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OUT OF STYLE

Reclaiming an “Inventional Style” in Composition

When scholars of recent composition history consider style, they often regard it as part of “current-traditional rhetoric,” which is associated with an emphasis on the formal written product, prescriptive rules, and static language practices. Typical of such a mainstream view, Richard Young makes this arguably negative connection explicit when he states that one of the salient features of current-traditional rhetoric is its “strong concern with *usage* (syntax, spelling, punctuation) and with *style* (economy, clarity, emphasis)” (Young 1978, 31; emphasis added). Indeed, Young and his generation of scholars often place current-traditional rhetoric’s emphasis on the textual product in opposition with what they identify as “the process approach,” which emphasizes writing as shaped recursively through a number of cognitive, social, and cultural processes. They further delineate the process movement by associating it with the rhetorical canon of invention, defined as the discovery of ideas or of “the subject matter of discourse” (Young 1976, 1).

What these scholars have ignored, however, is the way the study of style experienced a “renaissance” (Pace 2005, 28)¹ during the same three-decade period—from the 1960s through the mid-1980s—usually considered composition’s process movement and generally known today for its championing of invention. As a result of these characterizations, style now often ends up getting discussed *retrospectively* as distinct from more dynamic views of process and invention. This chapter seeks to correct that oversight: that is, to show how style, in contrast to the prevailing view, was actually an integral part of the process movement and how it serves—rather than opposes—an interest

in invention, which Robert Connors and Cheryl Glenn describe as “the central, indispensable canon of rhetoric” (1999, 160).

REVISIONIST HISTORY

In contrast to conceptions prevalent in the field today, I argue that during the process era, the study of style constituted a meaningful part of language *production* for writers. According to this largely untold story, style is not the product-based residue of current-traditional rhetoric that many say it is retrospectively (see Young 1978; Berlin 1987; Crowley 1989), but rather is a dynamic feature of the very process movement the field considers crucial to its disciplinary identity. Despite what has developed as our current conventional wisdom, then, I contend that the process period actually constituted a Golden Age of style studies, a time when style pedagogy was one of the *innovations* in the field, linked to those inventive features of composition that signaled advances in meaning, knowledge, and language.

Indeed, this hypothesis gains additional support when one turns to recent work from composition scholars like Tom Pace, who argues that process-era work on style by Francis Christensen, Edward P. J. Corbett, and Winston Weathers is often seen erroneously today as overly simplistic, apolitical, and decontextualized, when the real aim of these scholars was to make stylistic options available to students and to increase their rhetorical awareness (Pace 2005, 8, 22; see also Walpole 1980). Similarly, in *A Rhetoric of Pleasure: Prose Style and Today's Composition Classroom*,² T. R. Johnson, in looking at various moments in rhetorical history, theorizes a “‘renegade’ tradition” based on authorial pleasure, but raises the possibility that, in an abandonment similar to that of style, “in recent decades, we have strenuously disavowed this sort of renegade terrain in order to ascend to positions of authority and privilege within the university.” Johnson goes on to suggest that it may be time to reclaim that tradition, in part through “playing around, quite pleasurably, with devices and principles of prose style” (Johnson 2003, xii).

If recent work on style is beginning to point the field in a new direction, why is a revisionist history necessary at this juncture of composition's development? Given the ongoing binary division of invention as "central" and style as "reductive" or "static," it is crucial to correct this erroneous view and set the record straight. First, however, it is important to make clear that this dichotomization is nothing new, but results from what James Zebroski has referred to as the process movement's "invention agenda." In his article "The Expressivist Menace," Zebroski (1999) offers an explanation for the way in which composition histories tend to produce these very dichotomies, resulting from what he calls "the rhetoric of menace"—or the narrative of how the field "retrojects" or constructs the past in self-serving and pejorative ways, depending upon when a past era is being looked at, by whom, and for what purposes. It matters when a precise history gets written, Zebroski argues, since "a historical narrative emerges from the dialectic between present and past" (99). Zebroski attributes the relative rereading of history in part to the conflict between a "first generation" that initially constructs the profession in a certain way and a subsequent "revolt of the second generation" by emerging scholars whose different needs compel it to challenge the interpretation of the first generation. He explains that "retrojection of mythic histories onto the past occurs, as professionals, trying to establish themselves and their authority in the field, argue against what they take to be the essential character of first generation thought and identity" (99–100).

Similarly, Louise Wetherbee Phelps theorizes that what has occurred historically in the field might be viewed in terms of the particular "path composition has taken" in contrast with other paths the discipline has not pursued. In "Paths Not Taken: Recovering History as Alternative Future," Phelps (1999) observes that "negative and positive versions of 'what happened' converge through strategies and tropes of mutual accommodation favoring the dominant position." Once a particular path is taken, Phelps asserts, it is difficult to overcome

the belief that a different option the field may *at one point* have chosen is already lived through, over and done with, fixed, unchangeable, shaped through convergent choices into the single “path,” “mainstream,” “paradigm,” or (most tellingly) into the “system.” If the past converges and solidifies into the path taken, what remains today of multiple “paths not taken” becomes invisible (42).

Zebroski and Phelps help explain why composition scholars, in an attempt to resurrect the canon of invention after years of neglect, constructed it as a dynamic aspect of rhetoric in direct contrast to style, perceived to belong, on the other hand, to a static, current-traditional rhetoric. Through the process of retrojection, therefore, the same opposition that developed between “product” and “process” and “current-traditional” and “new” rhetoric (see Phelps 1988; Crowley 1989) produced, as Elizabeth Rankin stated, “a similar implied opposition between invention and style” (Rankin 1985, 9). Maxine Hairston reinforced this dichotomy in her influential article, “The Winds of Change,” where she wrote that “teachers who concentrate their efforts on teaching style, organization, and correctness are not likely to recognize that their students need work in invention” (Hairston 1990, 7). James Berlin and Robert Inkster articulated the opposition even more forcefully in an article that appeared in *Freshman English News*, stating that the current-traditional paradigm “neglects invention almost entirely . . . and makes style the most important element in writing” (Berlin and Inkster 1980, 4).

