an event as a locus through which other events are continuously woven. This methodology relies, in part, on the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer in extending our notion of what might count as interpretable data to include a text, a work, a trace (Truth and Method 373-74). For a historian, a “trace” refers to a document’s intertextual character—the way that a text suggests, argues with, comments upon, or even omits other texts. A hermeneutic analysis ultimately endorses an alternative way of reading. That is, instead of reading a work for those details which would allow for easy conformation into one of the accepted paradigms, the historian recognizes the agency of the text, allowing it to suggest influences which have shaped it (Philosophical Hermeneutics 57). In this way, the historian works speculatively rather than descriptively, participating in a dialectical interplay that permits the text to give evidence to others which have been omitted, left traces, or presented contradictions to the one in question.2

According to Gadamer, the intertextuality of texts permits them to “speak” to one another and to us (Truth and Method 377-79). This is not to say that a text is self-mediated or unmediated. Rather, it is because a text has been so thoroughly mediated by interpreters, by culture, and by the numerous political and social institutions which have preserved it that a text “addresses” us in various “voices.” From a hermeneutic stance then, we extend our understanding of an intertextual network to include nontraditional documents such as events, trends, or social movements alongside more conventional forms. A hermeneutic historian takes on the task of mediating these various forms—observing their patterns, illustrating their contradictions, pointing out their disruptions, and acknowledging the inequities among them. To do this, she situates a focal text within larger social and cultural networks with a self-conscious awareness of her own prejudices with regard to the historical context she constructs.3 Rather than being regarded as a limitation, the historian’s interpretive presence within a text may be seen as a positive value, inviting multiple readings and encouraging us to view the past as, according to David E. Linge, “an inexhaustible source of possibilities of meaning” (Philosophical Hermeneutics xix).

As an example of how this model might operate, I wish to examine a text which has been omitted from the received narratives of our discipline: an inaugural address written by George Robert Carlsen, president of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), entitled “The State of the
Profession 1961-1962.” I have chosen the work because it appeared at a time when much national attention was being paid to educational reform, particularly to mathematics and the natural sciences. The document also caught my interest because of its special emphasis on composition and because its appearance during the early 1960s roughly coincides with what we often perceive to be the birth of composition studies. Rather than interpret the document as an artifact of institutional history, I wish to allow the text, in a sense, to speak for itself by permitting the address to suggest other texts which were also neglected or ones which presented contradictions to or even complete reversals of Carlsen’s findings. I want to explore what new information this kind of reading might produce and what alternative history might result, particularly when read alongside the traditional composition narratives.

Ideally, there is no point of origin in a hermeneutic model, no text which would signal the advent of others, no text which would be valorized over another. However, what follows is “The State of the Profession 1961-1962” read as the locus of a hermeneutic network in light of such “new” texts as federally funded educational reforms, the Sputnik launch, the United States Office of Education (USOE) and Project English monographs, annual convention programs of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), and NCTE annual reports. I wish to demonstrate how one might step into the stream of a hermeneutic history only to see the flow of intertextual dialectic present at any given point and to observe how events need not always relate to one another in any readily identifiable causal connection. Instead, we are encouraged to regard textual relations as discursive negotiations—negotiations which do not always offer neat conclusions or easy answers.

Though its explicit purpose is to survey the English profession during the early 1960s, a hermeneutic examination of “The State of the Profession” reveals how composition’s subordinate status within the profession provided the English community with a means to access government monies earmarked for educational reform; demonstrates the degree to which cultural attitudes about scientizing American education shaped composition research; and uncovers a complex system of conversations and negotiations among college entrance board administrations, secondary English teachers, and university instructors which changed the face of collegiate student populations and composition pedagogy.

“The State of the Profession 1961-1962”
Prior to delivering his 1961 inaugural report to the Executive Committee of NCTE, Carlsen, then incoming president, circulated approximately 232 questionnaires to the presidents and liaison officers of NCTE’s affiliate groups. While acknowledging the mounting pressures and criticism directed toward educators “from the outside,” Carlsen felt that the best way to make
effective reforms was to ask the "insiders" of the profession what they felt were the strengths and weaknesses in the field of English. Over sixty-four percent of the questionnaires were returned, reflecting a geographical cross section of thirty-nine states. Respondents were asked to address the following questions:

1. As you know English in the schools today, what would be the one thing which needs most to be added to the curriculum, or on which greater emphasis needs to be placed?
2. As you know English in the schools today, what would be the one thing which could most beneficially be dropped from the curriculum, or on which less emphasis might advantageously be placed?
3. What is the best thing we are doing in the field of English?
4. In what area of English are we least successful?
5. What would be the one thing we could do to improve the professional status of the teaching of English?
6. What recent research, discovery, or theory in the field of English teaching promises to make the greatest contribution?

The tabulated responses to the first four questions are especially relevant to the field of composition. In answer to Question One, "composition" (seventy-seven votes) outranked its nearest competitors by over half ("language" thirty-six; "reading and literature" thirty-two) while the response to Question Two seemed to indicate a dissatisfaction with or appreciable failure of grammatical methods in dealing with writing instruction ("formal grammar" fifty-six; "diagramming" twenty-seven; "drill workbooks" thirteen). Responses to Question Four, reinforce this sentiment in ranking "teaching writing" (seventy-six) far and away the area of least success ("teaching oral English" fourteen; "teaching language" eleven). Perhaps, not surprisingly, "literature" (forty-seven) and "encouraging reading for pleasure" (twenty-two) topped the list of responses to Question Three; "teaching composition" (nineteen) placed third.

