THE USES OF LITERATURE

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Writing suspends all the familiar ways of organizing thought and experience: the genres of discourse, the distinctions between disciplinary and disciplining modes of thinking, such as that between literature and philosophy. . . . [Writing] does not have a pole and does not proceed from truth. As an operator of destabilization, it liberates a space within which the separation between the sensible and the intelligible which has been mapped upon the distinction and the association of language to thought can no longer function. It breaks up closure by producing signs and effects. It produces an immanence of its own, which excludes that of a meaning prior or exterior to the process of writing itself. It is a form of autonomy, to be sure, but one that protests against the concept, for it both represents and is difference.

—Wlad Godzich, The Culture of Literacy

Elizabeth Rankin (2000) has identified two primary positions in contemporary style debates: neoclassicists contend style can be cultivated and learned through mimetic and practical exercises, to dress ideas and polish prose; neoromantics, on the other hand, construe style as a manifestation of a distinct voice, and the pedagogue serves to facilitate its realization and performance. Rankin contends that while neoclassicists ignore the extent to which anxieties about style interfere with an ability to formulate cogent arguments, neoromanticists imagine that “style is the man,” that achieving a distinct style somehow exemplifies the ineluctable character of a person. Both positions potentially leave students mystified about how language (as a techne) works: how syntactical arrangements pace prose and reinforce meaning; how figurative language shapes thought and produces varied effects; how factors such as audience, context, and genre inform the deployment of stylistic tactics. Rankin thereby calls for a “new theory of style,” supple enough to encompass the broad-ranging heuristic, psychological, and social factors that make style-based pedagogy challenging to negotiate.
My essay situates Rankin’s pedagogical objectives within a broader matrix of disciplinary and social dynamics by examining how an “old theory of style,” Adam Smith’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1985; delivered in 1748), postulated a series of contradictory oppositions, among and between ideas and expression, prose and poetry, work and leisure—all of which inform in varying degrees assumptions and dispositions that vex contemporary debates about relations among and between language and thought, process and product, composition and literary studies. Smith (better known for his work in moral philosophy and political economy) debunked classical rhetoricians by claiming among other things that language held the most currency when shorn of artifice, when it enabled clear, direct communication. He valued the stylistic ideal of “perspicuity” and lamented how the English language was becoming mongrelized by “foreign” and “vulgar” elements. This conservative conception of style—resistant to both linguistic and social change and intolerant of diversity, literal and figurative—assumes language bears a transparent relation to the object world, serving simply as a medium of communication (a static technology, rather than a dynamic techne).

I cite Smith’s interest in style as homogenized social commerce as an illustrative backdrop to a more recent trend, in which composition and expository writing courses have adopted content and principles generally associated with the field of cultural studies. In an effort to make the practice of writing more accessible to students from a diverse range of disciplinary and sociocultural backgrounds, courses often draw upon reading material thought to be more relevant to students’ lives: noncanonical literature, contemporary fiction and prose, as well as popular and mass culture. This preference for course content that figures issues of language style as transparent (a tendency coinciding with an ostensible turn away from certain genres and forms of literature and rhetoric deemed too remote in language usage) potentially occludes the complex ways style intensifies and motivates reading experiences and practices, and in turn, facilitates the realization of goals and objectives specific to writing pedagogy.

In the following discussion, I examine the consequences of disentangling ideas from the complexities of means and methods of written communication and oral expression, and how this obscures the relevance of style in students’ development as writers. I first outline how Smith’s *Lectures* conflated issues of logic and expression, by imagining style as a manifestation of individual temperament, a construal that remained in
fundamental tension with the broader nationalistic and normative aims of the “new rhetoric.” I then weigh the extent to which cultural studies has revivified style debates in writing pedagogy by prioritizing experience and identity, championing expressive pluralism, and retaining a preference for accessible subject matter, that is, mass and popular cultural artifacts—a predilection that in some ways mirrors Adam Smith’s reductive contention that “[n]o one ever made a bargain in verse” (1985, 137), that figurative language and poetic ornament obstruct the plain dealings of popular forms of discourse and representation. By examining these stances, I wish to come to terms with how writing pedagogy can confront style impasses and honor the difficulties and frustrations students in fact experience when working to cultivate and refine their writing.4

