## INTRODUCTION

## The Stylistic (Re)Turn in Rhetoric and Composition

ecades ago, in his presidential inaugural address, John F. Kennedy rallied Americans to dedicate themselves to public service with a sentence that has become a part of our national lexicon: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." The phrase, whose call to volunteerism ultimately resulted in the start of the Peace Corps and similar initiatives, endures today not only because of its laudable purpose but also because of its *style*—that is, in two short clauses Kennedy reverses the order of repeated words, using a figure of speech known as *antimetabole* (sometimes also called *chiasmus*). The stylistic effect, achieved through the parallel rhythm and syntax of the words, is to make the sentence moving and memorable.

Regardless of whether students know the term *style*, they can easily recognize writing that has a powerful impact on them. The study of style, which is concerned with analyzing readers' responses to texts and how writers achieve those effects, can, in turn, give students knowledge of how to deploy similar techniques in their own writing.

Composition and literary scholar Richard Ohmann has defined style as "a way of writing," and his short definition, though just one of many, indicates what is really at stake with style: Given all the possible ways of conveying our meaning, how do we choose which ones to use? Style, then, involves a series of both conscious and unconscious choices that writers make about everything from the words we use (diction) and their arrangement in sentences (syntax) to the tone with which we express our point of view (e.g., ironic, formal, or colloquial) and the way we achieve emphasis in a sentence (e.g., by placing the most important information at the end). The figure of speech in Kennedy's address, another stylistic choice, is just one of hundreds of similar devices — like parallelism, alliteration, and metaphor — that writers use for specific effects. Style can thus be seen as a rich array of resources for writers, borrowing, for instance, from the fields of grammar, linguistics, psycholinguistics, and literature to achieve their aims. In composition, however, style, one of the five canons of rhetoric (along with invention, arrangement, delivery, and memory), is, above all, a rhetorical concept, meaning that it is connected to a writer's purpose, subject matter, audience, and context.

If style offers such a rich array of resources for readers and writers, then why is it relatively invisible today in the field of composition and rhetoric—and often in composition classrooms as well? The short answer is that style fell out of disciplinary favor among practitioners in the 1980s when it became associated with formalism and current-traditional rhetoric, and thus focused on the textual product and static language practices (e.g., mechanical correctness). Ironically, at the same time it was acquiring these pejorative affiliations—a period that paralleled composition's process era—some scholars were devising innovative techniques like sentence combining and generative rhetoric to connect style to invention and other forms of language production. Yet, style's decline also resulted from larger forces inside and outside the field. It got lost, for instance, amid the advent of new ideas from literary and rhetorical theory that caused an unprecedented bouleversement in disciplinary thinking about language and culture. Thus the study of style, competing in a climate of tremendous change, waned.

Despite its sometime disappearance from composition theory and pedagogy, however, style has reemerged in the twenty-first century as an area of significant interest in the field. Indeed, amid composition's various disciplinary reincarnations—the rhetorical turn, the public turn, the visual turn, and the digital turn, for example—another shift is now occurring: the *stylistic turn* in rhetoric and composition. What accounts for the renewed interest in style at this point in history, and why does its recent recuperation matter to composition students and instructors?

The answer, stated succinctly, is that style's recovery is an indispensable part of persuasive discourse, reinvigorated by such dynamic forces as culture, identity, dialect, oral discourse, genre, multimodal forms, and global influence. These areas, it has been suggested, constitute a "diaspora" of rhetoric and composition, areas where the study of style has migrated in the field (Butler 2007). Style, then, offers a way for composition to embrace the cacophony of difference that defines our field; stylistic pedagogy, the difference that defines our students. Stylistic difference is inherent in language variation, which allows the constantly changing influences—in words and phrases, new cultures and new media, for example—to hold sway.