THE WRONGFUL RIFT BETWEEN STYLE AND INVENTION

While claims about the respective roles of invention and style may seem part of a natural evolution in composition studies, it seems clear that the declining fortunes of style during the process movement resulted in part from the effort by some scholars to distance it from invention and to affiliate it with an increasingly derided current-traditional rhetoric. That affiliation, I assert, began in 1959, when the term “current-traditional

rhetoric,” once a neutral term, started to take on increasingly pejorative connotations with Daniel Fogarty’s *Roots for a New Rhetoric*. In his book, Fogarty characterized current-traditional rhetoric as “still largely Aristotelian in its basic philosophy,” and he included among its core elements grammar, spelling, and mechanics; the four modes of discourse; and “style qualities,” which he defined as “clearness, force, coherence, interest, naturalness, and other devices” (Fogarty 1959, 118). He contrasted the stylistic features of a current-traditional rhetoric that he saw as emphasizing form over content with “a new or improved teaching rhetoric” found in the theories of I. A. Richards, Kenneth Burke, and a “general semanticist approach” (120). Thus, it is clear that Fogarty, while not directly disparaging the stylistic elements of current-traditional rhetoric, implicitly suggested their inferiority to the “new or improved” theories of teaching rhetoric that he explored in *Roots for a New Rhetoric*.

In 1978, Young, building on Fogarty’s work, labeled the current-traditional rhetoric a “paradigm” and suggested that “one important characteristic of current-traditional rhetoric is the exclusion of invention as a subdiscipline of the art” (32). In the same article, Young linked style with what he considered pejorative aspects of traditional rhetoric, such as grammar, correctness, and many of the same features described by Fogarty. In 1987, after the end of what is now considered composition’s process period, Berlin continued this trajectory in *Rhetoric and Reality*, where he asserted that current-traditional rhetoric, which, he said, had appeared in response to the scientific curriculum at American universities, “makes the patterns of arrangement and superficial correctness the main ends of writing instruction.” This emphasis, according to Berlin, conveyed the idea that invention “need not be taught since the business of the writer is to record careful observations or the reports of fellow observers” (9). Under Berlin’s scenario, then, style became part of a mere “transcription process” in which the role of the writing instructor was regarded as “providing instruction in arrangement and style—arrangement so that the order of experience is correctly

recorded, and style so that clarity is achieved and class affiliation established” (27). By suggesting that current-traditional rhetoric rendered invention unnecessary, and style elevated, Berlin not only advanced the invention agenda, but also renewed a long-time charge of style’s elitist heritage, further undermining the status of an already maligned current-traditional paradigm.

Despite what seemed to be a gradual tendency to situate invention hierarchically over style, however, I suggest that style studies actually flourished during the process era, when many scholars linked the two canons in mutually productive ways. For example, in 1970, the NCTE Committee on the Nature of Rhetorical Invention stated, “One feature of [rhetorical invention] is that it *views ‘style’ as itself inventive*” (108; emphasis added). In an encyclopedic entry surveying the process era, Linda Vavra pointed out that “during the product/process paradigm shift of the 1970s and 1980s, stylistics flourished in composition’s two arenas: reading/interpreting texts . . . and generating texts” (1998, 315). Depending on a person’s philosophy of style, John Gage wrote in 1980, style can either be viewed as separate from invention “or it is one of the aspects of invention” (618). In his *Contemporary Rhetoric*, Ross Winterowd also suggested a unity of style and invention when he stated, “If one views theories of form and theories of style merely as sets of topics—which in most instances they are—then the whole process of composition is unified under the auspices of invention” (1975, 48). In their influential process-era text *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, famous for its invention heuristic, Young, Becker, and Pike (1970) highlighted the invention/style connection, which Young and Becker had explained in an earlier article: “In a complete theory, then, a particular style is a characteristic series of choices throughout the entire process of writing, including both discovery (invention) and linguistic selection and grouping (arrangement)” (Young and Becker 1967, 107). In all of these accounts, the authors viewed style and invention as connected in dynamic ways—not as part of the current-traditional rhetoric with which style has often been negatively associated.

While it is true historically that style and invention have always been separate canons of rhetoric, the tendency to characterize them as diametrically opposed, with few points of overlap, is a relatively recent phenomenon. According to Aristotle, as individual canons of rhetoric, invention and style have always been distinct at least in one respect: invention is considered the discovery of *ideas*, whereas style involves the discovery and use of *language* in certain contexts. Although invention can be generative, it is restricted to the formation of ideas, not language. Style, on the other hand, can be used both to discover and generate ideas through the improvisation of written language. Thus, the attempt to dichotomize style and invention reflects an incomplete characterization of the canons. Despite the dichotomization of the canons of style and invention by Fogarty, Berlin, and others, some scholars, both classical and modern, have attempted to find intersections among them (see, for example, Hawhee 2002). The idea that an “inventional style” exists, then, suggests the unique ability of style to facilitate the invention of ideas through writing. I assert that this productive idea of style, despite the revisionist tendency to characterize style as reductive, was dominant during the process era and must be reemphasized in any attempt to recuperate the study of style in composition today.

Part of the division between style and invention, both during and after the process era, is a long-standing theoretical split between content (that which is invented) and form (style and arrangement) that raises broader issues about the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric (Crowley 1990) and thought and language (Vygotsky 1997). The debate centers on whether style can be separated from meaning, a question which, if answered affirmatively, echoes what Lev Vygotsky calls a “metaphysical *disjunction* and *segregation*” of thought and language (Vygotsky 1997, 2). Adopting this “dualistic” view of a form-content split, often called the theory of “ornate form” (Milic 1965, 67), composition scholar Richard Ohmann argued that the very idea of style implies that the words written on a page

can be different, or differently arranged, without a *necessary* corresponding difference in substance. According to Ohmann, the idea that by changing even one word, a writer changes, in turn, the entire meaning of a sentence “leads to the altogether counterintuitive conclusion that there can be no such thing as style” (1967, 141). In contrast to this dualistic view, the organic theory argues that form is *not* separable from content and that “a difference in style is always a difference in meaning” (Beardsley 1967, 199). The organic view supports the premise that language and thought necessarily coexist. According to this view, as Vygotsky states, there is an “*identification, or fusion, of thought and speech*” (1997, 2), which implies that content and form cannot be separated in achieving meaning.