The final two questions dealt with issues of improving professional status and areas of influence in contemporary English. Responses to Question Five indicate a strong preference for "stiffen[ing] certification requirements" (fifty-three) and "smaller classes" (thirty-two) as a means to upgrade the teaching community. Answers to the final question illustrate the overwhelming influence of theorists such as Francis Christensen, Jerome Bruner, and Jean Piaget whose inroads into the fields of language and learning were beginning to be redirected and applied to composition; "smaller class loads" (nine) and "programmed learning" (seven) trailed behind urgent concern for the impact of "structural linguistics" (sixty) on the teaching of English.

Based on the strength of these findings, Carlsen outlines four specific proposals. The first two reflect his primary concern for improving composition instruction. He moves initially for the establishment of a committee to
“summarize research in this field so that teachers may have an authoritative statement of present knowledge” (10); however, in order to address writing teachers’ more immediate needs, Carlsen employs a prescriptive cookbook recipe to solve the difficulties of teaching writing:

Twenty years ago the idea of a dehydrated product into which a housewife could stir water and an egg and produce a never-fail cake was just as revolutionary as this idea of “canned” procedures for teaching composition. Brazen as the whole idea sounds, it has a definite philosophical basis. A person who is led through certain kinds of concrete experiences has more chance of developing his abilities in writing, insights into organization, and elaboration of ideas than does one who is taught simply how to verbalize the attitude. (10; emphasis added)

Carlsen never identifies the philosophical bases nor the pedagogy informing verbalized (that is, abstract?) writing instruction, but his three solutions suggest the kind of solidification he feels is necessary: a compilation of composition situations or topics; an attempt to isolate the parts of the composition process; and a study of sequential composition tasks (10-13). His suggestion in Proposal II about the implementation of linguistics is similar. Linguistic information must be made available in “manageable chunks” for teachers and “broken into segments which can be set up as a sequential strand running through a sequence of grades” (14).

What seems clear is that despite Carlsen’s use of the term process, his three suggestions imply that what he favors, after all, is a product. If we follow his cookbook metaphor, teaching writing is merely a matter of collecting the right ingredients (compiling topics); measuring them proportionately (isolating the parts); and executing the directions in their proper succession (performing a sequence of tasks). The end result is a “never-fail” product: the polished essay. To accomplish this, teachers must rework their curricula accordingly, shaping writers schooled through a series of lessons which parallel their developing abilities. According to Carlsen, composition situations should take the form of “a sequential and articulated program ... that avoids overlap and yet still provides for repetition of composition principles” (11). His suggestion for a pamphlet of five hundred or even a thousand “thumbnail sketches of composition situations” (12) calls to mind a kind of composition topoi from which teachers might select appropriate subjects for writing. After all is said and done, even the teachers yield products: effective writers.

Throughout his closing report, Carlsen expresses concern over what he interprets in the questionnaire responses as “the stated or implied desire for a fairly rigid and standardized program” replete with “arbitrary standards,” “formalize[d] procedures,” and a “set outline” (17). Although he optimistically sees the field of English moving toward “the edge of discovery,” the NCTE president turns his attention to mathematics and science instructors as the model innovators prepared to lead English teachers to that brink:
They seem much more interested in process . . . than in exact knowledge; in the
development of concepts rather than in the memorization of factual information; in
encouraging the child to speculate . . . rather than using methods set up for him. (19)

Carlsen describes mathematics and the sciences as process-oriented, stu­
dent-centered endeavors—approaches to writing instruction composition
studies would take nearly another decade to formulate. Ironically, his
proposals demonstrate the very programmatic inflexibility he criticizes.

"The State of the Profession" and the National Education Agenda
Carlsen's assessment of the state of the profession offers another progressive
narrative of composition history as he directs the field of English to move
"forward toward the 'edge of discovery'" (25). Yet the assessment is not
without some introspection: "We have been so enmeshed in our own area
that we have perhaps overlooked the things happening in other areas that are
indispensable to us" (25). It is just this practice of viewing composition as a
circumscribed space that a hermeneutic reading will help us avoid. By
examining some of those "other areas"—namely, the sociopolitical and
economic climate of the time—we are able to situate composition studies
within a larger historical context. This context foregrounds the accuracy of
Carlsen's closing words that English teachers follow the example of their
math and science counterparts. For in an age when upgrading the quality of
education was a national priority, it became increasingly apparent that if
English teachers were to ride the tide of this national concern, they must
abide by the ground rules first laid out by a scientific community.