If style thus stands at a pivotal moment in composition studies, then how is its 2,500-year history important in today's composition classroom? The answer is that throughout its history (which is too extensive to enumerate here), style has faced many of the same concerns important to current writing instructors and students. For example, does style simply mean the use of ornate words? Students are often taught not to use "flowery language," which contravenes our ideas of decorum and our preference for a plain (or "scientific") style. In ancient Greece, this very debate manifested itself in the development of two contrasting styles—the Attic, which embraced unadorned prose, and the Asiatic, which favored plentiful figures of speech. These opposing viewpoints eventually resulted in three "levels of style"—plain, middle, and grand—associated with proof, pleasure, and persuasion, respectively. Yet even the Roman orator Cicero, who favored the simpler Attic style, never

considered these divisions rigid, thinking of them instead as "symphonic," according to Michael Halloran and Merrill Whitburn (1982), and necessary for the ideal orator. All writers today—from composition classrooms to professional writing contexts—face the same issues: Given the audience, is it more effective to use a formal style or a plain (even colloquial) one? If we want to reach more than one audience at the same time, how might we integrate different stylistic levels persuasively?

A second relevant debate follows closely from the first: Is style separate from meaning and thus simply added on as the "dress of thought"? Or do style and meaning form an organic whole? These questions are evident today, for instance, in different approaches to revision: Is it simply a process of "cleaning up" an essay at the end of the process, or does it involve a more comprehensive look at how our meaning is achieved through the essay's structure, paragraphs, and words? The problem goes as far back as Plato, who discussed style as excessive adornment, always added on to meaning, which alone could be "true" (see Neel 1988). In the sixteenth century, French philosopher Peter Ramus went even further, separating the canons of invention and arrangement from rhetoric and placing them instead under "dialectic," a category he considered more prestigious. Ramistic "rhetoric" thus became exclusively the province of delivery and style, whose concern with eloquent language deepened the meaning-style schism as well as style's negative reputation. Even today, style is often associated with "fluff," to use Richard Lanham's (2006) word. As a field, composition has not been able to escape these pejorative connotations, which may be another reason for style's disappearance from writing classrooms.

While the view of style as a degraded form of rhetoric, unconnected to content, may seem difficult to dislodge, a group of composition scholars working in the 1970s and 1980s, in a series of language experiments, did just that. In fact, these scholars emphasized the conjunction of style and meaning in devising a plethora of innovative pedagogies, including generative rhetoric, sentence-combining exercises using both cued and open formats, imitation exercises, and the ideas of tagmemic rhetoric, developed in Young, Becker, and Pike's (1970) textbook Rhetoric: Discovery and Change. All of these techniques were considered a part of invention and were designed to help students add details, complicate their ideas, and write more sophisticated sentences (to achieve "syntactic maturity"). With a few early exceptions, the pedagogies did not rely on extensive grammatical knowledge. They did, however, depend in large part on repeated practice in a series of textbook exercises for students. While evidence suggests that the exercises worked, their prosaic subject matter did not always coincide with the increasingly rhetorical nature of composition classrooms.

In fact, of the many reasons already cited for style's sudden vanishing from composition, one of the most significant is the disjuncture between stylistic exercises and the changing needs of composition classrooms. How can sentence-combining exercises, or any exercises, despite their effectiveness in improving writing fluency, respond to the unique needs of different classrooms

and instructors seeking specific outcomes? In other words, how can style be integrated into the rhetorical situation of composition classes?

Some recent, edited collections in the field have tried to answer that question, either directly or indirectly, including The Elements of Alternate Style, Alt Dis, and Refiguring Prose Style. In addition, textbooks such as Joseph Williams's (2005) Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace, Martha Kolln's (2007) Rhetorical Grammar, and Richard Lanham's (2007) Revising Prose offer explanations with accompanying exercises for students. In A Rhetoric of Pleasure: Prose Style and Today's Composition Classroom, T. R. Johnson (2003) includes an appendix of exercises he uses with students, and in Part Three of this volume, the articles discuss various connections between style and pedagogical approaches in writing classrooms, some describing the stylistic assignments used with students. While instructors have understandably objected to the use of exercises unconnected to rhetorical purpose, many teachers interested in style attest to the usefulness of practice exercises in developing stylistic knowledge and acumen in student writers. Inevitably, then, we come back to the same central question: How can instructors use style pedagogy productively to help the students in our classrooms? Ideally, all instructors would design stylistic practice around their own students' work to help students learn. But how would one systematically approach such a task? Would it be effective? Who decides?

