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Out of Style

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INTRODUCTION

Reanimating Style in Composition and Rhetoric

OVERVIEW: STYLE AND LANGUAGE

As a student in the French School at Middlebury College, I wrote a stylistic analysis of nineteenth-century French poet José-María de Heredia's sonnet (1978, 117), "Les Conquistants" ("The Conquistadores"), completely unaware at the time that the study of style is part of a rhetorical tradition that began more than 2,500 years ago. Examining the poem from several perspectives—phonological (sound and rhythm), syntactic, lexical, semantic, and rhetorical—I looked at such features as the poet's use of explosive consonants and stops (including enjambment) as devices to convey the harshness of the conqueror's "brutal" departure; the later contrast with certain liquid and nasal consonants and the repetition of assonant vowel sounds to signal a shift in mood after the discovery of an exotic new land; the poet's reversal of syntax, first to speed up and then to slow down the rhythm of the poem; the sonnet's changing lexical field, with an opposition between nouns with masculine and feminine genders that parallels the poem's increasingly ameliorative movement from conquest to hopeful acceptance; and the contrastive use of rhyme to reflect the imprisonment of the conquerors who, literally and figuratively, break away from their native country to an alluring new world. While analyzing the poem's stylistic features and patterns, I was able to demonstrate how Heredia deployed various elements of form to help achieve his overall effect. I now know that my analysis of the sonnet falls under the rubric of stylistics—or the study of style—whose history in literature complements its ancient counterpart in the history of rhetoric and its equally dynamic history in the field of composition.

In composition studies, the salient features of style—which Richard Ohmann defines as “a way of writing” (1967, 135)—are often different from those in literature, and the texts examined are generally non-literary prose rather than poetry or fiction. Like literary stylistics, however, composition’s approach to style has clearly been influenced by linguistics, the study and description of language phenomena in units up to and including the sentence, and by rhetoric, the study and use of language in context to inform, persuade, and produce knowledge. Some of the linguistic and rhetorical features I examined in Heredia’s sonnet include sound and rhythm, vocabulary, diction, register, syntax, and semantics, as well as figures of speech like tropes (e.g., metaphor) and schemes (e.g., parallelism). Although various other elements (e.g., phonetics and graphics) are also relevant to style, I argue that stylistic features are part of descriptive and interpretive frameworks—from classical rhetoric, discourse analysis, linguistics, and literary theory, history, and criticism, for example—that link their objects of study to the ways one goes about studying them.

Depending on what aspect of a stylistic relationship is being emphasized, one of several definitions of style might be used, each one representing a different theoretical approach to the topic. Indeed, it is fair to say that any definition of style involves one of several long-standing debates that have informed the study of the canon throughout history. Thus, for example, when Ohmann defines style as “a way of writing,” he is taking the position that style is a choice (of words, syntax, etc.) a writer makes among alternative forms. His broader argument is that style (or form) is separate from content (or meaning), and for him this “dualistic” theory underpins a central question: “If style does not have to do with *ways* of saying *something* . . . is there anything at all which is worth naming ‘style?’” (Ohmann 1959, 2). While this perennial form-content issue is discussed in detail below, its brief mention here is intended to indicate the complexity surrounding the question of what constitutes “style.” The

counterpart to Ohmann's dualistic view of style is an "organic" position, often attributed to Aristotle, asserting that form and content are inseparable. Another definition of style—the unique expression of an individual's personality ("style is the man")—raises the question of whether style is an unconscious process or a matter of conscious control among writers (Milic 1971, 77). Defining style as a unique or idiosyncratic—sometimes, an extraordinary—use of language implies an opposing norm or a standard, ordinary use that raises theoretical debates about whether to identify style with social groups or with characteristics of an individual's personality. Still another question focuses on whether style is measured subjectively, by so-called impressionistic techniques, or objectively, through the application of quantitative measurements, especially computers.

Because these multiple—and often competing—definitions of style are sometimes confusing, I define style as the deployment of rhetorical resources, in written discourse, to create and express meaning. According to this definition, style involves the use of written language features as habitual patterns, rhetorical options, and conscious choices at the sentence and word level (see Connors 1997, 257), even though the *effects* of these features extend to broader areas of discourse and beyond. The term "rhetorical," while informed by a rich history in oral discourse, refers specifically to written language as it is used to inform, persuade, and generate knowledge for different purposes, occasions, and audiences. This definition not only accommodates several perspectives on language, but also accounts for ways in which language theories can aid the deployment of style in various contexts. While I am adopting a rhetorical definition of style that includes qualities like tone, emphasis, and irony, certain linguistic concepts are also relevant. For example, some of the phenomena I used to analyze Heredia's poem (e.g., diction and syntax) are linguistic as well as rhetorical. However, as Sharon Crowley argues in "Linguistics and Composition" (1989), the use of linguistics in the study of style is problematic in that "American linguistics habitually

privileged the spoken over the written word” (492) and thereby avoided the more complex structures used, for instance, by professional writers. Furthermore, Crowley acknowledges the general deficiency of linguistics as an organizing system: “To date, no linguistically based stylistic taxonomy has appeared that begins to rival the scope of that developed . . . by classical rhetoricians” (491). In addition, Susan Peck MacDonald asserts that “one of the unfortunate disciplinary accidents of the late twentieth-century period is that trends in linguistics have been out of synch with English” (MacDonald 2007, 609).