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The eighteenth-century Scottish belles lettres movement distinguished itself from antecedent neoclassical principles of disputation, invention, and imitation. Adam Smith’s *Lectures* emphasized perspicuity of style, correct language usage, and diversity of emotional effect, largely bracketing questions of logic and persuasion to prioritize authorial character, audience reception, and dispositional taste.5 Drawing upon existing disciplines such as moral and natural philosophy, as well as political economy, Smith postulated a “new rhetoric,” which took as its object of study the vernacular and took as its social mission civil exchange, rather than political oratory.6 The discipline from which he largely derived the basis for his theory of style—moral philosophy—later splintered into various humanistic and social scientific fields, such as aesthetics and ethnology. Smith’s *Lectures* contemplated writing styles of ancient and contemporary sources in drama, history, law, philosophy, and politics. It provided detailed character analyses of authors (dead and living) and the style of their works and recommended methods for depicting characters in a variety of contexts. The *Lectures* range widely across genres and disciplines, surveying how emotions, such as awe, grief, modesty, and surprise, are experienced and expressed through writing; it deemed capturing “the spirit” of an author, an action, or an occasion as paramount, not only when translating a work from one language to another, but also when determining a style’s effectiveness.

Smith’s conception of style as temperament—as a mercurial rhetorical barometer—highlighted the expressive and social dimensions of language in unprecedented ways. At the individual level, its execution devolved from the passions and lived experience, rather than moral
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precepts. Swift’s propensity for ridicule garners praise, for example, because his “harsh and unpleasant . . . compositions” distill a style “suit[ed] well enough with [his] morose humour” (1985, 23), while Lord Shaftsbury’s “polite dignity” (59) comes under fire for breeding halfhearted expositions, imitative of the ancients. At the national level, Smith’s stylistic tenet of perspicuity spoke to large-scale efforts to personify a normative moral character and to standardize the English language, to promote cultural hegemony and social assimilation in the colonies, the provinces, and the mainland. His more thoroughgoing emphasis upon emotional phenomena and resonance mystified, however, some of the actual basis upon which stylistic effects were achieved—that is, through a knowledge and application of grammar and a socialized awareness of conventions of language usage. In short, the cause or means of producing a style mattered less than the end result: prose bristling with passionate conviction or the spirit of an age.

Smith’s Lectures vividly register incongruities between the practical enactment of and theoretical justification for an ethos, and this tension has left its trace upon how style variously figures in contemporary writing pedagogy within the humanities and across the disciplines. Writing-intensive courses, for example, often prioritize academic argument, valorizing a “plain style” to create knowledge and to convey research findings. Indeed, Smith in “Lecture 7” notably differentiated the characters and styles of the “plain” and “simple” man, regarding the former as one who, among other things, clings to a “self-sufficient imperious temper” (1985, 37) and the latter as one who was “open to conviction” and “more given to admiration and pity . . . and compassion than the contrary affections” (38). While in the Lectures, a plain style does not necessarily correspond to or rest upon the same exclusionary premises of perspicuity, it does presuppose a known standard; and while such style discourse continues to saturate commentary about and descriptions of writing, it’s not necessarily accompanied by reflection upon the ways in which language produces its plain effects.

Smith equated a plain style with a certain detached cognitive self-satisfaction (exemplified for him by Swift’s critical forte, ridicule), and this epistemological orientation potentially resonates with contemporary calls for a “plain style,” to the extent that it assumes one can channel ideas and logic through language, without explicitly addressing how the medium of language realizes the expression of ideas in written form. It uncritically perpetuates the belles lettres conflation of style of language
usage with the character and disposition of authors, as if writing unproblematically reflected such diverse and varied human attributes as intelligence and personality. It discounts how the complexities of interpersonal dynamics and social expectations can inhibit self-expression, or indeed, determine whether one in fact practices the skill of writing in various disciplinary and social contexts. David Russell, for example, trenchantly traces the evolution of these conflicting understandings of writing, noting how in late-nineteenth-century America “the mass education system tenaciously clung to the outmoded conception of writing as transcribed speech and to the vanishing ideal of a single academic community, united by common values, goals, and standards of discourse,” which resulted in “a conceptual split between ‘content’ and ‘expression,’ learning and writing” (1991, 5).