If the articles in this critical sourcebook raise these questions, they also provide potential answers. On a practical level, much of the recent work in style begins with analyzing some of the stylistic techniques used by writers including student writers—and practicing ways to incorporate them into the process of writing essays. Imitation is advocated by several authors in this volume. However, unlike former examples, it is often taught today as a conversation that students can enter on the same level as established writers, whose work students appropriate and transform (see Lu and Farmer in this book). Another area is Johnson's idea of a sound- and voice-directed rhetoric of pleasure that captures the rhythms of oral speech and incorporates them into written discourse. A different strategy is to borrow more from the oral tradition and discourses that go beyond Standard English. In this collection, the work of Geneva Smitherman shows, for example, how the use of indirection in African languages, frequently adapted in the informal oral discourse of the African American community, can make writing more effective—and interesting. This use of oral discourse finds parallels in several other techniques that have already influenced new pedagogy-for instance, Winston Weathers's nontraditional array of stylistic options, known as Grammar B (see Part Three), as well as the idea of hybrid, mixed, or alternative discourses in the collection Alt Dis. These ideas suggest the future of teaching style in the field—not as a replacement for composition's rich stylistic tradition, but, on the contrary, as a complement.1

Why is such a stylistic reinvention important? The example from John F. Kennedy that begins this introduction gives some idea of style's significance. Even though Kennedy uttered his phrase approximately fifty years ago, it still

resonates as a part of our cultural heritage. Why do we recall it vividly today along with the words of Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Gloria Anzaldúa, or Virginia Woolf? We remember them because of their style. Kennedy's use of antimetabole (or chiasmus) creates a repeated parallel structure that is difficult to forget. Style, in other words, makes writing memorable. It is never divorced from content, of course, since we rarely recall nonsensical words, no matter how clever they may be. But it is essential to see style for what it is: a key way to separate what is memorable from forgettable in history. On a narrower level, style is part of what makes writing persuasive, one of the goals we seek in our composition classrooms. The persuasive ability that stylistic study can develop, tied to emotional elements in writing, is never far from the broader reach of memory. If style has this impact on readers and writers, one might ask, then how can it have the same influence on the field? In the five parts of the collection that follow, various writers approach that question from different perspectives.

Part One, "The Rise and Fall of the Study of Style," which begins with a title alluding to the work of Robert Connors (1981, 2000), examines some of the rich possibilities that style provides for language and writing before moving to its disappearance, specifically from the field of composition. In classical rhetoric, the discussion of style goes hand in hand with the development of the ideal orator. Quintilian, for example, outlines this ethical dimension in other parts of his work when he discusses the idea of "the good man speaking well." While the qualities of style enumerated by the classical rhetors represent many of the same stylistic ideals we espouse today, the differences are also important. Besides showing that the way we think about style is culturally and historically determined, the articles suggest that values not only change but stay the same over time. The writers emphasize the view of style as a way of developing eloquence through a variety of stylistic means, including imitation. Even though we may not place the same value on eloquence today, its cultural power and importance in writing have not been abandoned, even if its definition has changed to accommodate a print-based society. Some have argued, of course, that the advent of a new orality in our technologized and globalized world has made their observations more relevant now than ever. Although the articles depicting the various ways style was valued in ancient Greece and Rome constitute the rise of the canon, the articles that comprise its fall also value style while asking what might have accounted for its untimely demise from composition. One of the common threads running through the fall is the failure to find a smoking gun, that is, a single event or reason that clearly explains style's disappearance or justifies its exorcism from the field. The articles about the fall also provide useful historical evidence of the importance of various practices in the field, indicate ongoing pockets of current activity, and propose possible avenues for style's revival.