For my purposes, then, I am focusing on the features of style that can be described locally through rhetoric, even though the effects of those elements are not necessarily local, but extend to more global features of discourse or to readers’ responses (see Williams 2005, 351). One example of a language phenomenon that functions precisely in this way is the concept of “cohesion,” which M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan define as the “relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text” (1976, 4). Even though cohesion can be described locally—for example, the cohesive device “exophora,” or the use of pronouns that have an antecedent in a previous sentence, is a device occurring within individual sentences—it is manifested only globally, or throughout a text, where it refers to the relational effects of the pronoun use, or what the authors call “non-structural text-forming relations” (7). As Stephen Witte and Lester Faigley explain in “Coherence, Cohesion, and Writing Quality,” “For Halliday and Hasan, cohesion depends upon lexical and grammatical relationships that allow sentence sequences to be understood as connected discourse rather than as autonomous sentences” (Witte and Faigley 1997, 214). Louise Wetherbee Phelps adds that cohesion, as used in composition, “has been reserved for stylistic features of texts (language) in global contrast to their semantic and pragmatic aspects of structures (meaning)” (1988, 174). In *Cohesion in English* (1976), a book that had a profound impact on composition studies when it appeared,

Halliday and Hasan explain further how cohesion passes from language into meaning and discourse structure:

The concept of cohesion is set up to account for relations in discourse . . . without the implication that there is some structural unit that is above the sentence. Cohesion refers to the range of possibilities that exist for linking something with what has gone before. Since this linking is achieved through relations in meaning . . . what is in question is the set of meaning relations which function in this way: the semantic resources which are drawn on for the purpose of creating text. (10)

In acknowledging, as Halliday and Hasan do, that stylistic effects extend to patterns of meaning beyond sentences, I contend nonetheless that efforts to attribute linguistic features to discourse, sometimes called “text linguistics,” have been unsuccessful. For example, scholars like Francis Christensen attempted to devise a rhetoric (or grammar) of the paragraph analogous to a sentence-based model. In “A Generative Rhetoric of the Paragraph,” Christensen argued that “the principles used [in his article ‘A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence’] were no less applicable to the paragraph” (1978, 76). Yet, composition scholars like Paul Rodgers (1966) rejected Christensen’s “sentence-expanding” notion of “the average paragraph as a ‘macro-sentence or meta-sentence,’” because he felt that the principles were not transferable. Similarly, Rodgers critiqued what he called Alton Becker’s attempt “to analyze paragraphs ‘by extending grammatical theories now used in analyzing and describing sentence structure’” (73). In addition, W. Ross Winterowd ultimately “emphatically repudiated” his own previous contention that “the sentence is the most productive analogical model for exploration of ‘grammar’ beyond the sentence” (1986, 245). Similarly, Frank D’Angelo’s (1976) effort to extend syntactic structures to larger stretches of discourse—one he attempted to develop into a “full-fledged theory and pedagogy of composition” (Crowley 1989, 496)—was never taken up broadly by scholars in the discipline.

For similar reasons, I argue that style is not the equivalent of literary studies' "thematics" or its theory of "textual comparison" (Todorov 1971, 36), which attempts to apply stylistic features to whole bodies of work. Part of the reason for moving away from text linguistics came about with the understanding that language does not *itself* create or express meaning and that a great deal of what makes meaning is contextual and dependent on such "extralinguistic" factors as the reader and his or her responses to the text. In his analysis of a recently translated essay on style and pedagogy by Mikhail M. Bakhtin (see Bazerman 2005, 333–38), Joseph M. Williams explains the importance of these types of responses:

Most of the words we use to describe style displace our responses to a text into that text or its writer. When we say a sentence is clear, we mean that we understand it easily. When we say a speaker is coherent, we mean that we have no trouble following him or her. Such qualities are neither in the speaker ("You are clear") nor in the speaker's language ("Your sentence is clear"). They are in our responses to particular syntactic, lexical, and other features on the page (or in the air), uttered or written and heard or read in a particular context. (Williams 2005, 351)¹

Given the importance of our responses to numerous textual and non-textual features, it is clear that stretches of discourse beyond the sentence—what Rodgers, to cite one example, called a "stadium of discourse" (1966, 73)—reveal other important insights into language and meaning related to stylistic analysis. For example, in a slightly different approach, Winston Weathers attempted to define style more broadly in his article, "Grammars of Style" (1990). A "grammar of style," he suggested, is the "set of conventions governing the construction of a whole composition; the criteria by which a writer selects the stylistic materials, method of organization and development, compositional pattern and structure he is to use in preparing any particular composition." Weathers's argument that style includes the "conventions . . . of a whole composition" (201) influenced

some scholars who reconceived of style as arrangement, as in the Weathers-inspired collection *Elements of Alternate Style* (Bishop 1997). This approach, in fact, is suggestive of Young, Becker, and Pike's contention that style is part of the "universe of discourse," an idea they developed in their innovative text *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* (1970).

