Butler, Paul. *Out of Style: Reanimating Stylistic Study in Composition and Rhetoric*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2008.

Reviewed by Rosemary Winslow

As the twentieth century was about to close, Robert Connors advised scholars who worked on style in rhetoric and composition to "close the books." After fifteen years of the near erasure of "style" in the discipline, he deemed all hope for its return lost. The study of writing as words formed into sentences, words chosen by writers, bit the dust during the theory era of deconstruction, social construction, and historiography. Rhetoric and composition studies had moved on, wrote Connors, and "[w]e all must" (241). The essay itself actually served to revaluate and recommend sentence-level style pedagogy. During the previous fifteen years, style analysis had continued in a shadow life of largely implicit and unacknowledged ways of reading. The decade since has seen–fortunately, I believe–a small, but sure, recuperation of the style canon.

Paul Butler's book, *Out of Style: Reanimating Stylistic Study in Composition and Rhetoric*, advances the recuperation, arguing for its need in pedagogy as well as in public discourse by rhetoric/composition professionals. Butler offers highlights of the long history of style in composition, in Western thought, and in the public sphere. While his overarching goal seems to be to "take back" the study of style for rhetoric/composition in public intellectual discourse, the book functions as an overview and thus appears intended as a general argument for returning style to teaching, aimed at the younger generation of scholar/teachers and graduate students in training. The titular figure of "reanimation" presents an accurate advocacy for his proposal: not a *new* study using the work in stylistics that has gone vigorously on since rhetoric/composition opted out, but rather a reclaiming of the old spirit of style from the classical rhetorical tradition. Though Butler begins with an introductory anecdote about learning literary stylistic analysis in his undergraduate years, his decision to include

only the rhetorical tradition of style is a good one for two reasons: first, what rhetoric/composition professionals trained in the past twenty years know best is rhetoric, not linguistics; and second, the field of stylistics is vast, far too large to argue for a return in a single book, let alone claim *the* territory of style for rhetoric/composition.

Style was long located as part of rhetoric, and Butler sees its demise in the discipline as responsible for the loss of disciplinary public stature, since the public counts style as the major, and most visible, area of language use. Given the spread of stylistics, I do not see that it is possible for style to "go back" to rhetoric, as Butler hopes–stylistics is international and interdisciplinary in scope, ranging from linguistics and psychology to literature and philosophy. Style was once wholly within the province of rhetoric, but that has not been the case for a century. I do agree wholeheartedly, however, that rhetoric/composition scholars and teachers should include style as a major area again, and should have claim to certain perspectives on it–those that have to do with writing and its processes (with argument, persuasion, narration, exposition, and so on) as interconnected versus free-standing provinces of language-making. By treating style as meaning-making in the choices of linguistic elements (whether socially-guided or individualistic), rhetoric/composition scholars and teachers would have a viable role in public discussions. A more tempered line of argument such as this would have been more balanced and persuasive than the overreaching position Butler dreams. His appropriate goal for restoring rhetoric/ composition scholars to public discussions of language could have then taken a realistic and proper perspective instead of the proprietary one he advances.

In the introduction, presented as Chapter One, Butler recalls anecdotally his undergraduate experience with style analysis in literature, sets out the rationale for re-animation and return, offers some definitions, runs through the history of teaching style in colleges from the 1960s to the 1980s, dubbed style's "Golden Age," and its demise in the mid-80s. The most formidable

problem in style study is to answer the question, "What is style?" The first question in stasis inquiry would be, "Is style?"–and that is where style fell on the rocks in the 1990s when many of the new generation of scholars, influenced by deconstruction, social construction, and postmodernism, answered, "No, there's no such thing as style," since style could not be located as a substantial entity. I recall being on a committee at the time with young scholars trained by eminent classical rhetoricians, with whom they vociferously disagreed. Any discussion about including style on a national test was refused because "there is no such thing." The central point about style is that it is not a "thing"; it has no substance of its own, but is rather the "way" linguistic features have been chosen at the phonological, syntactic, and semantic levels in the particular instances of making language. Style can be seen only in parole, as the specific linguistic elements in a discourse. The "choices"–whether preset as socially-driven registers, or individual takes–that make for style are real, as are the particular linguistic elements of which discourse is made (see definition of style in K. Wales). True, there is no way to separate style from content and see it as distinct; nevertheless it appears in patterns of linguistic elements, from phonological to semantic–that add up to the content. Style is evident in every small to large element of language. While the analyst cannot proceed without positing a separation, distinctions between style and content are best seen as a cline, where sometimes no difference occurs and, most often, some difference occurs (see discussion in Winslow, forthcoming).

Butler's solution to the ultimate impossibility of an adequate definition is to swiftly pare away all but the rhetorical use of style: he offers a severely limiting definition of style as "the deployment of rhetorical resources, in written discourse, to create and express meaning" (3). While the limit assists the goal of claiming style for rhetoric/composition, it does not do justice to the explosion of style in other disciplines, indeed as interdisciplinary in status since the inception of its modern power in the 1940s as a collaboration of linguistics, literary theory, and hermeneutics. What Butler *does*

accomplish by staying within the parameters of the rhetorical tradition is to argue for a view of style as interconnected. This strategy makes for a solid and coherent discussion from chapter to chapter. If Butler seems unaware that this idea of style as invention has been around for quite awhile [in for example Robert Connors' revision of Edward P. J. Corbett's influential *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (1999); he discusses only Corbett's solo text], he drives home the point that the interconnection of style and invention is surely the direction in which rhetorical stylistics must develop. On this key point, I agree–if the hope for a relevant, viable stylistics in rhetoric/composition is to join with the language processing knowledge amassed in the last quarter century.