Critics and teachers within the contemporary humanities have regarded ad hominem style talk circumspectly, in part for the evident way it casts specious judgments upon means and methods of self-expression. The invocation of a plain style particularly stirs serious misgivings and contentious questioning: what social norms belie “straight talk”? what emotional sterility does it impossibly require? what political naïveté underscores this rhetorical populism? While well warranted, such skepticism forestalls discussions of how these issues can be used to pedagogical advantage; further, preemptively scorning style has had far-reaching consequences for teachers of writing: causing some to disavow their specific disciplinary expertise or to efface the intellectual and social value of their labor by dismissing stylistic considerations as finessed lessons in grammatical instruction. Such responses impact how students experience and value our pedagogical ministrations. Cultural studies has in recent years posed a compelling challenge to style talk, and I now wish to examine briefly the extent to which some of its methods and procedures in the writing classroom have at once enabled valuable interrogation, while also replicating in key ways some of the signature logistical and methodological impasses of its belle-lettristic predecessor.

Cultural studies approaches commonly interrogate the ethical and social assumptions underlying service-oriented writing courses that aim primarily to prepare students to truck, barter, and trade in academic discourse. But just as belles lettres reoriented scholastic interest away from Greek and Latin texts toward contemporaneous vernacular literature, cultural studies shifts academic focus from literature and rhetoric toward mass culture and other popular forms of representation. The historical
circumstances and justifications underscoring these respective methods of inquiry obviously differ. Cultural studies performs its maneuvers presuming in part that privileging categories such as experience, personal expression, and identity democratizes access to higher education, encouraging students to participate in their learning by reflecting upon issues relevant to, and capable of transforming, their individual lives and the social world. *Belles lettres*, on the other hand, appealed to perspicuity, claiming it promoted the kind of discursive homogeneity and social harmony that yielded productive commercial and managerial exchanges.

These contrasting humanistic initiatives nonetheless bear striking resemblances when juxtaposed. *Belles lettres* glossed style’s particularity as a phenomenon of written language by collapsing it into individual temperament; cultural studies likewise eclipsed the specificity of style with respect to matters of writing by casting it as a product of social and political effects. Both models consequently emphasize the role of consumers: while *belles lettres* addressed the emotional reactions of audiences and readers, cultural studies focused upon the construction and formation of individual and group identities within the context of, and in relation to, mass and popular culture. As a result, each approach rests upon its own set of normative assumptions about how individuals identify with or relate to dominant and marginalized social identities: for example, *belles lettres* assumed that sympathetic identifications among persons yielded productive civil and social exchanges, while cultural studies often explores frictive relations among classes of persons with competing interests and values.

In spite of such disparate premises, these respective humanistic agendas purport to promote social inclusion, inside and outside the classroom. *Belles lettres* imagined that establishing standards by which to judge means and methods of expression made the sphere of commercial and social commerce more inclusive, even while it required participants to conform to conventions and ideals designed to shore up the cultural hegemony and social manners of an emergent mercantile class. Cultural studies largely assumed that academic inquiry into the constructed nature of identities, as well as the function and purpose of quotidian cultural artifacts and popular discourse, would level the playing field for students with limited access to the kind of cultural and social capital of more privileged peers.

While cultural studies pitches its vision of the humanities as being more politically and practically oriented than the field of literature, *belles lettres* postulated that effective language communication promoted social
awareness and sympathy in everyday life, in ways that an anachronistic and politically motivated classical rhetoric could not. Each account consequently regards the political as somehow instrumental, without explicitly weighing the extent to which politically motivated disciplinary justifications compromise knowledge claims and pedagogical goals or the extent to which one’s actions or practices do in fact achieve “political” consequences in a sphere (at best) auxiliary or tangential to the actual workings of the political domain. If Smith distilled style in part to temperament, cultural studies largely displaced it onto political and social effects; both models as a result dismiss ESL issues, tacitly assigning, for antithetical reasons, a polemic and stigma to meeting the specific language difficulties and needs of nonnative speakers. A conscientiously deployed style-based pedagogy could more openly address social inclusion in the classroom by not presupposing students already recognize linguistic and social conventions of the so-called high or low cultural kind.