THE BREADTH OF STYLISTIC INTEREST IN STYLE'S "GOLDEN AGE"

I argue that composition has developed a selective and biased memory of what I call the "Golden Age" of style study, roughly a three-decade period (from the 1960s to the mid-1980s) that overlaps with what is commonly known today as the "process movement." As evidence of this claim, I cite recent works that express renewed interest in the study of style during that time period, yet conceive of it narrowly—primarily as syntax. Two examples are Robert Connors's article "The Erasure of the Sentence" (2000) in which he discusses so-called "sentence rhetorics" (121), largely based in syntax, that he says disappeared around 1985: generative rhetoric, sentence combining, and imitation; and Crowley's article surveying linguistics and pedagogies of style from 1950 to 1980, where she suggests that in both structural linguistics and the transformational linguistics practice of sentence combining, the basis for the study of style was the use of "syntactic structures in English" (1989, 487). During the process era, Winterrowd designated as "pedagogical stylistics" (1975, 253) the practical applications of largely syntactic methods that some considered the most useful for effecting improvement in student writing.

While it is true that syntax was a prominent focus of style study during the Golden Age, it certainly was not the exclusive focus, and the tendency to read other stylistic features out of accounts of that era reinforces composition's increasingly selective memory of it. What's more, the limited recollection adds fuel to today's nearly universal characterization of style as a "remnant" of current-traditional rhetoric, as the rhetorical antithesis of

invention (see Chap. 3), and as focused on what some scholars, borrowing from Connors, refer to as “sentence-based pedagogies” (96). If, as I argue, the study of style during the Golden Age was not limited to a narrow focus on syntax or its use in developing syntactic maturity in student writing, then what did style studies, broadly construed, consist of during a period of composition history that overlapped with the discipline’s process movement? Furthermore, what would a complete inventory of these stylistic practices comprise today? To answer that question fully, it is necessary to conduct historical research of the process era and Golden Age that goes beyond the scope of this book. Nonetheless, by pointing to some of the work that comprised the study of style at the time, I hope to give a sense of the future possibilities that exist for stylistic research, theory, and practice.

In addition to sentence combining and generative rhetoric, many scholars of the Golden Age (and process era) examined theories of cohesion—or the linking of one part of a text to another by means of such devices as reference, substitution, ellipsis, lexical cohesion, and conjunction (Halliday and Hasan 1976)—and coherence, the ability of interpreters to discover and attribute holistic meanings to texts, cued by cohesive systems (Phelps 1988, 174). One example of work on cohesion during the Golden Age was Young and Becker’s “lexical equivalence chains,” high-level sequences of discourse, which they discussed in an essay on the contributions of tagmemic rhetoric to composition, especially stylistic study (1967, 99–100). A similar area of study involved what has been variously described in different traditions as “topic and comment,” “theme and rheme,” or the “known and new” contract, which posits that a sentence conveys its message most cohesively if the “topic,” or theme of the sentence, contains the “known” or least important information and precedes the “comment,” which expresses the “new” or most important information related to the theme (Vande Kopple 1990, 215). The various terms for this theory can be confusing, as Phelps points out, because “it is not clear whether we are dealing with different labels for a few functions or many different

functions” (1984, 52). This umbrella of terms was often grouped under the rubric of what William Vande Kopple has called “Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP)” (1990) and was used in the work of such composition scholars as Joseph Williams (1994) and E. D. Hirsch (1977). Phelps (1984, 52) suggests, however, that some of the originators of the terms included Halliday (1967), Wallace Chafe (1973), George Dillon (1981), and such Prague School linguists as Frantisek Daneš (1974).

In addition to an interest in cohesion and coherence, some scholars focused on the difference between “nominal” and “verbal” styles; nominalization generally refers to producing a noun by adding derivational affixes to a verb or adjective (e.g., proficient and proficiency). Williams and Rosemary Hake found in a series of studies that an essay written in a nominal style “tends to be perceived as better organized, better supported, and better argued than the corresponding verbal paper” (1986, 178–79). The preference for nominalization among high school and some college composition instructors, however, contravenes Williams’s contention that “sentences seem clearer when actions are verbs,” though he does acknowledge the usefulness of nominalization as a cohesive device (Williams 1994, 38, 48). Another area of stylistic study based on readers’ perceptions of the readability of writing hails from the field of psycholinguistics. In *The Philosophy of Composition* (1977), Hirsch introduced the idea of the “relative readability” of prose, which is the idea of improving style based on Herbert Spencer’s (1881) concepts of “economizing the reader’s or hearer’s attention” and the “least possible mental effort” (11). Building on Spencer’s ideas, Hirsch went on to define relative readability as follows: “Assuming that two texts convey the same meaning, the more readable text will take less time and effort to understand” (85; emphasis original). Even though Hirsch later disavowed the concept of relative readability, it represented one area of stylistic attention influenced by psychology during that era.