Carlsen's urgent call for rejuvenating English teaching reflects on a
small scale the growing concern at the time for educational reform on all
levels of instruction. Some scholars have pointed to the October 1957
launching of Sputnik as the event which triggered American interest in its
instructional systems; however, calls for change had been voiced since the
post-WWII era and had been articulated most strongly by institutions of
higher learning. After the war, college populations soared as returning
soldiers-turned-students took advantage of the Servicemen's Readjustment
Act of 1944 (G.I. Bill), inadvertently creating one of the nation's largest
scholarship programs and fostering a student population that was typically
older, non-traditional, and goal-oriented. In order to meet these chal­

lenes, colleges and universities began to address the need for increased
student housing facilities, larger class sizes, and equitable student/teacher
ratios. These issues had garnered enough attention to warrant the 1960
formation of an NCTE Advisory Council and had become a topic of ongoing
importance at annual CCCC sessions. In his contribution to the 1960 NCTE
Annual Report, Dr. Robert Rogers, Advisory Council member specializing
in Literary Scholarship and the Teaching of Literature, remarks on the
following concerns:
the need for more articulation between colleges and secondary schools in composition; 
. . . the problem of securing more English professors to teach freshman courses; the 
proliferation of courses at the college level and the fragmentation resulting; the effects 
of large enrollments upon increased class size and other instructional arrangements.

University and college faculty were not unaffected: new students meant 
changes in curricula and pedagogy as reflected in the following session titles 
from annual CCC programs: “Obtaining, Training, and Keeping a Compe­
tent Staff” (1949); “Let’s Face the Fact of Diversity in Our Institutions: A 
Look at Our Uncommon Problems” (1950); “The Growing Shortage of 
Composition/Communication Teachers: Some Possible Solutions (1958); 
“Maintaining Standards in Spite of Rising Enrollments” (1958); and “The 
Problem of Numbers in the Composition/Communication Course” (1959).7

Miller traces the gradual streamlining of college composition courses 
and their marginalization within departments of English from 1920-1960, 
attributing their “leveling into the generic forms” to the onset of New Critical 
literary principles and to the tendency to “increasingly identify introductory 
writing courses with the result of reading ‘important’ literature” (Textual 
Carnivals 67, 68). These factors were certainly operating. Still, if we examine 
the alterations in writing curricula in light of a larger historical context, we 
begin to recognize external social and cultural reasons for change that 
amount to more than an internal desire on the part of departments of English 
to subjugate the role of composition to the interests of literature. Rather, 
remodeling introductory writing courses may have been a response, in part, 
to a booming non-traditional student population and an effort to unify 
departmental fragmentation—problems Roger’s report and the CCCC pro­
grams suggest existed.

Here we see how a hermeneutic approach allows for such nontraditional 
texts as committee reports and convention programs to uncover and include 
factors shaping composition's development that are omitted from strictly 
classical, naturalistic, or research narratives. In addition, if we review 
Carlsen's motion for a rethinking of the way composition was taught along­
side such issues as unskilled writing instructors and oversized classes, we may 
evaluate the NCTE president’s directives less harshly. The analysis offered 
earlier reads “The State of the Profession” in a manner that reveals the 
historian's contemporary position in relation to the thirty-year old text; in 
particular, my indictments of Carlsen’s proposals about teaching composi­
tion are made in light of what we now know and believe about theories of 
writing production and the writing environment. However, introducing 
Roger’s report and the CCCC program listings works to extend the text’s 
contextual boundaries. That is, we see Carlsen’s project as a very pragmatic 
response to the problems of teacher training and classroom overcrowding, in 
that he offers both new teachers and students prescriptive curricula designed 
to facilitate their introduction to college writing.
The NDEA and Project English

Historically, the United States government has been slow to intervene in matters of educational reform, leaving such decisions to the respective state and local school boards. According to Peter Dow, numerous education bills had been introduced during the early 1950s only to fall short of enough Congressional votes to gain a presidential signature. At the same time, NEA had become more actively engaged in foregrounding the interests of its teachers; as early as 1957, the Resolutions Committee drafted a recommendation such as the one “Urg[ing] Congress and the USOE to focus no less on language and literature than on science and mathematics” (Hook, A Long Way 180). These resolutions were then distributed to Congressional, federal, and state officials; school administrators; educational groups; and occasionally, the media.

In September 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower acquiesced to mounting pressures from both public and private appeals, signing the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). In the coming years, the NDEA would allot more than one billion dollars for renovation in all areas of elementary and secondary curricula including new school construction, expansion of foreign language instruction, experimentation with audiovisual materials, and increased availability of fellowships and loans (Dow 25). The degree to which education reform seemed inextricably bound to national preservation is evident in the title of the bill and is echoed as well in the sentiments of Neil H. McElroy (Secretary of Defense 1957-61), who declared at a 1955 White House Conference on Education, “Education has become as much a part of our system of defense as the Army, the Navy or the Air Force” (qtd. in Dow 23). What followed was a national movement for educational reform that seemed indifferent at best to the plight of English language studies, for federal agencies and corporate foundations alike began to channel monies into math and science programs at an unprecedented rate.

The field of English was initially omitted from the NDEA (not to be added until 1964). Yet if we interpret the initial exclusion of English from government funding as a wholesale rejection on the part of “other areas” to aid composition studies, we read too narrowly. There is a way in which Carlsen’s call for help was indeed answered, and answered resoundingly, by all levels of English and education professionals. For its part, NCTE took steps to scientize the discipline by looking to its own coffers for funding: the Research Foundation of the National Council of Teachers of English was established in 1960 with an initial endowment of $50,000 amassed from both Council monies and a portion of its membership dues (Hook, A Long Way 168-69). In response to English’s exclusion, a cooperative campaign was initiated on the part of the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Council on Education, the College English Association, the Modern Language Association, and NCTE to demonstrate the necessity of
extending federal monies for English studies. The product of this joint venture, *The National Interest and the Teaching of English*, summarized the state of the teaching of English on all levels, outlining discrete areas targeted for improvement. Of particular note is item one: “Projects . . . Focusing . . . upon the Study of Language, Literature, and Composition” (*National Interest* 1; emphasis added).