Kathryn Flannery alternatively suggests, for example, that style-based pedagogy promotes civic and social virtues by equipping students with the rhetorical resources to participate actively in democratic practices, to critique and understand various kinds of rhetoric inside and outside the academy. While by and large consistent with the politics of a cultural studies approach, Flannery emphasizes the necessity for understanding style in ways that connect form to content and in terms of individual choices and effects, which manifest within preexisting disciplinary, ethical, literate, and social contexts. She perceptively notes, for example, the prevalence in composition studies of an “odd conjuncture of a liberatory (but not therefore revolutionary) rhetoric and the privileging of a normative hygienic prose (clear, concise, forceful and sincere).” (1995, 4). Her historical materialist study fruitfully examines how various style agendas overlook the role of rhetoric within practices of writing, though she’s less relentless about pursuing the normative flipside of counterrhetorics: that is, the so-called revolutionary rhetoric, which might lead her to places where language substantively falls short (i.e., pain, violence, the material world).

Certain kinds of agonized and aggressive language, such as cussing and swearing, commonly fall off the humanist rhetorical radar; these often figure instead as spontaneous rages of speech, beyond the more reflective pale of writing. In addition to recuperating rhetoric as an object of study, speech needs to be factored as a phenomenon that leaves an indelible impression upon the ways in which one relates to and practices writing. Barthes paradoxically noted:
It is ephemeral speech that is indelible, not monumental writing. . . . The correcting and improving movement of speech is the wavering of a flow of words, a weave which wears itself out catching itself up, a chain of augmentative corrections. . . . context is a structural given not of language but of speech and it is the very status of context to be reductive of meaning. The spoken word is “clear”; the banishment of polysemy (such banishment being the definition of “clarity”) serves the Law—all speech is on the side of the Law. (1977b, 190–91; emphasis in original)

While acknowledging that speech transactions routinely result in misunderstandings, Barthes equates speech with “clarity,” assuming that a situated context allows for clarification, which ignores the obvious fact that individuals (by definition) cannot inhabit the exact lived context of an interlocutor, regardless of whether they share a proximate social context. Barthes’s series of negations in relation to speech—that is, not writing, not language, not polysemy—in short does not factor the ways in which it comes to bear upon language acquisition and writing proficiency.

My brief exegesis of cultural studies’ absorption into composition and writing curricula suggested this recent development has in effect reproduced dilemmas registered long ago within belles lettres and other “clear, concise, forceful and sincere” style movements. Flannery, too, grasps this point at some level when she caps off her introduction, “Style as Cultural Capital,” by noting:

I see this book contributing to a growing conversation concerning postmodern democratic institutions. It is neither possible nor desirable to simply recuperate John Dewey’s progressive vision [of democratic education], but it does seem to be the moment—in the midst of, on the one hand, a sometimes alienating critical discourse that too often leads to nothing other than its reproduction, and on the other hand, a nostalgic return to a humanism that never was . . . [to reconsider] the paradoxical possibilities of a postmodern democracy. (1995, 32)

Following Flannery’s lead, I focus less upon the real or imagined political consequences of these methodologies than on the bearing they have upon institutional and professional responsibilities, to value commensurately and proportionately the teaching of reading and writing, alongside other forms of research, scholarship, and knowledge production. As questions of style have obsessed rhetoricians from antiquity to the modern world, I wish to consider the extent to which an enduring interest in
and suspicion of style informs present-day professional convictions. This essay thereby focuses less upon the particular ways style achieves sundry intellectual skills and virtues (i.e., specific exercises or lessons exceed the scope of this discussion), than on making the versatility of style an evident cognitive and experiential feature that touches upon and weaves through so many dimensions of our reading and writing practices.