In line with this project, Chapter Two, titled "Historical Developments," summarizes highlights of theories of style, from the Sophists, through Plato to Cicero and Quintillian; then skips to the Renaissance, including only Erasmus and Ramus, briefly, and skips again to the twentieth century. Thirty pages for two and a half millenia makes for a broad stroke, but Butler hits the important developments. The chapter outlines a history of style in rhetoric that rereads rhetoricians in line with twentieth century literary theorists and philosophical views of style as monist, that is, as inextricably vital from the moment of invention versus the dualist perspective of style as the dress of thought. While this knowledge has been recaptured in the past 50 years by other disciplines, Butler's discussion is a useful rendition for professionals in the rhetoric/composition field. Pointedly, literary stylistics is dismissed in a one-page summary of its mid-century years in the U.S., appropriately brief since literary studies and rhetoric/composition have been largely separated, at least in scholarship, in the past decades.

Chapter Three seeks to reclaim the rich view of style from the process era as connected to inventional processes versus sheer expressiveness. This is an important and necessary correction to the recent historical view of that era, which regarded language-making as monist. One of the adages of that time, quoted from

E.M. Forster (*Aspects of the Novel,* 26), was "How do I know what I mean until I see what I have to say." While composition instruction in the first half of the century by-and-large privileged style, albeit an elitist and dualist version, Butler rightly says that the process era's focus on the acts of drafting and revision as finding and deepening meaning required a deep dependence on style throughout all stages of composing. Butler traces important moments in the process era's thinking about style as invention, from linguistics' influence on tagmemics, generative rhetorics, to sentence-combining–all of which were proven to work in classrooms and were dropped from scholarly discussion in journals during the decades that preferred social and political theory and action research.

Chapter Four, bearing the exotic title "Style in the Diaspora of Composition Studies," takes up a claim Robert Connors and Cheryl Glenn made in *The New St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing* (1999), that "style has diffused today into one of the most important canons of rhetoric" (232; qtd in Butler 86). Butler appropriates the term *diaspora* from Janice Lauer's 2002 article on the diaspora of invention, applying it instead to the "forced exile" of style from the discipline. *Forced* seems to me accurate, given that at least some journal editors would not publish articles on style even when reviewed as outstanding contributions. Since it is not possible to keep style and invention out of rhetoric, they went underground and dispersed, were called something else, or were called by no name. Butler locates one site of dispersion in genre theory–a natural since style is register, and genre theory studies the social relations in forms, expectations between discourse participants. Style is involved in the choices of words that form identities and position persons in social roles, e.g., teacher and student, through genres, e.g., syllabi, evaluative comments, tests. A less successful positioning of an exilic site is rhetorical analysis. Butler's sole example is the work of Marie Secor and Jeanne Fahnestock, who have been doing stylistic analysis for several decades, and used to call it by that name. Is this a diaspora or a case of term-switching (like code-switching) from a specific to a

more general category in order to fit the politics of the times? I have the same quibble with the third of Butler's "sites"–personal writing, which is creative non-fiction (CNF). Style has never been exiled in literary writing, quite the contrary. It is rhetoric/composition that has come to include CNF in the past two decades. The process era attempted to, but largely failed. The last section, on race, class, and gender, is the strongest of the chapter, demonstrating how the lack of stylistic analysis has impoverished analysis in the research that has been central to rhetoric/composition in the past twenty-five years.

The view of style as social, not merely expressive, is the most important point Butler makes. The two eras–process and social action–are brought together in a common wing, bearing the reader into the fifth chapter, which rethinks style as key to re-entrance to the public sphere. Here, Butler's argument as to the exile of style is turned back on the whole of the discipline: rhetoric/composition intellectuals have been exiled from public discussion of writing because they have not wanted to talk about style, which is what the public regards the central aspect of writing to be. And as Butler has argued throughout the book, many of the ways that style is central have been discounted and denied since about 1985. He groups the current public intellectual voices together with current traditionalists and rhetoric/composition scholars in their narrow view of style as grammar and usage. No wonder, he ponders, rhetoric/composition scholars have lost credibility if they cannot counter the inaccurate retro views of literacy propounded by Stanley Fish, Heather MacDonald, and others. One caution in an otherwise helpful chapter: the view of style in literary studies is poorly informed and outdated; Butler draws only from Peter Elbow and Mary Louise Pratt to characterize an entire varied discipline over thirty years.

The sixth, and last chapter, looks toward the future of rhetoric/composition, lamenting the loss of style's rich analytic potential for research and teaching. Restating the main points of the book, Butler emphasizes the loss of style as caused by "misunderstanding" of its nature and a backward-looking tendency

that associated style with the older current traditional and process era pedagogies. Style went "out of style" unfairly and injudiciously, and must be brought "back in style" if rhetoric/composition intellectuals are to regain their say in the public arena. I could not agree more.

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