Part Two, "Stylistic Influences and Debates," explores the possibilities and limitations of style in the discipline, particularly during a two-decade period (from the 1960s through the mid-1980s) that constitutes what some have

called the "Golden Age" of style in the field. One universal theme in these readings is the belief that style has many pedagogical and theoretical possibilities that often work together in ways the authors investigate by inventive means. In a period of almost unparalleled optimism about the linguistic possibilities in the field, the study of style figured prominently. At the same time, these influences were not without their share of debate. These readings, often through various types of research conducted by the authors, attempt to refute some of the prevailing ideas about style present both inside and outside the field. Thus despite the enthusiasm with which the articles approach the possibilities of stylistic invention, they also signal a cautionary tale, asking readers to look behind the conventional wisdom that so often supported stylistic knowledge and practice at the time. In fact, one theme of these readings is that we should not always accept the way ideas have been taken up or accepted in the field. There is a tendency, they warn, not to question certain established beliefs, as though they are the final word on the subject. Given this warning, the readings here should be viewed not only in the context of the time in which they were written but also the intervening years during which ideas have changed. How have stylistic influences and debates evolved over the years? What remains in our belief systems about style, and what has fallen away? Are some ideas worth revisiting, given the changes in our disciplinary knowledge and the different needs of our students and of composition class-

Part Three, "Style and Pedagogy," makes a number of overtures to innovative pedagogies of style, either opening up new territory altogether or rethinking some of the pedagogies that have been used since the time of classical rhetoric. Indeed, in a field with models that begin with the progymnasmata, a set of "elementary exercises" in ancient Greece and Rome (see Crowley and Hawhee 2009), the inventory of pedagogical possibilities available to those with an interest in style is impressive. One theme that runs throughout this set of readings is style's close connection to grammar, not in the sense that style requires explicit grammatical knowledge but, rather, in the ways style and grammar work together to produce writing achievement. The authors also demonstrate how pedagogy works closely with its theoretical underpinnings, with theory sometimes serving as the very basis of new stylistic teaching. What's more, influences from outside rhetoric and composition are evident in the readings, illustrating the way in which the field has been inculcated in the various critical theories circulating within the humanities. One of the main ideas throughout the readings is that style is constantly reinventing itself pedagogically, opening up new ways of writing to students in composition courses and encouraging, at the same time, a new way of thinking. Hence, in many respects, style serves as the catalyst for pedagogical invention, renewing the field in significant ways through teaching. As part of that process, the authors focus on making old pedagogies new, exploring applications to philosophical and ideological debates in the field, and thinking about where the study of style needs to go, why, and how its innovative uses are possible in a constantly changing field not always open to stylistic study.

Part Four, "Style and Culture," reflects the movement in composition and rhetoric to find connections between style and the enormous cultural changes that have affected the discipline. Far from being just incidental or superfluous, the cultural influences on style have been responsible for far-reaching developments reflecting, for example, new language policies in the field. In addition, culture suggests the important links, for instance, between style and identity, affirming the increasingly important nature of gender, race, social class, sexuality, and other identity markers in the field. Clearly, composition studies also has been drawn to the contestation of cultures, indicated best, perhaps, by Mary Louise Pratt's (1991) idea of the contact zone, and many of the readings are indebted to this concept as a productive force in the field. One of the questions surrounding style's future in the discipline concerns whether it functions as more than a conduit for the influence of outside cultures. The writers in this part begin to answer that question, looking at style as a force of negotiation and, even more importantly, as a force of change. In that regard, the readings take up one of the traditional definitions of style as deviation from a norm and, for all practical purposes, they embrace that view. Certainly the cultural currents in constant flux in society include influences on language that appear, like a maelstrom, to change with opposing linguistic and cultural forces. In the midst of this upheaval, no one is left unchanged or unaffected, including the discipline of composition and its relationship to style. The authors suggest, in fact, that those impacts emanate both from without and within the culture of composition studies. Thus the readings set the stage not only for the future of style but also for the future of the field itself as it stands buffeted constantly by outside forces, trying to withstand the crosscurrents that define and refine its disciplinary identity.