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In recent years, writing programs have increasingly deemed literary texts (especially poetry and pre-nineteenth-century novels and prose works) as too remote in their language, syntax, and subject matter to help students develop the techniques of effective writers. James Slevin (2001) productively challenges this assumption by suggesting composition and expository writing programs strategically adopt canonical parents that cut across various genres, to expose students to language’s rich array of expressive possibilities. Stylistic analyses of literary works abet such reflection, precisely because these artifacts often consist of intensified uses of language, different from most conventional disciplinary and everyday discourse. Poetry may in fact, for example, best illustrate these issues, as it at once emphasizes and problematizes the notion of “self-expression,” casting interpretive focus onto the ways in which diction, rhythm, and syntax structure lines of verse and convey a menagerie of emotions that may or may not be conducive to economic or social commerce. Poetry, of course, existed prior to writing and, generally speaking, flourished in communal-based and oral cultures. Smith, for example, begins “Lecture 23” marveling at the fact that “a species of writing [i.e., poetry] so vastly more difficult [than prose] should be in all countries prior to that in which men naturally express themselves” (1985, 136). He then conveniently dichotomized the function and purpose of these respective discursive “species”: for Smith, poetry aligns with “barbarous nations,” with pleasure and amusement, with unnatural expressive constructs, fettered by numbers; prose, by contrast, aligns with commerce and modernity, with conducting business and the refinement of social manners, with spontaneous expressive exchanges—that is, conversation. Smith thereby concluded:

In the first ages of Society, when men have their necessities on their hands, they keep their business and their pleasure altogether distinct; they neither mix pleasure with their business, nor business with their pleasure; Prose is not ornamental nor is verse applied to subjects of Business. It is only when
pleasure is the only thing sought after that Prose comes to be studied. People who are rich and at their ease cannot give themselves the trouble of anything where they do not expect some pleasure. The common transactions of life, as Deliberation and Consultation on what they are to do, are of themselves too dry and unpleasant for them, without the ornaments of language and elegance of expression. ‘Tis then Deliberative and Judicial eloquence are studied and every ornament is sought out for them. (1985, 137–38)

Smith superimposed a mutually exclusive relation among the spheres of business and pleasure, work and leisure, casting classical rhetoricians’ interest in elegance and ornament in prose as a kind of baleful quest for luxurious goods, which required a new rhetoric capable of regulating the profligate tendencies of poetic ornament within the arena of prose.

I originally titled this essay Adam Smith’s “Rhetorical Hand” to render visible a critical historical juncture when practices of writing and elements of style were reconceived in terms I believe have had far-reaching consequences for modern-day pedagogical contexts and professional convictions. For with Smith, generic distinctions among kinds and styles of writing become complexly imbricated with various forms of social distinction, associated with the sphere of political economy as well as moral philosophy. The composition of poetry became anathema to prose writing, and figurative language was cast as a potential obstacle to efficient communication. Smith in effect naturalized prose as an expressive enterprise that improved with, and in fact helped optimize, commerce. In his rigid bifurcation of work and pleasure, prose and poetry, he glossed how writing entails a kind of alienation of speech, how prose flows from neither conversation nor commerce, but from writers grappling with the cognitive and experiential challenges posed when navigating the complexities of language and written forms of communication. By the same token, the cultural studies movement has amply demonstrated that stylistic considerations extend to nonliterary as well as nonlinguistic artifacts, which suggests that reading practices play a pivotal role in determining how and whether students apprehend and reflect upon issues of style within the context of their own writing.

While I therefore largely agree with Slevin’s call to include literature and a diverse array of cultural artifacts in writing curricula and syllabi, I am also proposing something more skeptical of language’s relation to experience, of its freewheeling expressive possibilities: that is, perhaps we have overlooked the obvious—the immeasurable virtues of depersonalizing the stakes of style. I raise this point acknowledging the need
to encourage students to care about their writing, without taking critical feedback personally (a central paradox of effective writing pedagogy). During workshops, for instance, students often censor themselves, perhaps because they have so thoroughly internalized at various stages of their educational instruction the spurious notion that “writing is a form of self-expression,” a conviction that makes it difficult to reflect upon writing as a techne that requires ongoing practice and reflection. I hence propose that a style-based pedagogy emphasizing how language and sign systems produce various effects, which cannot necessarily be controlled or fully foreseen, would foster frank and respectful engagement with peers’ written work. Some basic principles of literary interpretation—that is, not confusing the narrative perspective or voice with the author and understanding how stylistic considerations factor in determining explicit and implied meaning—do, I think, apply to generating constructive workshop dynamics, particularly if the historically situated values of students can be challenged and made relevant to the effects and mechanics of writing in various disciplinary, generic, and social contexts. Further, conceiving writing and its attendant stylistic matters as an expressive enterprise potentially inhibits students needing the most help when working to build writing proficiency, because difficulties and setbacks become experienced—by logical extension—as a kind of personal failure.