Two points are significant here. Notably, this is one of the first nationally publicized attempts to recognize composition as a concentration distinct from literature that warranted specialized attention. If we examine *The National Interest* from a hermeneutic standpoint, we become aware of the way that a text's place in history is never totally determined because of the way that it concurrently affects many audiences. *The National Interest* was used overtly as a political bargaining tool by members of the profession to garner government support; just as clearly, it influenced members of the field, providing a vehicle for professional unity; finally, it had an unexpected positive impact upon the general populace. Carlsen's address makes this last point quite evident. According to the NCTE president, one of the unforeseen benefits of *The National Interest* was a deepening respect for the field of English as a result of members' "willingness to perform the professional responsibility of self-criticism and self-evaluation" ("State of the Profession" 1).

The publication of *The National Interest* and supportive NCTE Congressional testimony failed to bring about the extension of the NDEA to include English in 1961. Its work was not entirely in vain, however. In September, Congress authorized limited expenditures for the improvement of English instruction to be administered by the Cooperative Branch of the Office of Education. Public Law 531 or Project English was instituted. Its budget during the first fiscal year was approximately $400,000 with an allocated increase to $900,000 the following year (Hook, "Project English" 33). Representatives from all levels of instruction met the following February to discuss directives and made the following four recommendations for the program: (1) to institute curriculum study centers and research projects; (2) to improve existing teacher-preparation programs; (3) to increase the knowledge and competence of teachers currently in the classroom; and (4) to create a means for distributing knowledge about the teaching and learning of English (33-34). Federal funds along with various institutional contributions were awarded to those universities and colleges which agreed to serve as sites for the curriculum study centers.

While Project English was a victory on behalf of the profession in establishing the primacy of English education, it was far from an ideal solution to Carlsen's appeal for more research in composition. To read Project English hermeneutically, we must situate it with respect to the attitudes toward research techniques and practices of the period. In doing so, we see the way in which composition studies began to rely on empirical and
quantitative methodologies not only as a means to access information about the writing process but also as a way to access federal monies. These constraints not only influenced the nature and form of composition knowledge during this time but also directly affected the status of composition. In “The State of the Profession,” literature held the position of security and dominance (that is, teaching literature received the highest ranking under the category of items the discipline did best) and composition the subordinate position. Yet, despite its underdog status, it is composition, not literature, which lends itself to the scientification required to gain monetary support. According to Erwin R. Steinberg, Second Coordinator of Project English from 1963-64, literature proposals, especially in the early years of Project English, were considered suspect (“Research” 50).

Proposals submitted for consideration were initially reviewed by an English subpanel, but final consideration, Steinberg reports, was assessed by “the Research Advisory Council, made up of people generally characterized rather indiscriminately as ‘educational psychologists’” (50). No representative from the field of English sat on this Council. The curtailment of English was further secured by limits placed on the nature and form of its projects. According to Steinberg, “Evaluation, measurement, and research design were the bywords,” imposing empirical criteria on a profession which felt ill at ease in developing quantitative, statistical investigations and one which feared that the social scientists might very well appropriate Project English funds for their own research programs given their “scientific” advantage (50).

This procedure was later reorganized when the Cooperative Research Branch of the USOE was replaced by a newly established Bureau of Research and Development. The Bureau created five programs to which an incoming proposal might be directed: Basic Research, Curriculum Improvement, Developmental Activities, Small Contract, and Research and Development. Proposals were then reviewed by individuals from the host university and channeled into one of the five subcategories for review by another panel reconstituted to include at least one member from English. Most English proposals fell under the auspices of Basic Research, whose panel in 1963-64 consisted of three members of MLA and NCTE, a reading specialist, a psychologist, and an active member of the National Council (51).

The construction of a scientized research base for composition studies demonstrates how power relations within composition studies and in external cultural movements interact. From a hermeneutic standpoint, we can also use this illustration to see how composition was mediated by social and political systems. In looking at the way in which composition was employed as a means to access governmental support, we also need to consider the constraining influences posed by more powerful external institutions. While it gained economic subsidies, English studies, and composition in particular, lost a representative voice in deciding what kinds of projects would most
enhance its development. In its later years, the USOE accorded English more control, placing more English professionals on the subpanels and permitting them more say in the selection and direction of fundable projects. Yet the onus of making the projects scientific never completely lost its hold. Generally speaking, most projects which anticipated four or five years for completion and included a separately published monograph of their findings bore the unmistakable empirical stamp of chi-squares, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients. What remains to be uncovered during this period are instances of alternative composition research methods, such as ethnography or protocol analysis.

The discussion above underscores the degree to which composition studies was characterized by the scientific quality of its research. At the same time, the impact of the large number and variety of studies which were conducted also makes us aware of the quantity of projects conducted. That is, when we situate Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer's small work *Research in Written Composition* within the intertextual network of texts also produced within the same time frame, we see how a hermeneutic model provides us with a means to revalue canonical texts.

