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[Review of] *The Promise of Reason: Studies in The New Rhetoric*. Edited by John T. Gage.  
Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press,  
2011; pp. 272. \$60.00 cloth.

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*The Promise of Reason: Studies in The New Rhetoric*. Edited by John T. Gage. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2011; pp. 272. \$60.00 cloth.

My own exploration of *The New Rhetoric* began with some hope and a modest promise of reason when I was a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin. Trish Roberts-Miller promised the text would be dense, but likely useful for expanding how I thought about reason. I hoped it would help me make sense of a particularly persnickety and seemingly incommensurable series of events concerning Jewish identity that took place in Israel and the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I remember being fascinated and confused, but most of all excited, by the possibilities for rhetorical interpretation, criticism, and theory that *The New Rhetoric* opened up for me. John T. Gage's collection, *The Promise of Reason: Studies in The New Rhetoric*, so named for the 2008 Conference held in Eugene, Oregon, where "more than 120 scholars from 13 countries" presented their work and where many of the essays debuted (6) in somewhat shorter form, offers a fascinating and thankfully far less confusing entrée into the most salient issues, which *The New Rhetoric* helps to ponder more deeply and reasonably. With its 16 essays representing a variety of approaches, the collection offers up many areas of inquiry for a variety of scholars, and does so eloquently.

Gage's excellent collection is notable for gathering international contributions from a range of disciplines into a single volume. It is one of the few volumes to feature scholars from the United States, Europe, and the Middle East side-by-side, demonstrating not only the international appeal but also the continuing intellectual pull of *The New Rhetoric*. As anyone who has edited a special issue or collection knows well, one of the challenges of putting various voices together is maintaining cohesion among diversity; in this respect, John Gage has done magnificent work as an editor, not only culling some of the most important work from the conference but also juxtaposing the essays in such a way that they shed light on one another as well as the concepts from *The New Rhetoric* that they explore in greater

detail. The headnotes to each of the four sections offer careful consideration of the essays within and provide a strong roadmap for readers looking to make connections among the contributions. The sheer volume of essays—16—promises to provide something for everyone who is drawn to develop a better understanding of one of the most important rhetorical texts of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, my limited space here prevents me from discussing each essay in detail; therefore, in what follows, I highlight some key contributions from each of the sections.

The volume opens with two introductions—one from John Gage himself and a second from Perelman's daughter, Noémi Perelman Mattis. Together, this pairing offers both scholarly and personal frames for considering the importance and continuing relevance of Perelman's life's work to pursue and study justice, values, and argument. Gage hopes the volume will encourage "scholars in different national and educational cultures to be in dialogue rather than to work solely in their separate traditions of inquiry" (3), and the remarks of Perelman Mattis extend this dialogue to include consideration of personal and political matters as well.

Section 1, "Conceptual Understandings of the New Rhetoric," highlights key fundamental concepts that gird various pathways into the text. Responding to critics who argue that *The New Rhetoric* "lacks a viable criterion . . . for establishing the validity of argumentative reasoning" (21), Barbara Warnick opens the section with her essay, "Empiricism, Securement and *The New Rhetoric*," in which she examines "the ways in which the epistemological viability of *The New Rhetoric* is secured, not by formal principles of logical consistency or decontextualized truth standards, but instead by a confluence of empirical findings based on its authors' examination of argument structures and practices" (22). Jeanne Fahnestock's essay, "'No Neutral Choices': The Art of Style in *The New Rhetoric*," offers another impressive investigation by showing how *The New Rhetoric*'s attention to style achieves yet another important accomplishment because it demonstrates that "language choices encode selected objects of agreement" and, more than that, they also "constitute techniques of argument" (30). Fahnestock offers a comprehensive consideration of *The New Rhetoric*'s attention to style both as the "separate, inserted treatise on style in part 2, covering agreement," and the way *The New Rhetoric* "deliberately breaks the pattern of isolation and disperses observations on language choices throughout the treatise, occasionally stopping . . . to concentrate on a given

device” (32). Although Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca suggest there are no “neutral choices” in language, Fahnestock reminds us “that there are choices” and that *The New Rhetoric*’s “attitude toward language is positive” (44). If the first two pieces focus significant attention on the importance of audience, Loïc Nicolas continues this trend by revisiting one of the most useful and controversial concepts introduced by *The New Rhetoric*, that of the “universal audience,” and examining “in what sense the moment of discursive production can be analyzed as an interlocutive relationship” (49). Given Nicolas’s attention to relationship, it is perhaps not surprising that this section closes with an essay by David A. Frank and Michelle K. Bolduc focused specifically on the nature of the collaboration of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. First published as an article in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, this chapter builds on Warnick’s insights in her earlier essay, “Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca’s Contribution to *The New Rhetoric*,” by considering the “rhetorical situations in which Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca collaborated” and providing a “diachronic study of both scholars, both alone and in collaboration” to “better address the question raised by their collaboration” (58). Frank and Bolduc, using the terminology of *The New Rhetoric* itself, understand Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca as a “philosophical pair” (77) and interpret their collaborative work as a “dissociation of philosophical and literary impulses brought to bear on the problems of postwar Europe” (77).