In addition to the predominately syntactic areas of sentence combining and generative rhetoric, there was also widespread

interest in rhetorical imitation. While imitation certainly involves syntactic features (see Connors 2000), it also goes beyond that rhetorical aspect of sentences. Frank Farmer and Phillip Arrington (1993) have defined imitation as “the approximation, whether conscious or unconscious, of exemplary models, whether textual, behavioral, or human, for the expressed goal of improved student writing” (13). The practice draws on many traditions going back to such classical rhetoricians as Gorgias, Isocrates, Cicero, and Quintilian. In evaluating the ideas of some of these Sophistic and Roman rhetors, Mary Minock suggests in “Toward a Postmodern Pedagogy of Imitation” (1995) that their concepts of imitation, in a nod to postmodernism, “echo some of the insights of Bakhtin, Derrida, and Lacan.” Minock goes on to argue that the work of these latter, twentieth-century theorists departs “from the pedagogies of imitation of the past that worked well (only) in their particular contexts” (493). Today, as Farmer and Arrington explain, a direct correlation is often imputed between imitation and a concern for improving stylistic quality: “Since imitation’s fortunes have traditionally been wedded to style,” they observe, “a good case can be made that a diminished respect for style as an intellectual concern is likewise a narrowing of the possible uses of imitation in the classroom” (15). Thus, Farmer and Arrington argue convincingly that imitation has suffered the same fate as style, is inextricably linked to style, and, like stylistic study, has moved to the periphery in composition studies.

In contrast with the apparent recent demise of imitation (Farmer and Arrington 1993; Connors 2000), during the Golden Age a number of individuals studied the impact of imitation on improving student writing, including Edward P. J. Corbett, whose article “The Theory and Practice of Imitation in Classical Rhetoric” (1989b) is certainly linked to the multiple editions of his textbook *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (1971). In a book devoted to imitative practice, *Copy and Compose*, Weathers and Otis Winchester (1969) asked students to reproduce model sentences and paragraphs written by professional writers. In her

classic text *Forming/Thinking/ Writing: The Composing Imagination*, Ann Berthoff (1982), borrowing from an idea by Phyllis Brooks (1973), introduced the “persona paraphrase” as a means to compose sentences “so that the interaction of syntax and meaning can be observed.” With the persona paraphrase, students used a prose passage as a model to guide them in constructing a sequence of sentences that are syntactically close to the model, even though the subject matter of the imitation often varied in significant ways. The result, Berthoff suggested, is that “the model acts to shape your sentences, somewhat the way an armature provides a framework when you are modeling a clay figure” (223). Other compositionists who focused on imitative practices during this era include Winterowd, D’Angelo, and Richard Lanham. Williams and Hake, reporting the results of their experiment, suggested that the use of imitation produces results superior to those of sentence combining in improving students’ syntactic fluency (1986, 186–91).

Clearly, the study of style during the Golden Age also included scholarship in other areas not always placed under the rubric of stylistic analysis. For example, some scholars of spelling, following the Chomskyan school, argued that English spelling, far from being random, exhibits logic and can be taught most effectively using a “list” approach based on a “direct” teaching method, which challenged older views that assumed English spelling is fundamentally illogical (Beggs 1984, 319–24). A similar debate evolved over “direct” versus “indirect” pedagogical methods for vocabulary development. Although vocabulary learning was thought to encompass either a semantic or an etymological approach, Mary Moran claimed that “in actuality the two methods are often used in conjunction” (1984, 364). In addition, in a famous study, Charles Read (1971) suggested that preschool children have unconscious knowledge of certain aspects of the sound system in English. Echoing trends that have recently been reprised (see Mann 2003), process-era scholars also studied the role of punctuation in composition, drawing on rhetorical, grammatical, and typographical traditions. Greta

Little (1984) pointed out, however, that despite a wealth of available material, scholars during the Golden Age generally did not treat the study of punctuation as a serious research topic but instead considered it a “peripheral issue of correct usage” that focused on checking the manuscript for mechanical errors. “Thus punctuation,” she concluded, “has become associated with the product, having little or no serious role in the writing process” (390).

Another area of style that scholars examined during the Golden Age was usage, defined as “the study of the propriety or, more often, the lack of propriety in using various elements of language” (Ching 1984, 399; see Pooley 1976). Scholars of the era also examined semantic shifts in word formation, lexicography, language variation, and the effects of linguistics and pedagogy, and one result of this scholarship was the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s publication “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” (1974). In addition to the Students’ Right document, works such as Anne Ruggles Gere and Eugene Smith’s *Attitudes, Language, and Change* (1979) attempted to change prevailing attitudes and judgments about usage, including ideas about style. Moving beyond usage to the study of meaning, or semantics, some scholars looked at the intersection of style and meaning. In her widely admired book *The Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models, and Maxims for Writing Teachers*, Berthoff (1981) explored what she calls the “interpretive paraphrase” as “a means why which meanings are hypothesized, identified, developed, modified, discarded, or stabilized” (72). Berthoff goes on to explain that the interpretive paraphrase, as a method of critical inquiry, is a way for writers to ask, “How does it change the meaning if I put it this way?” Berthoff’s heuristic has resonated in composition studies in significant ways since her text was published.

