Gage, John T., ed. *The Promise of Reason: Studies in The New Rhetoric.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois U, 2011.

Reviewed by James P. Beasley

The Promise of Reason is a collection of sixteen chapters that analyze the historical and theoretical influence of Chaim Perleman and Lucie Albrechts-Tyecta's 1958 publication *Traite de l'argumentation: La nouvelle rhetorique.* The book began as the proceedings of the University of Oregon conference on *The New Rhetoric*, held in 2008. In his introduction, editor John T. Gage explains the significance of the collection's title:

> The theory of argumentation looks forward to–it promises– a way out of the dilemma created by a belief that human reasoning operates according to definable and dependable rules and self-evident facts: if true reasoning belongs only to science, differences in human values are solved only by one or another form of coercion. (2)

In an introduction on such as important historical contribution as *The New Rhetoric*, an editor runs the risk of being either too ebullient or not enthusiastic enough. Gage's introduction is neither pandering nor assuming. He writes,

> The rich diversity of issues taken up by essays in this volume suggests that scholarship on *The New Rhetoric* will continue to explore the meaning and implications of its theory in an attempt to understand more completely the practical and ethical dynamics of the human performance faculty we call argumentation. (2)

I admit, the theoretical implications of *The New Rhetoric* can be daunting, but that seems appropriate for Gage and his contributors. Like the theory of argumentation which *The New Rhetoric* espouses, Gage acknowledges the collection's dependence

on its universal audience, awaiting our reactions, hopeful for our mutual communion.

In part I, "Conceptual Understandings of *The New Rhetoric*," contributors examine *The New Rhetoric's* style, terminology, and authorship. Jeanne Fahnestock's "No Neutral Choices": The Art of Style in The New Rhetoric" examines how language choice and arrangement work to achieve that mutual communion by examining how Perelman and Olbrechts-Tytcea utilized "association and disassociation" as methods of development (33). In Loic Nicolas's chapter, "The Function of the 'Universal Audience' in Perleman's Rhetoric: Looking Back on a Theoretical Issue," the universal audience is best explained as "debating with oneself" (52) or "picturing oneself in a speech interaction in which the participants argue and justify their respective points of view" (52). For Nicolas, what made *The New Rhetoric* so new was this vulnerability in the face of opposing ideas, and the trajectory of Nicolas's reasoning here is exhilarating as it unfolds. "It boils down to endangering one's own speech by putting it to the text of a confrontation with a would-be contradictor. To put it another way, it is a 'dialogue' that the speaker acknowledges as virtually likely within the context of another speech" (52). Nicolas's interpretation of the universal audience of *The New Rhetoric* centers on its potentiality of innumerable arguments, and is thus generative in its function, rather than insistently immovable. For Nicolas, then, rhetoric "consists in a never-ending anticipation of objections, criticism, or protests" (53). That moment of anticipation constitutes the rhetorical stance (53).

The collaborative authorship of *The New Rhetoric* is a thorny one, but in their chapter, "Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's *New Rhetoric*," David A. Frank and Michelle K. Bouluc write that although the exigence for *The New Rhetoric* was provided by "Perelman's dissatisfaction with the conclusions in *De La justice"* (59), "the rhetorical turn of the collaboration was a result of Olbrechts-Tytcea's familiarity with the work of literary theorist Jean Paulhan" (61). This rhetorical turn, therefore, defines the authorship as Olbrechts-Tyteca's. According to Frank and Bolduc,

Olbrechts-Tyteca's attenuation to the comic is the fundamental contact zone of their collaboration. Without the comic, there would be no co-authorship: "It is the comic that can disclose processes of argumentation otherwise hidden in customary, that is serious, rhetoric. This sudden move reveals both the underlying importance of the comic in their work and moreover, how the comic serves as a key marker of their collaboration" (69). Because this contribution to *The New Rhetoric* was common to both Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (the "human reasoning" and the "human laughing"; 78), the question of authorship is not significant simply in regards to the feminist legacy of *The New Rhetoric*, since it would deny the idea of the comic its theoretical significance.

In part II, "Extensions of *The New Rhetoric*," contributors move beyond formalist critiques and begin to examine how *The New Rhetoric* both complements and contradicts other theoretical constraints that have also been characterized as *New Rhetoric*. The first such comparison is with Kenneth Burke's "identification," but contrasts and comparisons are also drawn with the rationality of French linguistics. In their chapter "Kenneth Burke's 'Identification' and Chaim Perleman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's 'Communion': A Case of Convergent Evolution?" Richard Graff and Wendy Linn argue that the epideictic genre "fosters a sense of solidarity or communal spirit among the members of the audience who share these values" (109). While for Perleman and Olbrecht-Tyteca, an understanding of the epideictic form was crucial to a reinvigoration of rhetoric, for Burke the epideictic was merely useful as a form in his reinvigoration of rhetoric because persuasion "turns out to be submission to the verbal form as form" (117). As I write this review, I am struck by Graff and Winn's claim and how it is affecting the reader as I write. Is the reader engaged in this review because it is following the form of a book review, or is the reader engaged in this review because it is an epideictic genre? While Burke, Perleman, and Olbrechts-Tyteca all utilized the epideictic in their reinvigoration of rhetoric, according to Graff and Winn, *The New Rhetoric* theoretically

depends on the epideictic as a value-sharing, community-dependent genre.