While scholars like Ohmann and Richard Lanham have argued in favor of a view of style as “ornate form,” it is clear that this dualistic theory has retained some of the negative connotations it acquired historically when sixteenth-century logician Peter Ramus attempted to confine rhetoric as a whole to the canons of style and delivery and associated invention with philosophy (see Ong 1974). Although no one has traced the overall impact of this schism on the composition field, it seems clear today that a view of style (or form) as separate from meaning (or content) has contributed to the association of the canon with a current-traditional paradigm which, according to Berlin and Inkster, views reality as fixed, knowable, and rational (Berlin and Inkster 1980, 4)—and unconcerned with invention or the production of new knowledge. The organic view of style, on the other hand, is seen as supporting Berlin’s claim that language itself “embodies and generates knowledge” (Berlin 1987, 167), a central tenet of his social-epistemic rhetoric. This theoretical debate remains important today because it continues to influence what I suggest has become a fundamentally reductive view of style in composition and rhetoric and accounts in part for the neglect of attention to the study of style in the field.

While the form-content issue resurfaces regularly, as it did in a Stanley Fish op-ed column in the *New York Times* (see

Chap. 5), it was process-era composition scholars, aware of the apparent impasse the competing theories of style had produced, who proposed various compromises as a way to address the question. Milic, for example, suggested a practical solution based on the idea that “writing is a continuum leading from thought to expression” in which thought or content is “strongest at the origin,” becomes “eventually coextensive” with form, and then gradually diminishes in importance as it approaches expression (where, ostensibly, form is more important). Milic felt that this continuum offered a way to keep form and content together, “yet separate for the process of analysis” (1975, 282). Virginia Tufte, in articulating a view of “grammar as style,” argued that the feature of syntax, the predominant basis of her book, differs from diction in that changes in the former, in contrast to latter, “alter meaning, *if at all*, much less obviously” (1971, 6; emphasis added). Winterowd, recognizing the importance of the “manner/matter controversy” to composition pedagogy, suggested that two sentences with different forms “can both be taken as the same kind of speech act” and, therefore, as a matter of common sense, “two different sentences can share the same meaning” (1975, 271). Today, various language theories have shown that many factors beyond language itself contribute to meaning, and as such the form-content dichotomy does not hold the significance it once did. Nonetheless, the history—and persistence—of the debate clearly continue to influence recent discussions about the role of style in composition theory and pedagogy, as recurrent debates about the role of form, especially grammar, in composition demonstrate (see Chap. 5).

STYLE AS INNOVATION IN COMPOSITION’S PROCESS ERA

In establishing style as an innovative resource during the process era, it is important to note that several language theories and influences converged at the time to give rise to the hope of producing syntactic maturity among writers. It is clear, for instance, that Noam Chomsky’s transformational linguistics

(Chomsky 1957; 1965) had an enormous influence. In fact, Frank O'Hare wrote that "Chomsky revolutionized grammatical theory" (O'Hare 1973, 5) and, indeed, transformational grammar was part of a general language-oriented milieu that influenced the development of such stylistic practices as generative rhetoric (Christensen 1963), sentence combining (O'Hare 1973; Mellon 1969, 1979; Bateman and Zidonis 1964), tagmemic rhetoric (Young *et al.* 1970), and a redeployment of classical rhetoric (Corbett 1971, 1989a, 1989b; Lanham 1974, 1976; Berthoff 1982), including the use of stylistic imitation. The work of these scholars helps refute the characterization of style as coming necessarily at the end of the composing process—generally as part of revision (Blakesley 1995, 193)—and invention coming earlier in that process. A reevaluation of style in terms of its productive and inventive purposes earlier in the writing process can help re-establish the canon's rightful place in the recent history of composition studies. In this reevaluation, a reanimation of style practices would have at least two purposes. First, it would offer composition scholars, teachers, and students access to and facility with a rich array of language resources that would allow them to gain expressive ability, eloquence, clarity, precision, and other valued "writerly" qualities. Secondly, a recuperation and reconsideration of style studies could aid writers with the invention of ideas.

The retrospective tendency to assume that style was unconnected to process or to emerging language theories seems to be widespread in the field today. Although there has been an attempt recently to account for the demise of the study of style around the mid-1980s (see, for example, Connors 2000), Joseph Williams and Rosemary Hake (1987) observed that style had come to be perceived as based on linguistic theories that relied, often exclusively, on the text, and made the sentence the highest hierarchical structure in a language system that includes a host of other relationships. These non-linguistic relationships were not only social and cultural, but also included units of discourse larger than the sentence (Roen 1996, 193). These factors,

syntactic or otherwise, may explain in part the absence of any discussion of style in important works that look retrospectively at the process movement. One example of this type of work is the 1994 edited collection *Taking Stock: The Writing Process in the '90s*, an account of process that looks at expressivism but does not include any substantive mention of style. Several *Taking Stock* contributors, in fact, suggest that one of the most prominent features of the process era was its retrospective link to expressivist rhetoric. According to volume editor Lad Tobin, "Where the social constructivists and cultural critics come together with the traditionalists is in their criticism of expressivism and personal writing, and so that is where the critique of the writing process movement has been strongest" (6).