Whatever the reason for the demise of interest in the broad study of style after the process era, its neglect in composition studies today points to the exigency I present: If we view “style” as a set of language resources for writers to exploit, then the

general absence of style in the field has arguably deprived writers and teachers of an important reservoir of conscious knowledge about these resources and how to cultivate them. It is important to recuperate stylistic theory and practice in composition because they offer untapped tools to writers and teachers. In abandoning this important arena of study, the field has lost theoretical knowledge of the systems underlying stylistic resources, practical knowledge about how writers learn to deploy them, and the potential value of that knowledge for composition practice and pedagogy. I argue that the study of style stands at a liminal moment in composition and rhetoric today, a time when its rediscovery offers great promise to the field. In 2000, *College Composition and Communication* published “The Erasure of the Sentence,” in which Connors questions the disappearance of sentence rhetorics from composition theory and pedagogy after 1980 and makes the claim that their marginalization was the result of “a growing wave of anti-formalism, anti-behaviorism, and anti-empiricism” (96). For all practical purposes, Connors’s article marks the beginning of a tangible re-emergence of important discussions about the role of style in the discipline.

In the aftermath of Connors’s “Erasure,” a number of other articles appeared, such as Sharon Myers’s “ReMembering the Sentence” (2003), Mann’s “Point Counterpoint: Teaching Punctuation as Information Management” (2003), Laura Micciche’s article, “Making a Case for Rhetorical Grammar” (2004), Mike Duncan’s *College English* piece, “Whatever Happened to the Paragraph?” (2007), and MacDonald’s “The Erasure of Language” (2007), published in *CCC*. Broadening the context of the discussion through books and edited collections were Kathryn Flannery’s *The Emperor’s New Clothes: Literature, Literacy, and the Ideology of Style* (1995), which briefly reinvigorated the question of the ideologies of plain style; *Elements of Alternate Style* (Bishop 1997), inspired largely by Winston Weathers’s ideas on “Grammar B” and alternate style from a 1976 essay; the edited collection *Alt Dis: Alternative*

Discourses and the Academy (Shroeder, Fox, and Bizzell 2002); T. R. Johnson's *A Rhetoric of Pleasure: Prose Style and Today's Composition Classroom* (2003); and Johnson and Tom Pace's *Refiguring Prose Style: Possibilities for Writing Pedagogy* (2005). While composition as a discipline may have recently expressed some renewed interest in style, it seems safe to say that, since around 1985, the field as a whole has largely ignored style as part of its theory and practice. Paradoxically, just as composition has turned away from serious stylistic inquiry, other areas of society and culture have often embraced style theory and practice with almost unprecedented interest.

THE SHIFT AWAY FROM STYLE IN COMPOSITION

In his 1976 essay "Linguistics and Composition," Winterowd surveyed the prevailing linguistic and stylistic scholarship that informed both theory and practice in composition studies at that time. Winterowd's essay was part of Gary Tate's *Teaching Composition: Ten Bibliographic Essays* (1976), an edited collection in which several authors linked style in important ways to the then-evolving process movement in composition. Winterowd took up the influence of Chomsky's transformational linguistics, of Christensen's generative grammar, and of the practices of imitation, sentence combining, and sentence composing; Corbett surveyed various "Approaches to the Study of Style"; Richard Larson looked beyond the sentence level to "Structure and Form in Non-Fiction Prose"; and Richard Young related invention to style through Christensen's generative rhetoric and other methods in "Invention: A Topographical Survey." Tate's publication was part of style's Golden Age. The wealth of work produced during this three-decade period amounted to a resurgence of interest in a variety of language-centered methods such as sentence combining, imitation, and generative rhetoric as well as renewed affiliations with classical rhetoric and other disciplines.

Accompanying this renaissance of style was the belief, evident in Tate's edited collection, that its theoretical underpinnings in linguistics could be used for productive purposes,

that is, to teach people how to write better prose. Importantly, scholars selected many of the stylistic traditions with which they were familiar and introduced them to the classroom for pedagogical purposes. This focused selection of stylistic traditions and practices may have led to Winterrowd's selection of the term "pedagogical stylistics" (1975, 253) to describe the pedagogies of style most common at the time. The term itself, though never widely adopted in the field, is a useful way to think about the pedagogical practices that became commonplace in composition classrooms at that time, many of them grounded in linguistics. Beyond the conscious selection of stylistic practices, the belief that theory could be used to generate language characterized a variety of works on style both inside and outside the field. Some works that influenced composition include Martin Joos's *The Five Clocks* (1962) and two books by Walker Gibson, *Tough, Sweet and Stuffy* (1966) and *Persona: A Style Study for Readers and Writers* (1969).