I therefore contend that curriculum content at once matters more and less than imagined: it matters more because unhelpful assumptions continue to be made about the relevance of style to the development of strategies and techniques of writers, and it matters less because the care and facilitative efforts of the pedagogue models for students how to pursue and to realize independent thinking, how to labor at and relish the beauty of a craft. Two prominent figures serve as instructive examples of how personal voice frequently figures in style debates and writing pedagogy; they also register the extent to which contradictory disciplinary and professional anxieties about style lie at the heart of conflicts among, between, and within composition, literary, and cultural studies. Peter Elbow’s career and work eloquently attests to how a passion for medieval literature and metrics can translate into a belief in and commitment to style as the realization of authorial voice in composition classrooms; likewise, Richard Rodriguez poignantly relates in his popular essay “The Achievement of Desire” the rewards and struggles of reconciling a bilingual upbringing with a fascination for the otherness of the Renaissance (see Elbow 2002; Rodriguez 2002). Each ambivalently attests to the virtues
of studying subjects far removed from their personal experiences and social circumstances, how a turn away from the self potentially enabled a more authentic authorial voice to flourish.

Rodriguez’s meditation, inspired in part by his deep identification with Richard Hoggart’s description of the “scholarship boy” in *The Uses of Literacy*, commences with a pedagogical scene in which he tries to interest students in the sounds of words, while later in the essay, he contemplates occasions when he imitated teachers’ ways of speaking, a form of emulation that coincided with a pall of silence that socially detached him from his parents. A breaking point of sorts eventually occurs as he completes his doctoral studies in Renaissance literature; “drawn by professionalism to the edge of sterility [he can produce only] pedantic, lifeless, unassailable prose” (p. 669) and he takes solace in a nostalgia for the past and a journey to unearth his own unadulterated voice. Elbow also registers professional anxieties around the topic of style as he contemplates the respective “cultures” of literature and composition studies:

The culture of literary studies puts a high value on style and on not being like everyone else. I think I see more mannerism, artifice, and self-consciousness in bearing (sometimes even slightly self-conscious speech production) among literary folk than composition folk. Occasionally I resist, yet I value style and artifice. What could be more wonderful than the pleasure of creating or appreciating forms that are different, amazing, outlandish, useless—the opposite of ordinary, everyday, pragmatic? Every child is blessed with an effortless ability to do this: it’s called play (p. 540).

Elbow strikingly personifies style in terms of professional demeanors: just like Smith’s “simple” man prone to modesty and sympathy, composition “folk” emerge as down-to-earth foils to their more fashionable cousins in literature, who more or less pose in this account as dandified versions of Smith’s “plain” man: indulgently lecturing about literary texts, imperiously ignoring what students and others feel and think, and unabashedly relishing “not being like everyone else.” Elbow ends by reveling in the prospect of “style play,” paradoxically admitting that it’s something he simultaneously “resist[s]” and “value[s],” yet something any unschooled “child” can perform. His fixation upon the palaver of “literary folk”—the “self-conscious speech production”—also curiously deflects (in a manner similar to Rodriguez) questions of reading and writing to matters of sound and speech, a maneuver that reveals the extreme to which Elbow equates style with self-expression and voice.
For my purposes, these testimonies—engaging and remarkable as they are as autobiographic sketches—are of interest for the ways in which they figure issues of speech and voice in relation to practices of writing and how they reference process in the development of readers and writers. As both Elbow and Rodriguez confess, writing can be a real pain; yet both precipitously jump to the palliative punch line: it’s in the end a pleasurable experience, because it helps cultivate and realize authentic voices. Repressing the tribulations of process deprives us of a means to describe and to manage pain, which makes a significant psychological difference from the student’s perspective, when persevering through those all-too-familiar moments when writing feels like strenuous effort, rather than a hedonic orgy with the Muses atop Mt. Helicon. Connecting style to process exposes possibilities for sentence-level and global revisions and provides working vocabularies to explain how writing communicates meaning—whether it be in creative or disciplinary contexts or in workaday lives. I also believe emphasizing style as a volatile yet integral part of understanding cultural artifacts, as well as the writing process itself, could assist in reevaluating the pedagogical virtues of process as praxis. Many have dismissed process theory for its alleged scientific pretensions, though the primary bone of contention has perhaps always in fact been the notion that any process could be definitively theorized, independent of context-specific writing occasions. As stylistic considerations can be fraught with matters of choice and contingency, it holds out the possibility of addressing issues of process in ways that neither fetishize nor reify matters particular to practices of writing.