Yet, in his concern over the way expressivism has been constructed during the process movement, Tobin (1994) does not make reference to a theory of style that relates directly to expressivist notions. Labeled "individualist or psychological monism" by Louis Milic (1965), the theory is best summed up by the French aphorism, "Style is the man." The theory holds that a writer's style is the true expression of his or her personality and, therefore, no two writers can write the same way, rendering imitation impossible (Milic 1975, 222). That theory has been the most prevalent view of style throughout history. Yet, *Taking Stock's* failure to acknowledge the influence of stylistic theories like psychological monism on the expressivist elements of process seems to disregard an opportunity to understand how the process movement constructed expressivist rhetoric and style in similarly reductive ways. For example, in the volume, Susan Wall (1994) writes that despite the continuing popularity of expressivist practices originating in process pedagogy, those practices are rejected today by compositionists with social views of language. Arguably, this retrojection occurs in much the same way that the process movement rejected current-traditional rhetoric and, at the same time, adopted some of the very practices of that rhetoric while giving them different names. Wall says:

While the expressivist terms and practices of much process pedagogy have remained popular among many progressive elementary and secondary teachers—indeed, have been reinforced by later developments such as the whole language movement—a number of social-epistemic scholars have established their rhetorical ascendancy in college-level composition by rejecting the expressivism associated with the process movement (*just as the process movement established its claims by appealing to teachers to reject “current-traditionalism” in the name of a “new paradigm”*). (252; emphasis added)

Like Wall’s association of an “expressivist menace” (Zebroski 1999, 99) with process and process with a new paradigm, I argue that the same phenomenon occurred with style and current-traditional rhetoric. In line with her argument, then, retrospective critiques conflate the notion of process with expressivism and of style with current-traditionalism and product, in both cases linking the terms with negative and reductive views of language. Tobin suggests that even though the link between personal writing and process is neither necessary nor accurate, the two are often “linked in practice and perception” (6). Similarly, a closer examination suggests that Tobin and his contributors, including such composition scholars as Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow, James Moffett, James Britton, and Donald Murray, seem to consider certain aspects of style a part of product. Evidence of this phenomenon can be found when Tobin first defines process as “an *emphasis* on the process, student choice and voice, revision, self-expression,” and then, in contrast, goes on to define what process ostensibly is working against: “a critique (or even outright rejection) of traditional, product-driven, rules-based, correctness-obsessed writing instruction” (5). While Tobin does not mention the word “style” explicitly in this context, he places stylistic “prose models” on a list that also includes “grammar lessons” and “lectures on usage” in his narrative of “life before the writing process movement” (2–4).

While the association of style with words like “product,” “traditional,” “rules,” and “correctness” (see Crowley 1989)

leads to its close affiliation with “grammar” and renders it retrospectively counter to the aims of the process movement, what Phelps calls the generally more “progressive” aspects of writing have not escaped reductive views, either (Phelps 1999, 42). As a matter of fact, both ends of the dichotomy—process and product, invention and style—have been viewed unevenly by the field. Crowley (1990) demonstrates this point in *The Methodical Memory: Invention in Current-Traditional Rhetoric*, where she suggests that rhetorical invention “goes in and out of fashion because it is intimately tied to current developments in ethics, politics, and the epistemology of whatever culture it serves” (1). Clearly, this tendency is, in part, what prompted the recent resurrection of invention in volumes such as Janet Atwill and Janice Lauer’s *Perspectives on Rhetorical Invention* (2002) and Anis Bawarshi’s *Genre and the Invention of the Writer* (2003), both of which tie invention to current cultural developments in significant ways. It suggests the way in which invention has, as Crowley suggests, resurfaced because of cultural concerns about writing.

Despite her argument that invention has been devalued at various times in history, however, Crowley makes a hierarchical distinction that seems to place invention over style. After suggesting that in “modern rhetoric, attention to invention has been overshadowed by interest in arrangement and style” (Crowley 1990, 1), she makes the Ramistic move of separating style from invention. Under this scenario, Crowley perpetuates a division whose roots stem from the sixteenth-century logician Peter Ramus’s separation of invention and arrangement (which he categorizes as logic) from style and delivery (which he includes under the province of rhetoric; see Chap. 2). For her part, Crowley suggests that invention alone is important culturally, while style (along with arrangement) becomes the reductive equivalent of what she calls “linguistic techniques”:

To teach writing as though the composing process begins with arrangement or style, then, assumes that speakers and writers can

deploy discourse in a cultural and ethical vacuum. . . . Composition becomes the manipulation of words for its own sake. (Crowley 1990, 168)

It is evident that, at least in this context, Crowley views style as a mere surface feature or ornament of current-traditional rhetoric, not connected to the epistemic realm in which she situates invention. In using this construction, Crowley fails to attribute to style a richer view as knowledge-making and connected to invention, philosophy, culture, and rhetoric.

STYLE IN THE PRODUCTION OF LANGUAGE

In contrast to constructions of style as merely “surface” or “ornamental” features, I contend that during style’s renaissance in the 1960s and for parts of the next two decades, composition scholars saw the possibility of using stylistic techniques to increase a writer’s repertoire of language resources and, ultimately, to improve writing abilities. In particular, Chomsky’s transformational grammar was seen as offering a possible means, through the study of syntax, of fostering what he called the “creative aspect” of language, or “the ability of speakers to produce and understand sentences they have never encountered before” (Riley and Parker 1998, 222). This applied to student writing in terms of arguing that syntax is a great source of both variety and deviation in written English. In line with Chomsky’s work, then, one of the predominant syntactic methods of the process period was sentence combining, a technique whose goal is to improve syntactic maturity. As Connors suggests in “The Erasure of the Sentence” (2000), two other important techniques included generative rhetoric and imitation.

Beyond Connors, whose sentence rhetorics address just part of the stylistic work during that period, other experiments with rhetorical aspects of style are examined, such as Young, Becker, and Pike’s tagmemic rhetoric; Corbett’s amplification and Lanham’s classical tropes and figures; and Christensen’s generative rhetoric. The contrast in these practices is important

in that the language-based approaches correspond with improving the fluent command of varied stylistic resources, especially syntactic ones; the others, in contrast, are connected with the rhetorical *use* of these resources. In both instances, the dynamic theories and practices are a vital part of the process period and suggest a use that has often been overlooked in accounts of the Golden Age. It is significant that the tendency has been to write many of these practices out of the history of the period.