While interdisciplinary work from individual scholars like Joos and Gibson clearly informed the work on style during this period, most of the published work hailed from edited collections in composition and the broader field of English studies. Some of the collections published during the time period included, for example, Martin Steinmann's *New Rhetorics* (1967) and Glen Love and Michael Payne's *Contemporary Essays on Style* (1969). In 1970, Young, Becker, and Pike published their groundbreaking book on tagmemic rhetoric, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*. Other works in the field included Lanham's *Style: An Anti-Textbook* (1974); Winterrowd's *Contemporary Rhetoric* (1975); Donald Daiker, Andrew Kerek, and Max Morenberg's *Sentence Combining and the Teaching of Writing* (1979); and Donald McQuade's *Linguistics, Stylistics, and the Teaching of Composition* (1979). These works were joined in the early 1980s by such single-authored books as Lanham's *Literacy and the Survival of Humanism* (1983b) and Patrick Hartwell's *Open to Language* (1982), a textbook that focused on the use of style in composition pedagogy.

Given the fact that Tate's first *Teaching Composition* collection (1976) represented a snapshot of the interests within composition studies at that time, it is significant that just 11 years later, he published a revised and enlarged edition, *Teaching Composition: Twelve Bibliographic Essays* (1987), with a far different emphasis. For example, Winterowd's contribution to the second edition, "Literacy, Linguistics, and Rhetoric" (1987), was a significant revision of—and departure from—his earlier article "Linguistics and Composition" (1976). As the new title alone intimates, a dramatic change in the influence of language theories on composition had occurred in the intervening years, and part of that shift involved the vastly diminishing influence of pure linguistics on the field. In the revised article, which might be characterized as "post-Golden Age" in that it appeared in 1987, it is important to note that Winterowd called linguistics "a branch of rhetoric" (265) that is "meaningless outside the context of literacy" (266), and his discussion of the linguistic influences on style comprised just a small part of a broader discussion about the developing influence of new social theories of language. In just 11 years, the world of composition had undergone a significant transformation. Indeed, Winterowd's changed emphasis was critical as a barometer of far broader shifts within the field of composition, including the adoption of many new perspectives on language.

During this period of change, composition drew increasingly upon theories from a number of new areas, despite retaining some overall affiliation with the discipline of linguistics. However, it is clear that composition's consistent movement away from formal linguistics has been concurrent with the development of various language theories, such as literacy, social and public theories of writing, postmodernism and poststructural approaches to literature and composition, and new theories of rhetoric. At the same time, the discipline of linguistics itself changed during this time period, adopting a quantitative and formal focus that arguably put it outside the practical use of scholars in various areas of composition and English studies

(see Crowley 1989). Additionally, as a field composition became disillusioned with the idea that language can *explain* meaning, and that idea led the field to seek other, largely social and rhetorical, approaches to writing. Thus, even though one aim of stylistic study is to analyze language features restricted to certain social contexts and to classify those features based upon a view of their function in those contexts (the field of sociolinguistics specifically took up this charge), composition's movement away from linguistics, though gradual, proved inexorable.

As the change in the first and second versions of Winterowd's article suggests convincingly, then, the tide had shifted in the years separating their publication. While interest in the study of style grew exponentially during the three-decade Golden Age of style, Connors (2000) has shown that attention to style studies dropped off abruptly in about 1985 or 1986—the end of the Golden Age. Despite the sea change in the influence of various theories and disciplines on composition during that time, it is still difficult to ascertain what happened specifically to the study of style. Why did the field abandon style? Did composition's turn to more social, political, and public views of language and more rhetorical approaches to teaching and theorizing about writing lead to the neglect of style? Did the disappearance of stylistic interest in composition occur in part because of the *mistaken* tendency to associate the canon of style with current-traditional rhetoric instead of the process-oriented approaches to writing that had begun to dominate the field? Given what appears to be the sudden demise of the study of style, what has caused a recent resurgence of interest in the topic as well as calls for further study? Why is the time ripe *now* to reevaluate the function and uses of style in composition theory and practice?

While most critics would agree that the field, in the aftermath of a “social turn” and “public turn” (see Mathieu 2005)² in composition, has “moved on” from some of the linguistic-based practices once at the heart of the study of style, I contend that a broad range of stylistic practices, though once linguistically based, are consonant with composition's socially based

approaches and complement the field's diverse interests in a number of rhetorical areas. One example of this is Bruce McComiskey's use of critical discourse analysis in *Teaching Composition as a Social Process* (2000). In addition, evidence of the continuing importance of style can be found today in areas of the discipline where stylistic analysis is deployed, although almost never under the name of "style." I attempt to characterize the state of style as it exists today and to contrast that status with its use during the process era in composition studies. The study of style is also prospective, pointing forward to the ways in which it might be redeployed in composition theories and practices and in other disciplinary areas. In these contexts, I argue, the availability of a reservoir of stylistic features would offer valuable help to writers, teachers, and students at all stages of the writing process.