Supported by the Cooperative Research Program of the USOE and compiled under the supervision of the NCTE ad hoc committee *The State of Knowledge About Composition*, *Research in Written Composition* continues to be regarded as one of the discipline's bench mark documents. An examination of the text, however, reveals that it provides a detailed survey of only five studies (scaled down from an original 485) the authors believe represent the “most soundly based of all those studies available” (55). During a time when national funding and research programs were dedicated to the improvement of English in American schools, two of the studies reflect work conducted outside our educational system. *Research in Written Composition* does provide a sizeable research bibliography. Still, the wealth of resources relegated to the text's final section undercuts the authors' rationale for including one study conducted by a member of NCTE's ad hoc committee and another completed at the home institution of the volume's writers. Despite anticipated charges of favoritism, the two studies were retained, with the consensus of the writers and the ad hoc committee, based on their “intrinsic merits and interest” (56).

When we consider the Braddock et al. text against the body of Project English studies, we can contextualize *Research in Written Composition* along with other similarly conceived traditional narratives, reading them not only for the knowledge they preserve but also with an awareness of the amount of scholarship that has been omitted, marginalized to bibliographies and appendices, or published as individual monographs. In addition, we interpret with a greater sense the political structures influencing composition history—powers that checked the production and distribution of knowledge from outside and from within the discipline.
Secondary School Teachers and the CEEB: Old Liaisons or New Allies?

As a branch of Project English, the work of the Curriculum Study Centers demonstrates an effort on the part of the English profession to conduct internal inquiries that explore the discipline's sense of purpose and pedagogical practices. Taken in this way, they may be viewed as a response to Carlsen's call for further composition research. The findings of several of the curriculum centers bear mention because of their attention to written composition. By disclosing their results alongside "The State of the Profession," we can observe how traces of texts may be hermeneutically interwoven. The intertextuality suggested here reflects the nature and degree to which Carlsen's directives and the voices represented in the early survey played themselves out, especially in their explication of the process theory of written composition. Placing these documents within composition history, we note the formation of a composition narrative that is less a product of dominant classical influences (although there are traces present) or the result of any one empirical study. Rather, this new narrative is an articulation that arises from the confluence and conflicted energies of a group long disassociated from college English instructors and curricula: secondary school teachers and writers.

All programs funded under Project English were required to design a sequential curriculum for a specified grade level and pedagogical emphasis. For example, Michael Shugrue explains that the work at Indiana University, under the direction of Edward B. Jenkinson, sought to discover "how those three components of English [language, literature, and composition] 'act, interact, change, and grow'...and to identify their structures—the underlying concepts" ("New Materials" 19). In the case of their focus on composition for junior high students, those underlying structures were decidedly classical ones. While the IU Center accepted the premise of writing as a process, their rendering of it assumed that the classical steps of inventio and dispositio were not only basic to the act of writing but the same for all students (19). Six structured theme assignments formed the basis of the composition units; the writing assignments of the literature and language segments integrated the same rhetorical tenets into an inductively organized program. The only difference throughout the grades was the amount of emphasis given an individual classical stage.

Some curriculum centers such as those at Northern Illinois University, the University of Oregon, and Ohio State University were funded to study the application of various linguistic and psycholinguistic language theories to writing. Northern Illinois explored the relevance of competing grammatical theories to the teaching of composition only to move to points of intersection they saw between oral discourse and written composition. The Oregon program, under the guidance of Albert R. Kitzhaber, worked on a curriculum for grades 7-12 that combined the triad of literature, composition, and language with components of transformational grammar. Ohio State inte-
grated its concern for generative grammar and psycholinguistic theory in hopes of identifying "a set of operations that characterize the composing process" (29).

Wallace W. Douglas directed the program at Northwestern University. This group believed that the teaching of writing "must be developed from what is known or discoverable about that process" (27). Their study reveals a turn to the act of writing itself as they note the limitations of the classical mode and a dawning recognition of the importance of prewriting:

It should not be forgotten that such terms as invention, disposition, and word-choice were originally applied to parts of the process of constructing speeches; only later was their significance transferred to the abstract qualities of the products of that process. Young people... need... to be taught how to do what writers do as they develop their writings from an original idea for a piece to the completed and complete whole. (28)

The programs conducted at the University of California at Los Angeles, Ohio State, Northern Illinois and Oregon Curriculum Centers reveal the way in which linguistic theory informed composition research, corroborating the questionnaire's findings that structural linguistics promised to make notable contributions to English. Basic to all the projects was an approach toward writing based on a linear, sequential framework. Here we see traces of Carlsen's suggestion to "isolate the parts of the composing process" as well as the influence of Project English's research design (12). As the various programs unfolded their research methodology, we can identify at least three distinct interpretations of the stages of composing: approaches that defined writing in classical terms with special attention to the stages of invention and disposition; studies that relied on structural and psycholinguistics; and programs that sequenced the writing process by making a particular stage the focus of a given grade level.

The Northwestern and Indiana study focused upon composition as a subject of study and gave less consideration to the writers themselves, their cognitive abilities, or their writing environments. In this sense, these studies are typical of most of the composition projects. Still, these studies contain the strands of the "revolutionary" composition research of the 1970s and 1980s. Our understanding of writing as process has changed; we now regard it as a more recursive, less linear activity. Nonetheless, Northwestern's emphasis on prewriting presages the work of future researchers—fluences Janet Emig would follow in her cases studies of individual writers (1969); strands Nancy Sommers would pursue in her work on writers' revision strategies (1978); and themes Linda Flower and John Hayes would elaborate in proposing their cognitive model of the writing process (1981). A hermeneutic reading allows us to recognize the long history of research in composition—a richer, more complex history than presented in some canonical works.

