While I did not undertake the assignment of designing a syllabus for Rhetorical History II for our final project, I have thought about the scholars I might include if I were to teach such a course. From my research and reflections, I would include extensive readings from Alexander Bain, Gertrude Buck, and Virginia Woolf. This response will offer an argument as to why it is important to understand their work for two reasons: 1) all three of these scholars utilized psychological principles in their discussion of invention, which have universal relevance today; and 2) their work has implications for critical pedagogy.

Bain was described by Abey as having been “…the first man to devote his life to the study of psychology” (211). His approach to invention was that it stemmed from “…the indirect and gradual outcome of all the collective influences at work in the individual” (Bain qtd. in Aley 215). This approach contributes to Bain’s ideas with respect to invention in that Bain believed “it was a natural function of the mind…to generate” (Bizzell & Herzberg 1142) rhetorical devices. In his textbook, *English Composition and Rhetoric*, he defined three powers of the intellect as Discrimination, Similarity, and Retentiveness, and he discussed how these powers contributed to natural generation of rhetorical figures, such as antithesis, contrast, similarity, and metaphor. For example, he cited the metaphor as having stemmed from the mental process of “when like objects come under our notice,” which leads to the writer becoming “impressed by the circumstance, as when we see the resemblance of a child to its parent” (1147). In this respect, invention occurred naturally, through cognitive processes.

Such work has contemporary implications for the reasons described in the introductory paragraph. Bain’s contention that the use of rhetorical figures was a natural function of the mind shares strong similarities with the arguments in Linda Flower and John R. Hayes’s landmark article, “A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing.” In this article, the authors made the claim that “the process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing” (274), a claim they positioned in contrast to commonly held notions of a linear process model, which consisted of “Pre-Write/Write/Re-Write” (275). Their model is a clear contemporary implication of how Bain related mental processes to the use of rhetorical devices, as delineated in the example involving the metaphor, which we can understand as a “set of distinctive thinking processes” if we look at Bain’s chain of events that lead to the metaphor, as described on page one. Such generation of rhetorical devices is a key component of invention in that it is part of the thinking process that takes place during composing; I find it is certainly a part of the processes of my students. On a pedagogical level, it is important to help them recognize the benefits such use can have for their writing.

While there may not be an explicit connection between the work of Bain and the use of critical pedagogy, an educator could apply his work in use of this practice. Bain describes “three principal ends of rhetoric” as “influencing the will, understanding, or feelings” (1146). Ira Shor defines critical pedagogy as “habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning” (129). The advocacy-based philosophy that drives our FYC program is a perfect example of how educators use Bain’s philosophies to employ critical pedagogy; students complete Documentaries and Online Opinion Pieces, which require them to advocate the implementation of policy changes. This connects to Bain’s definition of “persuasion” as a “means of influencing the will” (19), which is a central tenet of advocacy as we teach it with respect to the influence of policy change through the use of ethos, pathos, and logos. In advocating policy change, students must question policies, and in doing so, they often go “beyond the surface meaning” of language that justifies the policies. In undertaking this process, students are adopting new habits involving deeper thought for the purpose of “influencing the will” of their audience, which is part of the invention process.

We can argue that Bain’s stance on the use of rhetorical figures had a direct influence on Gertrude Buck, even if there is no known scholarship that explicitly states the connection. Her dissertation, *The Metaphor: A Study in the Psychology of Rhetoric*, delves deeper into the discussion of the psychology behind the use of metaphors, which is based on a three-step process she delineated in her Master’s Thesis, *Figures of Rhetoric: A Psychological Study*. The process consisted of: 1) Association, which she defines as “…the excitation of one cerebral tract from another along a sub-conscious line of connection between them;” 2) Discrimination, which she characterizes as when “…outgoing impulses from the second tract encounter resistance in the paths which make no connection with the first tract;” and 3) Unification, when “…excitation of the second tract finds the easiest outlet along the subconscious line of connection between the two related tracts” (Buck, *Figures* 5). Through this process, the writer finds an association between the similarities of two entities, discriminates according to the differences of the entities, and expresses their similarities in a way that is designed to appeal to an audience. For example, Buck delineates how a simile, such as “her cheeks are like roses,” arises in the mind of a writer (Buck, “Figures” 6). In the “association” stage, the writer will connect the similarities of red cheeks and roses. In the “discrimination” stage, the writer will differentiate between the two objects, and in the “unification” stage, the writer finds the phrasing that appeals to the intended audience. Buck uses this process to study how the writer arrives at various rhetorical figures, which allows us to study how the mind negotiates the process of invention.