GOING PUBLIC WITH STYLE

It seems clear that the debate about style is currently controlled by "the public intellectual" (Farmer 2002), the common term given to those outside the field of composition who often set the parameters for discussions on various issues within the discipline, usually without composition's answering word (see Chap. 5). In general, these individuals are either cultural critics or those with a passion for language who want to preserve standards that they see as being eroded. William Safire, in his widely read column for the *New York Times Magazine*, "On Language," discusses the newspaper's "sternly prescriptive" style manual intended to discourage writers from a "push-mipullyu style" that Safire sees as deviating from civility. While acknowledging that "a stylistic rule is not a law" (1999), Safire nonetheless advocates adopting a style governed by rules of grammar and usage that give the impression that the author does not acknowledge a wealth of language variation. Like Safire, David Mulroy (2003), in his book *The War against Grammar*, argues that university professors have ignored grammar instruction in their classrooms and should improve their

own knowledge of grammar and usage. Additional evidence of the public's interest in style as grammar can be found in the success of Lynne Truss's *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (2004).

While composition has ventured into many new areas significant to the field, its neglect of the study of style comes at a price. The public conceptions controlling debates on style today—which often reduce style to the equivalent of grammar or prescriptive rules—have effectively usurped the topic from the discipline itself. In the process, notions of style outside the field have paralyzed those within it. While, on the one hand, resisting reductive definitions of style—and of the field—as remedial, composition professionals have nevertheless been forced to accept these public constructions, unable to refute views to which the field itself refuses to respond. I propose, therefore, that it is time for composition to take back the discussion of style—to redefine the way the conversation is framed and, by extension, to reclaim an area of theory and practice that can be a valuable source for language users. As a field, composition must exploit the resources that stylistic study identifies and, at the same time, reanimate style on our own terms—as a group of language experts who can provide the leadership to re-educate writers and a public passionately interested in the study of style, but often unable to see beyond its prescriptive affiliations.

I contend, furthermore, that this exigency is even more urgent than it may at first appear. Unless, and until, the field of composition takes up the issue of style directly, pressures from outside the field will continue to make it difficult for the field to be heard in other vital areas of its disciplinary work. In other words, it can be argued that the study of style has forged a Maginot line around the discipline beyond which it has been unable to move. The canon of style, then, represents a space where composition is forced to operate at uncertain borders and face occasional incursions from those outside the field who seek to attack the discipline at its very roots (see Mac Donald 1995; Menand 2000; Fish 2002, 2005). Sometimes constructed

as an “insignificant” area of scholarship, composition and rhetoric may be able to move beyond its sometimes devalued status in the humanities through the study of style. While scholars within the field have recently taken note of the critical state of composition as a discipline (e.g., Smit 2004), no one has explored the importance of style as a way of elevating the field to a more productive and respected position within the humanities.

The discipline of composition has an ambivalent relationship with style that has placed the topic on a dividing line both inside and outside the field. In essence, the lack of interest in style exhibited by composition has deferred conceptions of style to conventional wisdom about what constitutes “good writing.” These ideas about style focus on rules of usage and shibboleths of “good style,” such as Strunk and White’s “clarity, sincerity, and brevity” (2000). This arena of stylistic study is particularly hard to evaluate because most of it is controlled by a group of self-declared experts in style outside the field of composition. Although a few scholars within the field (Williams 1994; Kolln 1999, 2007; Coe 1987, 1998; Lanham 1974, 1976, 1983a, b, 1993, 2006) concentrate their scholarship on style, they are generally not the ones to whom the media or others turn to analyze or comment on stylistic issues. One result of the severely limited attention to style in composition is that there is no recent central body of scholarship (with a few notable exceptions, such as Johnson and Pace’s *Refiguring Prose Style* 2005) that identifies style as a concern in the field; this gap defers authority to commentators generally untrained in composition scholarship, history, and theory.

The distinction between popular and academic concerns about style is often conflated in so-called style manuals or handbooks. In the popular arena, these trace their origin to Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style* (2000). Today, however, most publishers of composition texts offer their own version of handbooks, where style tends to be conflated with grammar or used reductively, as in this statement from the *Longman Writer’s Companion*: “Editing means adjusting sentences and words for

clarity, style, economy, and correctness” (Anson, Schwegler, and Muth 2003, 73). This sentence conflates matters of grammar and usage (including correctness) with style. The irony of such an approach is that it internalizes an external view of style within the field, at once accepting popular conceptions of the meaning of style and at the same time resisting that meaning, given the field’s superior knowledge. One purpose of my book is to evaluate how one popular myth in particular—that of clarity—has controlled the discussion of and shaped the conversation about style in the field for many years. I focus the myth of clarity through the figure of the public intellectual and what I contend is an absence of discussion about style in the field. I point out the difficulty of composition’s relinquishment of the debate to outsiders and suggest what it would mean to explain issues to a broad audience as composition-trained public intellectuals (see Chap. 5).