One of the successes of Project English programs was its effort to revitalize composition within elementary and secondary English curricula;
the emphasis on college composition was appreciably less. The inequity between the two research areas may be indicative of a much deeper division that exists between elementary/secondary and college teachers regarding their perceptions of themselves as educators and of English itself. For the former, English is regarded as a subject—a general component within a language arts program; for the latter, English is a discipline, taught by specially trained members of its community. This disjunction places secondary teachers at a decided disadvantage by forcing them to teach a "transitional" English. As quasi-members of the discipline, they must teach English as a subject within the secondary curriculum (without the full rank and privileges accorded their university colleagues) but with the realization that they must prepare students for the disciplinary demands of collegiate reading and writing. This subtle distinction is one the "The State of the Profession" omits entirely in its wholesale endorsement of a "never-fail" recipe for composition instruction for all academic levels. If we note the way in which the writing research during the period was framed—with the triad of literature, language, and composition—we see how Carlsen's directives are more translatable to elementary language arts and secondary school curricula. Reading "The State of the Profession" against the results of the Project English programs, we see how college composition resisted the compartmentalization that Carlsen advocated.

One attempt to strengthen the connection between high school and college English instructors was the 1962 Summer Institutes Program sponsored by the Commission on English of the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB). The primary focus of the summer institutes was to improve secondary English teachers' instructional skills, particularly teachers of college-bound students. In addition, the summer meetings offered some pedagogical clarification for the ambiguous character of the two groups' relationship. John Gerber, an independent evaluator appointed by the Office of Education to assess the success of the CEEB institutes, observes the added pressures felt in many university departments to resolve the "English as subject/English as discipline" dichotomy:

A new appraisal of our proper professional functions has been quietly taking place on one campus after another. Even now it is no exaggeration to say, I believe, that a Department of English may no longer claim to be of the top rank unless it includes among its programs one or more designed to aid the high-school English teacher, both the tenderfoot and the old-timer. (9)

This movement placed college teachers in the role of theory-and-methods instructors as the class/workshop format of the CEEB program suggests. The liaison also raises questions as to the degree to which the theory and design of composition instruction was negotiated between the two levels of educators. For example, to what extent were college English teachers adapting or employing composition theory in their efforts to address the needs of the high school teachers of writing? In what ways were
college instructors in their influence on the participants, the new curricula produced, and the subsequent redesign of high school courses participating in the construction of a certain type of college writer? What vested interest did the CEEB have in underwriting this venture? Or in the cultivation of promising incoming first-year students? As Gerber notes in his report, one expressed goal of the Commission was to court sufficient interest on the part of the federal government in the success and necessity of the institutes so that it would underwrite future programs (12). The curriculums tested and published by Project English were certainly no less informed by the cultural and political assumptions of both the researchers and the students with whom they worked. Still, the existence of a program such as the one the CEEB established for the purpose of training the "best and the brightest" teachers and their future students, raises the question by the nature of its constitution the ethics of creating an educational agenda that restricts the beneficiaries to a select few.

This is not to say that the institutes did not have value or that they were ill-conceived. The original Institute blueprint began with twenty participating universities each of which hoped to attract a maximum of forty-five "influential" teachers. The guidelines of the Institute staff called for a director, three course instructors (one in each area of literature, language and composition), a workshop supervisor, and a follow-up instructor who would make on-campus visits to the respective participants' classrooms during the regular school year. A blueprint syllabus was created at a planning session in 1961 under the direction of Floyd Rinker and associates of the Commission on English of the CEEB. Helen C. White (literature), W. Nelson Francis (language), and Albert R. Kitzhaber (composition) chaired the major sections.

According to Gerber, interviews conducted with sixty-four of the program participants indicated that the course in composition had proved to be the most useful in terms of "practical helpfulness" (25). As it turned out, two syllabi were actually used for the composition section: one syllabus "was essentially subjective and experiential, stressing the role of the writer; the second was basically diagnostic, stressing the art of writing" (20). The separate syllabi produced a mixture of positive developments. Teachers who had worked with the first syllabus reported that they had experimented with classroom conferences; instructors working under the second format tried class critiques of written work. Both groups revealed that, since the summer institutes, they had begun reading their students' work with more compassion, placed more emphasis on marginal comments than numerical grades, and were more concerned with the overall effectiveness of an essay than with mechanical lapses (20). The participants' evaluative comments suggest the success of the CEEB program in introducing its teachers to new ways of thinking about the writing process, the significance of peer group evaluation, and the value of content over grammatical form.
If we attend only to what the summer institutes accomplished, we receive but a partial history. A hermeneutic approach to this text invites us to ask how this history was constituted and to consider the summer workshops as a more pedagogically-directed response to Carlsen's call for improving composition instruction. Furthermore, we begin to see how the involvement of the CEEB and the creation of summer sessions provided an opportunity for dialogue between secondary teachers of English and collegiate instructors—two groups whose negotiations and conversations undoubtedly changed the form and content of composition instruction within both writing communities. We also recognize the cultural and socioeconomic influences mediating “The State of the Profession.” We see the ways in which composition pedagogy often separated the writer from the act of composing and still privileged the reading of literature as the means to teach good writing. Finally, we detect an ideological bias among members of the discipline and their supporters to preserve the cultural, educational, and hegemonic dominance of a selected group of practitioners, students, and researchers.