TAGMEMIC STYLE

Perhaps no one else during the 1970s articulated the importance of an inventive style more clearly than the trio of Young, Becker, and Pike. In “Toward a Modern Theory of Rhetoric: A Tagmemic Contribution,” Young and Becker (1967), relying in part on Pike’s development of tagmemics as a field of linguistics, argued that style should be looked at as more than merely a deviation from the norm and should include not only the prewriting process, but all other aspects of the writing process as well: “In a complete theory, then, a particular style is a characteristic series of choices throughout the *entire process of writing, including both discovery (invention) and linguistic selection and grouping (arrangement)*” (Young and Becker 1967, 107; emphasis added). Berlin stated in his book *Rhetoric and Reality* that for Young and Becker “form and content are one.” Perhaps more important, Berlin recognized that Young and Becker saw arrangement and style as intricately related to invention: “In their view,” Berlin stated, “discussions of arrangement and style are finally discussions of invention” (1987, 171). Young and Becker developed this theory of an “inventive style” in an overall concept that they called “the universe of discourse”:

A writer’s style, we believe, is the characteristic route he takes through all the choices presented in both the writing and prewriting stages. It is the manifestation of his conception of the topic modified by his audience, situation, and intention—what we might call his “universe of discourse.” (Young and Becker 1967, 140)

Clearly, then, Young and Becker did not see style as something “added on” at the end of the writing process or as separate from content. For them, it was an integral part of every facet of rhetoric and central to any successful writing activity; stated differently, it was a quintessential part of the process movement.

While Young, Becker, and Pike (1970) are often cited for the notion of “tagmemic invention”—which relies on a theory of particle, wave, and field—at the center of their text, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, their broad conception of style, which they defined as a “way of behaving,” is not as well known. A key aspect of their redefinition of style was their emphasis on its epistemological implications: the fact that it helps form the content of any product at each stage of the writing *process*:

When people think of a writer’s style, they usually think of the distinctive features of his prose—a distinctive lexicon and syntax and, less often, a distinctive subject matter. That is, style is conventionally defined in terms of characteristics of the finished work. While granting that this concept of style is at times useful, we want to offer an alternative that emphasizes instead what one does as he is writing. We propose to view style as a particular way of behaving. Our focus, then, is on characteristics of the process of writing rather than on characteristics of the product. (359)

Although not going against traditional conceptions of style, Young, Becker, and Pike nevertheless proposed a new view of the writer as a “creator” who “must see the art of rhetoric in dynamic terms, as search and choice, as a way of behaving.” Already allying themselves in 1970 with more social views of writing, the authors saw the writer as one “concerned with formulating elements of experience and ordering them in coherent and meaningful systems, with formulating his relationship with his readers, and with shaping the notions welling up in his mind into a verbal object” (360). Their view of style as social, rhetorical, and intentional suggested its close affiliation with today’s popular conceptions of the process of writing.

In what can only be seen as an anticipation of Carolyn Miller's characterization of genre theory (Miller 1984), Young, Becker, and Pike also described the development of what they called an "intelligent style," or "an ability to isolate and identify the problems inherent in the activity of writing and to move toward workable solutions deliberately" (Young *et al.* 1970, 360). They suggested that writers must have a concept of writing problems that they view both generically and specifically and then adopt heuristic procedures that allow the intelligent stylist to "behave in new situations as if he has been there before." The problem-based approach made style much more than a static element of the writing process. As Young, Becker, and Pike described it, "By conceiving of the process of writing as a search for solutions to an interrelated sequence of problems and by providing heuristic procedures as guides in this search, we have sought to provide the tools necessary to form an intelligent style or reform an unintelligent one" (360–61). Clearly, they viewed style and invention as part of a dynamic process of writing in which the two canons, both parts of an "interrelated sequence of problems," are inseparable. Furthermore, the authors connected style and inventional problem solving in a way that anticipated the cognitive-based rhetoric of Linda Flower and John Hayes (1981), which evolved at a slightly later point of the process era.

In their view of style as part of an overall rhetoric that includes invention and arrangement, Young and Becker (1967) challenged some of the countervailing characterizations of style as the defining feature of current-traditional rhetoric and a product-based paradigm. Rather, in their view, style was one important element of their overall rhetorical theory of "tagmemics." Traditionally, they explain, style, while borrowing from a foundation of grammar, went beyond that foundation to explore how language could be used in various rhetorical situations:

Style, the third of the rhetorical arts in classical rhetoric, was largely the technique of framing effective sentences. Its function was to give clarity, force, and beauty to ideas. Although grammar was its

foundation, style was clearly a separate art, concerned with the effective use of language rather than simply with the correct use. (83)

Young and Becker went on to explain that style could become an end in itself, “at times preempting the entire field of rhetoric” (84), partly because of the theoretical division of form from content. Addressing what Milic refers to as the dualistic view of language, the authors considered the separation of form from content in both arrangement and style a serious deficiency. They observed, “Both the art of arrangement and the art of style divorce form from content, *failing to consider the importance of the act of discovery in the shaping of form*” (85; emphasis added). Thus, they were especially concerned that seeing style as merely a deviation from the norm has the effect of treating conventional language as “styleless language”: mere embellishment with no connection to invention (106). They indicated the importance of style’s inventive qualities in the discovery of language, a vital role that few others acknowledged explicitly, either during the process era or later in the retrospective accounts of that period.

CLASSICAL RHETORIC

Despite Corbett’s general recognition for his innovative work in recuperating the study of style during the 1970s and 1980s, his work in classical rhetoric is not often associated specifically with composition’s process era. In many respects, his theories of style constituted a very real part of style’s Golden Age, yet he never made the explicit connection between style and invention that seems to exist, at least implicitly, in many aspects of his work. For example, Corbett made no more than a reference to the importance of an inventional style when he retraced the “three-fold implication” of *lexis*, the Greek word for style, in which “we take the *thoughts* collected by invention and put them into *words* for the *speaking out* in delivery” (Corbett 1971, 414). I contend that Corbett’s failure to make the explicit connection between style and invention has resulted in his work on style sometimes being overlooked as an integral part of the process era in which it is clearly situated.