Additionally, when teaching writing from sources, the category of style productively straddles a variety of interrelated concerns and objectives: drawing attention to factors that illuminate how and on what terms any given source derives its authority; highlighting how issues of tone factor in the articulation and reception of claims; prompting critical reflection when selecting and interrogating passages representing, or indeed contradicting, an author’s ostensible meaning; inspiring students to create knowledge and to place ideas into a meaningful dialogue with thinkers past and present.

Cultural studies’ preference for popular subject matter and reading material poses special challenges when using stylistic considerations to negotiate the teaching of writing from sources, to the extent that it often requires students to investigate and research topics for which only recent journalistic sources exist. In this case, the assumption that students feel
more engaged by, or can more readily access, current events and mass and popular cultural artifacts confronts the stresses and trials of a lived experiment. Students sometimes discover during the research process that a library’s academic resources can and should be bypassed by whatever a Google search regurgitates, as often academic articles and books about contemporary subjects and popular culture have not yet made their way into library collections.\textsuperscript{15} This introduces problems specific to evaluating and negotiating online sources, and even the hippest cultural studies practitioner can find him- or herself staring down a yawning generational chasm, as rapid technological developments transform the ways a new generation conducts research and writing. Such changes acutely register around Internet plagiarism crises that have recently beleaguered the academy in unprecedented ways and that have extended to and troubled the ways in which we regard the credibility of journalistic sources. I can here only gesture toward some of the broader ramifications of these trends—for example, how blogging, e-mail, and chat rooms contribute to understanding writing as speech, as spontaneous, unreflective exchange,\textsuperscript{16} and how news venues and Web sites use stylistic flourishes as a substitute for substantive content—but the bottom line remains that it’s now more than ever important to stage a counteroffensive by equipping students with the means to evaluate stylistic matters with critical acumen and verve.

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The comparisons I have drawn among some general tenets of the eighteenth-century Scottish \textit{belles lettres} movement, as articulated by Adam Smith, and the contemporary, heterogeneous field of cultural studies, suggest that conventional wisdom concerning how individuals interact with and relate to practices of reading and writing can be productively challenged. Nowhere does this state of affairs become more obvious than when examining the complexities of style debates in writing pedagogy. Smith may have imagined business and pleasure, prose and poetry, as if in colloidal suspension, but as I have tried to demonstrate, this fallacious reasoning belied the porous disciplinary foundations of the new rhetoric. Effective writing pedagogy should explore ways in which business and pleasure coalesce and intermingle with each other, and a style-based pedagogy can serve as a potent vehicle, synthesizing the various strengths of composition, literature, and cultural studies\textsuperscript{17}—in the service of effective writing pedagogy across the curriculum, and most importantly, in the service of promoting the intellectual and personal growth of students. By exposing
the limitations and virtues of linguistic choice, style highlights the synergistic cognitive and experiential components of reading and writing and provides a provisional means to traverse vast disciplinary terrains.

The OED indicates that a synonym of style, glamour (i.e., a charm, spell, or personal effect), in fact manifested as a corrupt version of the Scottish term grammar (i.e., linguistic conventions, principles, and rules), and I conclude this essay emphasizing how these phonetic cousins, though ostensibly not etymologically related, in fact have always, in some degree, provoked interconnecting anxieties and desires relating to cultural prestige and social status. Some may regard these as immiscible terms—the remedial and thankless work of grammar (i.e., composition) versus the sophisticated and wondrous phenomenon of glamour (i.e., literature)—and I have suggested throughout this essay that the pedagogical and professional consequences of this narrow conception of complex and diverse language effects begs continued scrutiny. Far from being a transient academic fashion craze, style discourse continues to incite debate and provoke interest in ways that attest to its vitality in promoting an engaged and reflective writing pedagogy.