While comparisons between Burke and *The New Rhetoric* seem obvious, Roselyne Koren's chapter, "Language and Axiological Rationality: The 'Non-thought' of French Linguistics in the Mirror of *The New Rhetoric,*" asks why linguists, who have multiple language theories at their disposal, "need for her demonstrations to resort to the New Rhetoric?" (135). With this question raised, Koren analyzes how she sees the similarities and the differences between *The New Rhetoric* and French linguists and concludes that while pragmatic linguistics have much in common with *The New Rhetoric*, "Perleman does not dissociate between saying and doing but between ontology and axiology. He distinguishes between 'what is' and 'what has worth' . . . not in order to rank but in order to prove that these two constituents of language are interdependent" (137). Koren believes French discourse analysts refuse "to see and to know the logic of values" and as such, they contribute "to the anchoring of an epistemological non-thought" (137). Her essay demonstrates how *The New Rhetoric* creates a community of thought by searching "for sharable solutions to common problems" (140).

In part III, "The Ethical Turn in Perleman and *The New Rhetoric*," contributors demonstrate a theoretical sensitivity to the appropriation of *The New Rhetoric* by philosophical rhetorician Richard McKeon. Linda Bensel-Meyers identifies the inherent limitations of McKeon's philosophical rhetoric in her essay, "Philosophical Art or Rhetorical Skill: How Perleman's Ethical Pluralism Makes McKeon's Analytical Pluralism Ethically Conscientious." Bensel-Meyers criticizes McKeon "as too analytical and static for rhetorical use" (164), but also acknowledges how "Perleman's foregrounding of the rhetorical exigencies that circumscribe a logic of value judgments" (164) could be viewed "as far too ephemeral" (164). For Bensel-Myers, Pereleman's concept of the universal audience "actually humanizes McKeon's more analytical project" (169). According to Bensel-Meyers, McKeon's philosophical semantics move beyond an

awareness of the cultural literacy of differing nations towards a more rhetorical approach, for they could become "the arts by which different cultures approach common problems" (169). Conversely, Jean Nienkamp's chapter, "RhETHorICS," demonstrates the irrelevance of the formalization of McKeon's analytical pluralism and its connection to *The New Rhetoric*. Nienkamp asks, "What is the point of saying that rhetoric is the same thing as ethics, as implied by my invented portmanteau word, 'rhethorics'?" (169). For Nienkamp, *The New Rhetoric* substitutes persuasion for "reasonable discursive action," and this exchange demonstrates how ethics is rhetorical, and rhetoric is ethical. She conflates rhetoric and ethics because "both are value-based action in the social world, whether that action be discursive or more broadly symbolic or meaningful" (179).

In part IV, "Uses of the *The New Rhetoric*," contributor Maria Freddi examines principles of *The New Rhetoric* in the scientific writings of Richard Feynman; Paula Olmos demonstrates how using a film's quotability can help teach the sharing of rhetorical *paroemiai*; and Mark Hoffman examines argumentation in Leo Tolstoy. While these are worthwhile essays, James Crosswhite's "Awakening the Topoi: Sources of Invention in The New Rhetoric's Argument Model" is to me the most provocative and appropriate focus for the teaching of writing. Crosswhite's argument is that *The New Rhetoric* is not only rhetorical theory, but also the outline of an inventional pedagogy. He argues that "There is a difference between 'thinking up arguments about some subject' and looking for the arguments that are taking shape–or might possibly take shape–in an actual situation"(189) and that *The New Rhetoric* is essential for that understanding. Crosswhite criticizes current textbooks for the inattention to invention, for in these texts "criticism and analysis are often treated as nearly the whole of invention, or at least prior to invention. Although there are some exceptions and counter-tendencies, invention is rarely explored as being in some way prior to analysis and criticism" (194). Using *The New Rhetoric* as an undergraduate writing

textbook may sound almost insane at first, but he makes a convincing case.

While Crosswhite does acknowledge the difficulties inherent in attempting such a difficult project, "What we can only haltingly call 'The New Rhetoric's argument model' is nonetheless a richer and truer account of argument than the simpler models that can fit on a board or a screen and be explained in a fifty-minute hour" (193) His project adds a new focus to the debates about "critical thinking." With today's legislators and assessment wonks seeking to limit the boundaries of critical thinking, Crosswhite's project legitimizes definitions of critical thinking that are more hospitable to (New) rhetorical theorists. Conversely, those who view "critical thinking as focused on analysis and evaluation and not on the creation of arguments" (193) mistakenly assume that assessments of a "logically developed thesis with three supporting points" are much different than the ideological legislation they seek to fight. Crosswhite's chapter alone is timely in terms of our current cultural debates and our struggle to redefine the terms of these debates.

In order for those debates to be redefined the substitution of invention for criticism must be embraced. Crosswhite reminds us that "Criticism can make judgments only about arguments that have been invented by other means. Criticism might judge an argument to be better or worse, but it does not know if there are still other arguments to be discovered, and it does not know how to discover them" (194). In other words, measuring students' ability to make a supported claim is not that difficult. What is difficult is measuring the arguments to be discovered or how one would go about discovering them. Rather than the creation of a student populace that can make an argument, political ideology and assessments cannot measure when it is just as important not to make an argument. In sharp contrast, the aim of Crosswhite's pedagogy is the invention of "as many arguments from as many sides as possible. Thus we have activated that other idea: that it is a virtue to be able to argue from each side. The more arguments

we have from more perspectives, the better chance criticism has of producing valuable results" (195).

The essays in *The Promise of Reas*on demonstrate the significance of *The New Rhetoric* in academic discourses, including ethics, science, composition, and literature. They also demonstrate the lack of argumentation inside the public sphere and the widening gulf between those who teach argumentation and administrators who define critical thinking within our assessment-driven institutions. Before we react to ideological legislation or the newest set of required computer-generated assessment measures, it would be well worth a re-examination of the arguments we think we are making, and the essays in *The Promise of Reason* would be a thoughtful place to start.