One specific area where Corbett alluded to the reciprocal effect that invention and style had on each other was in his brief discussion of classical amplification, or extenuation, which he defined as the process of highlighting, or making “as big as possible,” the points made in speech or writing (Corbett 1971, 334). Corbett wrote that “the invention of matter . . . eventually had its effect on style when there developed a great interest in amplification” (1989a, 144). Classical scholar Douglas Kelly has suggested that amplification “provides the author with modal or formal techniques by which to achieve topical invention” (Kelly 1978, 245). Indeed, the idea that amplification invents a liminal space that exists between “figures of speech” and “figures of thought” places it at the very intersection between style and invention during the “new classicism” of the process era. As rhetorical scholar Don Paul Abbott (2001) explains, in classical rhetoric, amplification was an important part of copiousness or “*copie*,” whose various meanings include variation, abundance or richness, eloquence, and the ability to vary language and thought. According to Abbott, “amplification was, in effect, the active implementation of imitation. As such, the process combined the classical divisions of invention, style, and arrangement” (162). It is clear that Corbett saw amplification as a means of producing *copia* because of the variety of expression it produces. Even though he never used the idea explicitly to connect style and invention, however, he did acknowledge that “*copia* was partly a matter of fertile invention and partly a matter of stylistic resourcefulness” (Corbett 1989a, 131). In certain indirect ways, then, one can infer that Corbett regarded the intersection of invention and style as the fertile ground of language resources.

While Corbett saw invention and style as separate, but equally important, canons of rhetoric, Lanham attributed to style an importance that few others do, stating that composition’s “natural subject is style” (1974, 14). In *Style: An Anti-Textbook*, Lanham (1974) observed, “Writing courses usually stress, not style, but rhetoric’s other two traditional parts, finding arguments and arranging them” (131). Lanham added, however, “*Yet both,*

implicit in a study of style, emerge naturally only from a concentration on it" (13–14; emphasis added). In placing style ahead of invention and arrangement in his version of the rhetorical hierarchy, Lanham suggested that "style itself must be the object of contemplation" (14). Like Corbett, Lanham also turned to classical rhetoric as the source of his recuperative effort, where he drew upon rhetorical tropes and figures. Lanham's placement of style first in the canonical hierarchy began a theme of reversal that runs throughout his work and continues into his most recent book (Lanham 2006).

In his focus on style, rather than on invention, as the primary rhetorical canon, Lanham adopted the view that "rhetorical man is trained not to discover reality but to manipulate it" (1976, 4). He contrasted this rhetorical view with the "serious" view of a transparent style whose objective is the efficient communication of "facts, concepts, or imitations of reality" (1). According to Lanham, it is important to look self-consciously *at* the stylistic surface—what he called the opaque style—rather than *through* style to an underlying reality where a transparent content is normally thought to exist. He stated that he discovered this idea while studying the rhetorical language in Sir Philip Sidney's *Old Arcadia*:

He was trying to glimpse a world where verbal ornament is as essential as essence, as serious as serious purpose, and as needful for man, and where ornament and essence, like systole and diastole, like breathing out and breathing in, constitute the life-giving oscillation of human life. (Lanham 1983b, 58)

Borrowing from one of Burke's ideas in *Counter-Statement* (1968), Lanham argued that style reverses our normal way of thinking about what constitutes reality. "Style," he wrote, "instead of creating the decorative surface of reality, may be reality's major constituent element" (Lanham 1983b, 77). Lanham elaborated on this idea in his discussion of the virtues of the opaque style:

The opaque styles, then, imply a reality, a self, a pattern of attention, and a range of motive different from those usually called “serious” but equally necessary to our own full reality. When put in a behavioral context they reverse the whole direction of thinking about style. The tail seems to have been wagging the dog all along. (1983b, 76)

For Lanham, in “a world where words determine thoughts” (140), style is an essential part of “man as fundamentally a role player” who is motivated to play not only for advantage but also for pleasure (1976, 4–5). Style, then, becomes an important element of “play” and “game” through language, and it is through verbal play, said Lanham, that style should be studied and taught. Lanham’s idea of style-as-play placed his aesthetic approach to language in line with several theories of the period, including deconstruction. His view of style as more than a transparent medium countered a tradition of plain style, clarity, and the conception of style as inseparable from content. Lanham argued convincingly that focusing on the stylistic surface and the play of language as ornament can, in itself, give students important language resources. He suggested that people should experiment with “hypotaxis” and “parataxis,” with “periodic” and “running” style, and with the iconography of style (an apparent precursor to today’s visual rhetoric as well as Lanham’s interest in hypertext as reflected in his book *The Electronic Word* 1993). In all pertinent ways, he suggested, style can help generate ideas, confirming his notion that style can, through the use of language, be inventive. Lanham is perhaps one of the only recent scholars to assume that style is *the* indispensable rhetorical canon that cannot be ignored, a position that has never been considered seriously by the field.

GENERATIVE RHETORIC

In “A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence,” the main articulation of his views on the subject, Christensen (1963) set forth his ideas for how to help students develop a mature style. In part, Christensen was attempting to address his belief that “in

composition courses, we do not really teach our captive charges to write better—we merely *expect* them to” (F. Christensen and B. Christensen 1978, 25). Christensen’s central premise of sentence maturity can be summed up in writer John Erksine’s statement: “You make a point, not by subtracting as though you sharpened a pencil, but by adding” (26). Thus, in order to help writers develop a mature style, Christensen began with the principle of “addition,” by which he meant adding sentence modifiers of different lengths—which he called “free modifiers”—to base clauses that are often short. Sentences composed of base clauses and free modifiers are called “cumulative sentences,” which he said function according to four principles: addition, the direction of modification, levels of generality, and texture. Christensen explained the process further:

The main clause, which may or may not have a sentence modifier before it, advances the discussion; but the additions placed after it move backward, as in this clause, to modify the statement of the main clause or more often to explicate it or exemplify it, so that the sentence has a flowing and ebbing movement, advancing to a new position and then pausing to consolidate it, leaping and lingering as the popular ballad does. (F. Christensen and B. Christensen 1978, 27–28)

As Richard Coe indicates, Christensen’s use of free modifiers has a particular function in generating a recursive language process:

The most “natural” place to add a “loose” or free modifier . . . is in the postmodifier slot, located after the noun or verb it modifies. Physically, the sentence keeps moving across the page, but cognitively/rhetorically, the sentence pauses. As the modifier attaches to a preceding base, the “movement” or “direction of modification” is back toward that noun or verb “head.” (Coe 1998, 133)

While the intended outcomes of Christensen’s syntactic emphasis have been explored, few scholars have noted another important feature of these structures: the cognitive importance

of being able to articulate relationships among concepts and phenomena. Thus, for Christensen, the use of generative rhetoric to develop maturity in writing worked in the sense that syntax forms a number of varying relationships—those between agent, action, and object of the action; logical, spatial, chronological, and hierarchical relationships; and “given” and “new” elements of a sentence, to name a few. The idea in generative rhetoric is that these various aspects of syntax reflect and, in turn, may catalyze cognitive maturation toward more complex thought. In other words, the use of syntax in the form of cumulative sentences presumably allows the writer to express more complex ideas and relationships, which is what makes writing “better” or more mature.

For Christensen, the word “generative” was important in suggesting that form can be used in the invention and production of language. “We need a rhetoric of the sentence,” he observed, “that will do more than combine the ideas of primer sentences. We need one that will *generate* ideas” (F. Christensen and B. Christensen 1978, 26). Coe (1998) indicated that the idea of generating content includes invention: “The crux of Christensen’s generative rhetoric is the use of form—especially syntax—to generate content (i.e., not just as *dispositio*, but also as a technique for *inventio*)” (131). He further explained the idea of the generative nature of form in his influential *College English* article, “An Apology for Form; Or, Who Took the Form out of the Process”: “Form, in its emptiness, is heuristic, for it guides a structured search. Faced with the emptiness of a form, a human being seeks matter to fill it. Form becomes, therefore, a motive for generating information” (Coe 1987, 18). Indeed, as Coe suggested, Christensen’s own language indicated that he intended a connection between style and invention. In “The Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence,” originally published in 1963, Christensen wrote, “The idea of levels of structure urge[s] the student to add further levels to what he has already produced, so that *the structure itself becomes an aid to discovery*” (1978, 24; emphasis added).

Christensen's rhetoric becomes inventive in the sense that writers can build upon the base clause in a way that allows them to generate further ideas. In "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence," Christensen (1978) explained this inventional process:

The main clause . . . exhausts the mere fact of the idea: logically there is nothing more to say. The additions stay with the same idea, probing its bearings and implications, exemplifying it or seeking an analogy or metaphor for it, or reducing it to details. Thus the mere form of the sentence generates ideas. It serves the needs of both the writer and the reader, the writer by compelling him to examine his thought, the reader by letting him into the writer's thought. (6)

For Christensen, the cumulative sentence, with its principle of addition that involves right-branching and left-branching sentences, was a key part of writing dynamic sentences "representing the mind thinking" and forcing the writer to explore the implications of an idea—that is, to "amplify" that idea. In this sense, the very form of the sentence, considered by Christensen to be an essential part of its style, is productive; as a heuristic, it becomes part of invention. Berlin (1987) acknowledged the importance of generative rhetoric during the process era when he wrote that Christensen "taught writing teachers something about the relation of form to meaning, especially the ways in which linguistic forms can themselves generate meaning" (136).

SENTENCE COMBINING

Even though Christensen (1978) eschewed any connection between generative rhetoric and sentence combining, there are, in fact, many points of intersection between the two practices. As William Stull (1985) has suggested, "Sentence combining and generative rhetoric work towards the same ends: syntactic maturity as evidenced by good original writing" (84). Stull adds that he sees the possibility that a synthesis of the two would prove synergistic:

Each method may well enhance the other. To sentence-combining practice, the generative rhetoric adds a conceptual framework. To Christensen's four principles of style, sentence combining gives specific application. Where sentence combining enhances students' written fluency, generative rhetoric enhances their sense of style. (85)

Despite Stull's claim that there are a number of points of intersection between the two practices, there are also differences. Whereas generative rhetoric is based on structural grammar, sentence combining originates in Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar. While generative rhetoric is based on Christensen's principles of addition, direction of modification, levels of generality, and texture, sentence combining uses techniques of embedding, deletion, subordination, and coordination. The practice of sentence combining benefited from several early studies. Probably, the most important was that of Kellogg Hunt, who discovered that a good indicator of maturity in writing was the length of clauses, "what I will describe as one main clause plus whatever subordinate clauses happen to be attached to or embedded within it" (Hunt 1965, 305). In assessing stylistic maturity, Hunt found that a reliable indicator was something he developed and called the "minimal terminable unit" or "T-unit." Each T-unit, he suggested, is "minimal in length, and each could be terminated grammatically between a capital and a period" (306). In other words, T-units are units of syntax that can be punctuated as complete sentences, and Hunt's idea is that students should be able to write longer T-units at the end of the semester than at the beginning (see Halloran and Whitburn 1982, 59–60).

On the basis of Chomskyan theory, sentence combining drew on differences between deep and surface structures in language that have been useful in stylistic analysis. Both the deep and surface structures of a sentence have proven significant. If it is true, as Chomsky argued, that the deep structures (relational patterns) of a language can generate an indefinite number of understandable statements (surface structures), then the very

act of choosing among—or generating choice among—numerous possibilities itself involves an inventive process, that is, a process of choice and creation. This is an extremely generative aspect of sentence combining that many sentence-combining adherents did not articulate as forcefully as Christensen did, but that exists nonetheless.

At the same time, however, it is clear that scholars have established a connection between the principles of Chomsky's generative-transformational grammar and the improvement in student writing. In particular, as O'Hare stated, the Bateman and Zidonis study in the 1970s established the authors' claim that "a knowledge of generative grammar enabled students to increase significantly the proportion of well-formed sentences they wrote and to increase the complexity without sacrificing the grammaticality of their sentences" (O'Hare 1973, 6). O'Hare pointed out that John Mellon's study, reported in *Transformational Sentence-Combining*, essentially reached the same conclusion. In both instances, O'Hare stated, the evidence was compelling, but ultimately inconclusive: "Although it is at least questionable whether it was a knowledge of generative grammar that led Bateman and Zidonis's students to write more mature sentences, it is not unreasonable to assume that something in their experimental treatment must have caused those students to write more maturely" (18). The final report of the project in 1970 described more fully the circumstances in which students studied and transformed their style and also made several prescient recommendations regarding the study of style in composition.