JoAnn Campbell describes Buck’s work on metaphors as having critical implications on her historical context. According to Campbell, Buck problematized that “…models of learning are too mechanical…and students are frequently alienated from their studies and particularly their writing” (ix). In the 1890s, “mechanical correctness” had become the primary interest of composition instructors (Kitzhaber 179), and Buck was the only scholar to examine “…the nature and function of figurative language” during this time (Kitzhaber 180). It can be inferred that by rebelling against this interest during her graduate school years, Buck was harnessing a rebellious method of scholarship that would characterize her as a feminist in her later work. Campbell confirms this inference by framing Buck’s dissertation as having “used the new subject of psychology to address what might be called feminist concerns: what happens to the person in a theory of metaphor and the praxis that grows out of that theory” (xi). If we examine Buck’s discussion of the plain statement in her doctoral dissertation, which she defined as “…having the reader arrive by his own preferred route…” (“Metaphor,” 52), we can see that such a device allows the reader to take an active role in making meaning as opposed to the writer making meaning for the reader. From a feminist perspective, this is important in that it relates to Buck’s “feminist concerns…in that she wanted her women students to learn to speak and write effectively” by reexamining and revising their social roles, which had the potential to change how women read texts that may have shaped them according to patriarchal ideologies (xi). They could now make their own meanings, which would contribute to their inventive processes when they wrote about such texts.

On a contemporary pedagogical scale, this discussion helps us to employ student-centered pedagogy by teaching our students to arrive at their own interpretations of texts, which can help them with their inventive processes as they write about them. From there, we can begin to employ Shor’s definition of critical pedagogy in that we can teach students to look “beneath surface meaning” of texts for the purposes of questioning those texts, which can also inform how they undertake invention when they write about what they read.

The rebellion delineated by Campbell’s framing of Buck can be said to have an influence on the work of Virginia Woolf. According to Bizzell & Herzberg’s introduction of her life, “she was among the first to link women’s literary creativity with their education and economic position” (1250). In “Professions for Women,” she mentions a figure she calls “the Angel of the House” (1254) she has devised in her mind. As she is attempting to review a novel written by a male, the “Angel of the House” says “my dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man…never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own” (1254). She states that a common experience of women writers is to be “impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex” (1255), and Woolf’s implication is that gender roles have an influence on the cognitive and affective invention processes of women writers, hence her imagining of the “Angel of the House” figure.

It is important to know about Woolf in our field for the reasons that: 1) the cognitive and affective processes of writers are a universal issue that more contemporary scholars, such as Susan McLeod, Alice Brand, and Julie Lindquist have addressed in more recent scholarship; and 2) the issue of emphasizing the strengths of female writers is important for the body of knowledge with regard to how we can help students examine gender constructions, which is an essential element of critical pedagogy.

We can make the inference that the “angel” Woolf mentions represents her negative perceptions of how her readers might react to her work. On a contemporary scale, her statement that “had I not killed her she would have killed me” relates to two contemporary epistemologies. Looking at her work from the standpoint of an expressivist epistemology relates to Peter Elbow’s advice to “ignore…audience altogether during the early stages of writing” (52), which is a central tenet of expressivism. Reference to her method of “killing the Angel” can help student writers who are blocked, for any reason, overcome it by helping them to create a metaphor that could help them to overcome such blocks.

On a social level, Woolf’s ignoring of her perceived audience, as signified by the “Angel,” can be seen as “transgression,” the definition of which Alastair Pennycook draws from bell hooks when he says that “to ‘transgress’ is to oppose, to push against and to traverse the oppressive boundaries of race, gender, and class” (40). By ignoring this “Angel,” it can be argued that Woolf is traversing “oppressive gender boundaries” by ignoring a voice that tells her she is not entitled to a “mind of her own” due to her gender. Such an argument has implications for feminist scholarship in that it delineates the empowerment of female writers in their ability to facilitate inventive processes, which is discussed by contemporary feminist scholars like bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldúa. It also has implications for critical pedagogy in that it shows how Woolf looks beneath surface meanings of how her gender has been constructed, which can serve as a model for how students can question similar meanings about how they are constructed by the various institutions to which they belong. Ultimately, this questioning can inform how they undertake the process of invention, as it can shape how they approach constructing how their writing has been institutionally shaped.

From examining the wide range of scholarship in Rhetoric and Writing Studies, it can be said safely that there is not a wealth of work being completed on the application of psychology to our field; such work has been published sporadically, which I will problematize in my dissertation[[1]](#footnote-1). However, if we look at the work of Buck, Bain, and Woolf, we can see their work has contemporary applications with respect to the psychology of how writers facilitate invention. Furthermore, it has applications for critical pedagogy in how their work can inform how we teach students to look beyond the surface meanings of texts they read, policies they are required to follow, and social constructions ascribed to them by their institutions. Once students can look beyond the surface of these scenarios, they can begin new ways of inventing.

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1. The most known books on this subject include Alice Brand’s *The Psychology of Writing* in 1989, Susan McLeod’s Notes on the Heart: *Affective Issues in the Writing Classroom* in 1997, and Laura Micchiche’s *Doing Emotion* in 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)