**Conclusion**

While no narrative of our discipline is without its limitations, a hermeneutic model of composition history makes a space for classical, naturalistic, and cultural influences by demonstrating how they function concurrently through a text. I have suggested that a given document, in this case, “The State of the Profession,” always already reflects the interpretive presence of these forces. Moreover, in making apparent my own interpretive intervention into the text, I wished to point up how any historical narrative is also necessarily framed in these terms.

By applying a hermeneutic model of interpretation to “The State of the Profession,” we see how marginalized texts, contradictory findings, and open disagreements count. They count as part of a history that would acknowledge changing university student populations, the tenor of federally funded research projects, the interrelationship of high school and college English curriculums and other social forces as factors which had and continue to have an undeniable impact upon our discipline. Moreover, to examine a work such as “The State of the Profession” with regard for the many texts which precede, inform, and follow it, allows us to renegotiate the worth of those we venerate as canonical (such as classical, naturalistic or empirical narratives). We can see in the CCCC programs, the USOE evaluations, the CEEB Summer Institutes, and NCTE annual reports a profession engaged in conversation about what it means to write. The multivocality of a hermeneutic model of composition history, then, prods us to ask questions, to engage the ambiguities, and to listen to the marginalized and silenced texts. In doing so, we find not only a way to explore the contextual richness of composition studies but also a means to participate in a dialectic that is history in the making.20
Notes

1 Two critics also recognize these narrative distinctions. Stephen North identifies what he terms first and second generation historians of composition. The former are distinguished by their interest in pedagogical history as it is traced through the classical tradition; the latter group concentrates on the discipline's institutional heritage, treating historical materials as signposts affecting writing instruction (66-68). More recently, Susan Miller also discusses the presence of "neoclassical continuity" in traditional histories of the field as well as the work of "naturalistic historians" (e.g. Robert Connors, Sharon Crowley, Donald Stewart, William B. Woods) (45). Connors himself recognizes the political implications of composition historians' work, stating that they "have set themselves a propagandistic . . . as well as an informative agenda . . . as reformers as well as scholars" ("Historical Inquiry in Composition" 18). To these groups I would add a third, the theoretical and empirical researchers, whose investigative narratives continue to add to our historical canon through their qualitative and quantitative investigations of writing and its contexts.

2 It is important to distinguish here between the use of "dialectic" in the Platonic/classical sense and Hegel's application of the term. For Plato, a dialectic construction is often employed as a heuristic, instrumental in discovering *topoi* or underlying assumptions for an argument. But in terms of a negotiation between two parties, the classical dialectic is never equitable; there is always a privileged speaker. In Plato's *Phaedrus* or *Gorgias*, for example, Socrates's discourse dominates the exchange; the secondary speakers serve as "yes" men unable to introduce new information into the dialogue. In contrast, Gadamer relies upon Hegel's definition of the dialectic exchange as "permanently tensive . . . a bringing to presence amid absence" (Crusius 36; *Truth and Method* 362-69). Gadamer replaces Hegelian metaphysics (i.e. the belief in an Absolute Spirit or truth revealed in time), with the belief that "truth is always . . . an opposition of revealment and concealment. The two belong necessarily together" (Philosophical Hermeneutics 226).

3 Gadamer attempts to rehabilitate our notion of "prejudgments" or prejudice, arguing in *Truth and Method* for its productive power (269-71, 277-80). He contends that a historian never escapes or works outside of the presuppositions that actually guide practice. According to Gadamer, while prejudgments do situate us, reminding us of our place in history, they nevertheless make understanding possible since they are "simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us" (Philosophical Hermeneutics 9).

4 No responses were received from the following states: Alaska, Arizona, Idaho, Kentucky, Maine, Mississippi, Nevada, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, and Wyoming. California and New York, respectively, submitted the greatest number of replies.

5 Jean Piaget published two significant works during the 1950s: *The Construction of Reality in the Child* (1954) and *The Language and the Thought of a Child* (1955). Jerome Bruner, who also wrote extensively on the cognitive development of children, published *Process of Education* in 1961 (a work which often served as catalyst behind many of the curriculum reforms of the period), and *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand* followed shortly after (1962). Lev Vygotsky's *Thought and Language* appeared in the same year while the influence of Francis Christensen's study of linguistics and its relevance to writing is evidenced by such work as "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence" *CCC* 14 (1963): 155-61.

6 For further references, see Olson 109.

7 In 1953, the United States Office of Education estimated the national shortage of teachers at 345,000 (Hook, *A Long Way* 161).

8 Despite the support of President Truman and prior passage in the Senate, a major education bill failed in the House Education and Labor Committee in 1950. Committee Chair, John Lesinski, noted that although most committee members supported federal aid, "no acceptable bill preventing federal domination of local schools can be drawn" ("Federal Aid Impasse" 486).