PURPOSES AND AIMS OF THIS BOOK

Given the current state of affairs in stylistic studies, what would it mean to reclaim this area of study in the field? Does composition’s heritage account for style’s relatively recent Golden Age that has extensive links to traditions of Greek- and Roman-based rhetoric, literary stylistics, and other influences that have approached the study of style in significant ways? I look back at this recent period to correct current impressions of how style actually functioned at that time in composition and rhetoric—to show how central it was in the field and the varied ways in which it was addressed; in particular, I reveal how style was an integral part of what we now call the process movement in composition. In essence, I recuperate the uses of style during that period and present a more accurate picture of how it was conceived of and used pedagogically and practically in the field. Specifically, I focus on the productive and inventive uses of style. Thus, mine will be a revisionist’s view of that period of stylistic presence in that it will reexamine some of the labels or conceptions that have come to be associated with style studies and investigate their origin and accuracy (see Chap. 3).

In addition to its retrospective view, my book also looks prospectively at the implications of a crucial paradox for the field. Even as style appears to be invisible in composition, I contend that it is at the same time ubiquitous, having diffused into other areas of the discipline under different names and ideas. In making this argument, I borrow the framework that composition scholar Janice Lauer has established for rhetorical invention, which, she argues, has “migrated, entered, settled, and shaped many other areas of theory and practice in rhetoric and composition” (2002, 2). My goal, simply stated, is to find the same evidence of style’s invisible migration in the work of our field. One of my aims, then, is to examine why style has in essence “gone underground,” its diffusion a testament to its continuing, if latent, importance. If style has, as Connors and Cheryl Glenn tell us, “diffused into one of the most important canons of rhetoric” (1999, 232), then why must we look so hard to find evidence of it? I propose that the answer to the paradox is intricately connected to the claims my book makes about the field’s neglect of style and its view of past stylistic practices as an unwelcome legacy. I argue that this approach is based on misunderstandings about the potential uses and functions of the canon of style in composition.

In light of what is arguably the simultaneous submergence and re-emergence of style in the field, I propose that the time is ripe to reevaluate the place of style in the discipline of composition. In *Out of Style*, therefore, I investigate the state of our current understanding of style in the field. What is missing in the way that “style” often gets taken up in the field as simply a remnant of current-traditional rhetoric or as a synonym—or pseudonym—of grammar? For years, the realm of rhetoric was reduced to the domain of style and delivery. In light of the recuperation of invention and arrangement in composition, how can we support a view of rhetoric in composition studies today that is not reduced to style, but includes it in dynamic ways? How might the field gain by elaborating a more complete view of style, with greater attention to its dynamic nature and connections to invention, the process movement, and other canons

of rhetoric? What if that reanimation were invested in a broad range of study going beyond syntactic practices and incorporating a number of the areas that scholars found worthy of pursuit during the Golden Age and the process era in composition and rhetoric? As James Jasinski has asked, “What might it mean to take style seriously as a topic for theoretical reflection and critical analysis?” (2001, 537).

PROLEGOMENON TO FURTHER WORK

While *Out of Style* stands on its own as an account of the state of style in the field of composition today, it also serves as a prelude to further work that needs to be done. Thus, it can be seen as the first step in a full reintegration of the study of style into the discipline. My focus is on revisiting and correcting some of the misconceptions that have developed. The chapters set the stage for a historical reconstruction of what was studied during the Golden Age or process era, how it was used and valued, and what needs to be revalued through a careful reconsideration of work that exists in style studies, some of which is not obvious. I argue that various forces and ways of thinking have distorted our ability to think about style productively. I examine how that distortion has happened and why. With the idea of correcting misconceptions as a dominant theme, here is what each of the following chapters contributes to the book:

Chapter two examines how the history of style has set the stage for the arguments made in the book. It shows the way in which many of the issues discussed were part of Greek and Roman rhetoric, and the rupture that occurred during the Renaissance. It also sets forth relevant contemporary theories of style and stylistic traditions.

Chapter three corrects the misapprehension, largely through retrospective accounts, that style did not constitute part of the process era. It shows some of the clear links between the canons of style and invention and makes the argument that during the process era, style was considered a productive and dynamic source of language innovation.

Chapter four shows that despite the apparent invisibility of style in the field today, it is wrong to think that it is no longer a part of the field. Rather, style is often hidden, having dispersed into a “diaspora” of composition studies, where it is being used in important ways.

Chapter five examines some of the ways that myths about style have filtered into the field, often through a group of public intellectuals who present style reductively in the public sphere, as equivalent to “grammar,” for instance. The chapter argues that it is time for the discipline to take back the discussion of style and reclaim it as a topic of serious scholarly inquiry as composition-trained public intellectuals.

Chapter six explains what can be done to revitalize style in composition. It points to work the field can take up, explores the implications of the work done in this book, and invites the discipline to join in a renaissance of style studies in composition.