While Frank and Bolduc point out how Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca’s contributions offered important extensions into the literary and comic realm, section 2, “Extensions of *The New Rhetoric*,” more formally connects key concepts from *The New Rhetoric* to those of other important thinkers, extending their reach in the process. Alan Gross opens the section with his essay, “Solving the Mystery of Presence: Verbal/Visual Interaction in Darwin’s Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs.” By connecting concepts of presence with the work of Peirce’s semiotics as well as Gestalt theory, he extends *The New Rhetoric*’s concepts into the realm of the visual. Given the ever more digital world in which we exist and argue, the move to consider the visual in terms of *The New Rhetoric* is a provocative and productive one that likely will generate many avenues of exciting new scholarship. Extending the work they began in an earlier essay on “communion,” Richard Graff and Wendy Winn put *The New Rhetoric*’s concept in conversation with Kenneth Burke’s “identification,” terming them “cognate concepts” that

“evolved convergently” (104). Roselyne Koren provides a window into the way *The New Rhetoric’s* conception of argumentation allows scholars to overcome difficulties presented by French linguistics and to engage more ethically and honestly with value judgments, because *The New Rhetoric* “permits one to demarcate the axiom’s limits if one wishes to be a ‘whole’ person and not to dissociate or to rank judgments of reality and value” (142). She explains that part of *The New Rhetoric’s* “considerable advantage” is that it concedes that “scientists judge, evaluate, and may even take subjective ethical stands without compromising the rules of the scientific game, since they must, like all utterers, explicitly justify their subjective divisions” (142).

The third section, “The Ethical Turn in Perelman and *The New Rhetoric*,” continues this line of ethical inquiry with important explorations of Perelman’s international work through his involvement with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). As Ray Dearn points out, “no single individual was more heavily involved in the UNESCO project than Chaim Perelman” (148). Using Perelman’s contributions to the UNESCO project as an “anchor point,” Dearn provides an insightful consideration of Perelman’s “reflections upon the confusions surrounding the concepts of democracy” (149) that shows how Perelman’s idea “corresponds closely to the philosophy of openness and pluralism that underlies the new rhetoric project” (149). Linda Bense-Meyers uses Perelman and Richard McKeon’s shared involvement with UNESCO as a way to put their rhetorical theories in conversation, attempting “to reconcile the two rhetorical approaches as similar philosophies of negotiating value judgments that can present us with a programmatic approach to higher education with implications for the role of rhetoric and writing across the curriculum in the formation of tomorrow’s global citizens” (164).

Whereas section 3 extends New Rhetoric concepts to the realm of international ethics, section 4, “Uses of *The New Rhetoric*,” examines the pragmatic applications in the classroom and beyond. Jim Crosswhite’s excellent chapter provides a fabulous meditation on the benefits and challenges of teaching *The New Rhetoric* to undergraduates. In this lovely essay he reflects on what happens when he teaches an upper division course, “Inventing Arguments,” based on *The New Rhetoric’s* techniques. Perhaps it is appropriate to end this review of *The Promise of Reason* with the prospect of

pedagogy, because there is still much to discover, invent, and implement in this area.

As a whole, this collection delivers on the promise to offer a capacious and contextualized understanding of the many promises of reason *The New Rhetoric* provides. In putting international approaches together, Gage succeeds in opening up a multidisciplinary, transnational conversation, and provides a path for this dialogue to grow and develop in the next 50 years and beyond. It offers a wonderful introduction to *The New Rhetoric*'s key issues for scholars new to the text and its concepts while simultaneously enabling scholars more familiar with *The New Rhetoric* to further their knowledge by providing them deeper analysis of ideas that have come to be synonymous with the text—"the universal audience," "ethics," "presence," and "invention." With any collection, some essays are stronger than others, but on the whole each of the contributions offers insightful analysis and proves worthy of the time spent reading it. I know that the next time I teach *The New Rhetoric*, I will be assigning this volume as required reading, whether in whole for graduate students or in selected parts for undergraduates. My only complaint is that such a wonderful volume is so expensive. Then again, who can put a price on the wisdom contained within?

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