When Mellon argued in "Issues in the Theory and Practice of Sentence-Combining: A Twenty-Year Perspective" that "sentence-combining covers arrangement and style but not invention," he adhered to the classical separation of each of the canons. Yet, in stating that a writing class structured around sentence combining "could be better still were the sentence-combining lessons paired with lessons on invention and the structure of argument" (Mellon 1979, 29), Mellon did not acknowledge the generative, and potentially inventional, aspects of sentence combining

itself. This is not to say, of course, that Mellon did not recognize that invention and style are related to each other. I argue, however, that he has not given full credit to the practice that he had such an integral role in designing. Furthermore, his position confirms the tendency, as Winterrowd argued, to see sentence combining as simply a series of exercises, divorced from a true rhetorical context. This is the precise critique made by Elbow (1985), who argued that the concentration on syntax in sentence combining is ultimately harmful as a generative tool:

I think sentence-combining is vulnerable to attack for being so a-rhetorical—so distant from the essential process of writing. In sentence-combining the student is not engaged in figuring out what she wants to say or saying what is on her mind. And because it provides prepackaged words and ready-made thoughts, sentence-combining reinforces the push-button, fast food expectations in our culture. (233)

In contrast to Elbow's claim, I argue that sentence combining has essentially been unfairly misunderstood, even by some of its practitioners. Mellon did not link sentence combining with invention in his 1979 article, which many saw as the final word on sentence combining. However, sentence-combining articles and research continued until the mid-1980s, and as the seven new editions of *The Writer's Options* demonstrated, scholars attempted to place sentence combining within a rhetorical context. When Shirley K. Rose (1983) suggested, however, that sentence combining was not a new practice but was part of a number of similar practices that had originated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, her historical survey did not include anything about the inventive, generative, or rhetorical aspects of that practice. It seems clear that those who took up Chomsky's generative-transformational grammar as the foundation for sentence combining did not give full credit to his theories as the basis of inventive language processes. For that reason, I argue, sentence combining has been misinterpreted in the overall retrospective account of the process era and has not been given a

fully comprehensive evaluation in its role as a feature of inventive, generative, and rhetorical language production.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR COMPOSITION STUDIES

It is important to observe how certain parts of composition history acquire intellectual pedigrees that can be difficult to change. One example of such a phenomenon is composition's process movement, retrospective accounts of which are beginning to be scrutinized as scholars question the way process is now described or defined. For example, Tobin and Newkirk (1994) express concerns with the retrojection of expressivism and, in *Taking Stock*, question the way this movement gets pejoratively labeled after the fact as the central aspect of the process era. Johnson (2003) has identified the same trend in his reexamination of a renegade rhetoric that he sees as misinterpreted in composition scholarship of the past few decades. Connors (2000) writes of a similar occurrence when he revalues sentence rhetorics in "The Erasure of the Sentence." Importantly, the process of retrojection has also figured prominently in the fate of stylistic study in rhetoric and composition. In fact, I argue that the retrospective affiliation of style with a much-maligned current-traditional rhetoric has ultimately resulted in the loss of a rich reservoir of resources which, as this chapter has shown, were deployed with great success during composition's process era. These stylistic resources are intimately connected with invention and suggest ways of generating language and ideas in productive ways. Indeed, the resources of style offer ways to revalue practices like amplification, generative rhetoric, sentence combining, and tagmemic rhetoric for writers. As Connors (2000) suggests in his analysis of sentence combining—one that applies to all the stylistic techniques I explore here—nothing has ever shown that these stylistic practices do not aid in developing language maturity or fluency. In other words, these techniques are effective in developing a writer's style.

In any revaluation of an inventional style that developed during the process era, however, an important question

remains: What is at stake in reanimating the study of style as an important part of process? As a field, what do we gain by reclaiming stylistic practices from the process era even if they are inextricably linked to invention and other dynamic features of language use? First, in doing so, composition gives itself a reason for rehabilitating the study of style as a topic of serious scholarly inquiry. As it stands, the absence of style from retrospective accounts of the process period very likely reflects the desire to avoid any pejorative affiliation of the term “style” with current-traditional rhetoric and its connection to grammar and usage, the use of models or forms, and other practices that have acquired “baggage” in the field over time. Yet, even if this stylistic taboo is lifted, how is the recuperation of style as a vital part of process helpful today? One benefit, I argue, is in reestablishing a close nexus between style and invention, which is worthwhile as we look at the tools available for analyzing discourse. Because style has come to be thought of generally as a static canon that is deployed only at the *end* of the writing process, it has been difficult to imagine it as a vital way to generate language—as a resource for constructing language and discovering new ideas through writing. In reestablishing style’s connection with invention, those concerns are now allayed, paving the way for a new inventional style as part of composition practice.

Another advantage may seem less obvious at first. The stylistic options mentioned in this chapter represent some of the process-era language practices in use during that time. While some may still be used in composition classrooms, I suggest that most are not, and certainly not to the same extent. Imagine the possibilities that exist in renewing these stylistic resources as seen through the lens of their inventive qualities. If these are reclaimed today with an eye toward their potential use in generating language and ideas through writing, a real renaissance of stylistic discovery could be in store for composition theory, practice, and pedagogy. This chapter has shown that style’s exclusion from the field results, at heart, from an

accidental affiliation with current-traditional rhetoric that denies the inventional aspects of stylistic techniques. Given the field's turn toward social and public forms of writing, the advantages of an inventional style are clear. It seems that the time is ripe to bring the study of style, out of style for so long, back into the reservoir of language resources that process-era scholars recognized as crucial to the language theories and innovations of the time.