9 While Truman was not opposed to Federal support for educational reform, he nonetheless clearly placed the burden of proof upon the education reformists: "The task before the
Committee on Education and Labor is to consider the need for Federal assistance to the schools, and the ways of meeting it, and then to devise a program which will... prevent all Federal officers... from exercising a control over matters which, we are all agreed, should be left to the States." ("Federal Impasse" 487). This is a marked contrast to the supportive and active position President Kennedy would express only a decade later in his message to Congress on 6 February 1962. "Congress has long recognized the responsibility of the Nation as a whole—that additional resources, meaningful encouragement, and vigorous leadership must be added to the total effort by the Federal Government. . . . For education in this country is the right—the necessity—and the responsibility of all. Its advancement is . . . dependent on the greater financial resources available at the national level" (qtd. in Plynt 31).

The National Science Foundation (NSF) was instituted in 1950 by an act of Congress to oversee research and training in mathematical and scientific areas. The NFS gradually increased its range of financial support throughout the 1950s to include the Physical Science Study Committee (1956), the School Mathematics Study Group (1958), the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (1958), and the Chemical Education Materials Study (1958-60). By the 1960s, the NSF had joined with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) to support several new subsidiary programs and also expanded its curricular interests to include the social sciences (Dow 25-27).

NCTE's attempt to authorize itself as a funding resource and to cultivate among its membership a sense of acceptable research practices is demonstrated by the fact that although funds were made available as early as 1960, the NCTE Research Foundation approved no proposals and dispersed no monies until 1963. This move was not for lack of applications; rather, NCTE was initially disappointed with the poor quality of the first proposals because they lacked the very requirements valued by a scientific community: well-structured proposals, an identifiable means of measurement, a realistic time table for project completion (NCTE 1964 Annual Report A-17; See also NCTE annual reports for 1961, 1962 and 1963). Hook's translation of this information emphasizes pedagogical concerns. He observes, "The directors of the Research Foundation . . . were necessarily very cautious in allocating funds, and although they occasionally showed an interest in 'pure' research, they were more likely to approve proposals that promised a rather quick classroom pay-off" (A Long Way 213).

When Congress conducted hearings to consider extending the NDEA to include English, National Interest was reprinted in full in Congressional records as testimony (Hook, "Project English" 33). Over 10,000 copies were sold while free copies were sent to members of Congress, USOE officials, state education departments, and key media figures (Hook, A Long Way 195).

The following sampling reflects the kinds of projects typically produced during the period: "The Correlation of Awareness of Structural Relationships in English and Ability in Written Composition" (Mount Olive College 1963), "The Effect of Practice and Evaluation in Improvement in Written Composition" (Stetson University 1964), and "Effects of Frequency of Writing and Intensity of Teacher Evaluation Upon High Schools Students' Performance in Written Composition" (Florida State University 1963).

In his report as first Coordinator for Project English, J.N. Hook notes that during the first year of the program, thirty research studies had begun ("Project English" 34). When the NDEA broadened it base in 1964 to include English, it assumed much of the financial responsibility for future English research programs, curriculum development centers, and summer teacher-training institutes. In his summary evaluation of English programs underwritten by the USOE, Michael Shugrue states that by the summer of 1967, Title XI of the NDEA had supported ninety-six institutes in English ("Conclusion" 1). Hook expands this figure, estimating that during 1964-68 alone eighteen thousand elementary and secondary teachers attended 440 NDEA Institutes (A Long Way 197).

In a report as chairman of the Committee on the State of Knowledge About Composition, Braddock announced that the committee had been awarded a grant in the amount of $13,345.00 from the USOE. They also received a supplemental allocation of $4,397.00 from the University of Iowa to finance the completion of the project (NCTE 1962 Annual Report C-5).

The Harris Study, "An Experimental Inquiry into the Functions and Value of Formal Grammar in the Teaching of English, with Special Reference to the Teaching of Correct Written
English to Children Aged Twelve to Fourteen” was conducted in five London schools; the Buxton Study, “An Experiment to Test the Effects of Writing Frequency and Guided Practice upon Students’ Skill in Written Expression,” was carried out at the University of Alberta during the 1956-57 academic year. Research by Dora V. Smith, a member of the Committee on the State of Knowledge About Composition, concentrated on “Class Size in High School English: Methods and Results” while the Becker et al. project, “Communication Skills: An Experiment in Instructional Methods” was completed at the University of Iowa.

In his report as Coordinator, Steinberg notes this imbalance, pointing out that in the twelve curriculum centers operating in 1963, only three projects were concerned with the teaching of English in college. Even the two centers which proposed examining college writing (the University of Nebraska and Northwestern University) eventually narrowed the scope of their projects, excluding college composition entirely from their final reports. The University of Nebraska set about designing composition curricula for grades K-13 but revised it for K-12; even Northwestern University which was concerned with “the sickest subject in American academic life, English composition” (72) admitted the over-ambitiousness of hoping to design a sequential writing program for 7th grade through sophomore year in college and so restricted itself to composition work in junior high school.

For further discussion on the history of elementary, secondary and university educational systems, see Cuban.

Indeed, the relationship between the two groups—a tentative rapprochement which had long been evidenced in CCCC programs—increased during this period as the following session titles indicate: “Integrating High School and College Work” (1949); “As Others See Us: A Mutual Appraisal of the College Freshman and High School English Courses” (1958); “Composition/Communication Programs for the Twelfth Grade College Preparatory Student” (1959); “High School and College Teaching—A Look at Each Side” (1959); “Common Problems in the Teaching of High School and College English” (1960); “Bridging the Gap Between Secondary School and College: The Published Statement of College Requirements” (1961).

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