Part Five, "Style and the Future," contemplates the way in which style, as the inheritor of a number of changes and influences already, stands poised to move itself—and the discipline—into the twenty-first century. In that regard, the readings explore the new developments in stylistic study in the field, following its movements, for instance, into multimedia, visual rhetoric, the public sphere, and new theories or interpretations of stylistic theories. In these readings, the authors do not hesitate to articulate new visions of style for composition and rhetoric or to redeploy it in new, often creative, ways. Considered collectively, the readings represent a snapshot of the reemergence of style in the field over the past decade. They make an argument, simply by their compilation here, for the end of style's elision, at least from the standpoint of disciplinary identity. While the writers respond in unusual ways to established ideas from stylistic history, theory, and pedagogy, they also begin important new conversations with each other, anticipating, as it were, the potential of disciplinary change catalyzed through the study of style. The actual adoption and implementation of the ideas offered by these authors will take more time of course. These new approaches to stylistic study suggest, in fact, that the field, without forgetting its past affiliations with stylistic study, must leave behind some of its past conceptions and reimagine style in different ways in the future. At the same time, the readings represent a strong affirmation that style figures importantly in a growing, ever-evolving discipline. They suggest in no uncertain terms that the renaissance of stylistic study in the field is under way and will continue unabated in the years ahead.

Illustrating the importance of style in composition and rhetoric is the structuring principle of the different parts in this collection. While the study of style has broad historical reach and works across many disciplines, the intent with these essays is to show how stylistic study has been especially important in rhetoric and composition. Some other significant influences on style, for example, those from the fields of literature and linguistics, are listed in the Additional Readings section at the back of this book. That section also features the work of other rhetors who wrote on style in classical rhetoric. While this volume includes work by Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, contributions from the Sophists and Plato, among others, are also listed in Additional Readings. In literature, two symposia at Indiana University in the 1960s, one of which produced Roman Jakobson's (1960) highly influential essay "Concluding Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," are listed, as is the work of Sister Miriam Joseph (2005), whose eloquent book on style in the Renaissance has recently enjoyed a second printing. In linguistics, influences like corpus analysis (see Enkvist, Spencer, and Gregory 1964), sociolinguistics (see Labov 1972), and the more recent work of the New London Group (2000) would, if space permitted, complement the collection nicely. Furthermore, an article on the plain language movement, a major force in government and business several years ago, could round out the articles, along with additional attention to language diversity—for example, the impact of World Englishes (see Cliett 2003).

While these five parts work successfully as independent representations of the collection's overall ideas, they also work together to present a new view of style in the discipline. Indeed, the sections, taken together, offer a rich, historical overview of style in rhetoric and composition, including its interdisciplinary influences. They also suggest a complicated notion of stylistic study as it has encountered the disciplinary forces that have shaped it and, at least for a short time, rendered it invisible. The canon of style, though seemingly inactive for some time, is moving forward at a rate that defies the perception that it ever disappeared from rhetoric and composition. Clearly, style has evolved into a flexible and definitive canon of rhetoric, forged in the past and future movements of the field. In that sense, it stands positioned to become one of the most important tools in the future of rhetoric and composition and one of the most valuable resources available to writing students and teachers.

Although the essays in this collection are representative of outstanding work on style, they necessarily cannot encompass the full breadth of material available on this far-reaching topic. However, the range of articles—not to mention the structure of the book—is far richer today because of the help of five outstanding reviewers. Their comments, questions, and suggestions were instrumental in shaping this volume, which has changed significantly from its original conception. I therefore owe a debt of gratitude to Stephen A. Bernhardt, University of Delaware, Deborah Rossen-Knill, University of Rochester,

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## NOTE

1. Other recent ideas in line with the discipline's stylistic tradition include Sharon Myers's (2003) pedagogical uses of templates, collocations, and concordances in "ReMembering the Sentence" and Susan Peck MacDonald's (2007) proposal for the recuperation of a broader concept of language in "The Erasure of Language."

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