

Book reviews

No Empty Rhetoric: Understanding Human Rights Advocacy in Context

Richard Ghere, *Rhetoric in Human Rights Advocacy*
(Lexington Books, 2015)

Ioana GRANCEA

At the time of this book's release, it is well understood among rhetoric scholars that the degree of public support that a social or political cause can get depends largely on the discursive work of advocacy groups: choice of arguments, strength of voice, degree of public visibility, capacity to adapt the discourse to community values – all influence the outcome. This is why I believe that the book's merit is neither that of emphasizing the *existence of a rhetorical dimension* in human rights advocacy, nor that of showing how rhetorical theory *can help practitioners* do their work more proficiently, although the author insists on both these aspects. He goes back and forth, in almost every section, between real instances of advocacy discourse and *new rhetoric* recommendations (as formulated by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca) – which makes the book a delight for anyone interested in applications of the *new rhetoric*. But I believe that another aspect of the book is the one that struck gold. The major contribution that it makes to rhetorical studies consists in the extensive exploration it provides on the variables that influence the content and the consequences of advocacy discourse. The (often intricate) web of relations in which speakers are immersed influences and is influenced by the architecture of their discourse. It is this *relational emphasis* of the book that I find most valuable.

Ghere's insight, although never made explicit as such, is that the hot spot of contemporary rhetorical studies is not rhetorical excellence per se, but analytic ability to disentangle the cognitive and emotional threads of a given area of discourse and follow them back to their origin and (where possible) fast-forward to their end. The author goes at great length in unveiling personal and social underpinnings of discourses that gained public attention at a certain point in recent history. The public interventions of major human rights advocates or antagonists are analyzed in the light provided by transcripts of their phone conversations, diary pages of their spouses, interviews with their personal consultants. President Lyndon Baines Johnson, peace advocate Mary Anderson, victim of abusive child labour Iqbal Masih, Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, musician Lucius Banda are some of the people whose discursive action in the field of human rights is subjected to such analysis by the author.

The “zooming in” function of the author's analysis is completed by his ability to “zoom out” on the effects of the discourse for/against particular applications of human rights. Ghere looks with a critical eye at the proof available for the proposed connection between broadcast radio *hate discourse* and genocide (pp. 65-78), the alleged influence of symphonic music on intercultural dialogue (pp. 179-192), or the proposed contrast between societal rights “talk” and the actual usurpation of those rights (pp. 143-159). Enlarging the picture even more, Ghere raises interesting questions regarding the implications of winning a global audience for a local human rights issue (pp. 93-105; 233) and ponders on the consequences that might be brought about if human rights advocacy would give up the *rhetoric of eradication* (pulling out rights abuse at the roots”) and would develop a results-centered approach aimed at “boundary relaxation” based on what he calls “talk around the edges of culturally embedded practices” (pp. 232-242).

Consistent with the underlying idea that rhetorical efficacy is never a direct consequence of sound argumentation but always depends on a more intricate web of meanings and relations, the author looks at the challenges that advocates need to face when translating human rights language to a local community attached to completely different values. The contrast between the way human rights are formulated in international fora and the discursive contexts in which they have to be applied is a recurrent theme in the book. Drawing on the work of Clifford Geertz, Gerald Hauser and Avishai Margalit, the author gets into details about the work that human rights advocates need to perform as interpreters between the discourses of the local culture and the international human rights community. Their work is that of getting from the *thin* formulations of human rights to the *thick* vernaculars needed to express local realities. It is not only a matter of word choice - even the way in which the success of a humanitarian action is defined and measured may be culturally biased and particular interventions may end up doing more harm than good to the targeted population if advocates do not take the time to *really listen* to them and understand their way of seeing the specific problems that are meant to be tackled (pp. 47-64).

While recognizing that human rights issues are one of the areas of discourse that are “by nature messy” and that “appear even more muddled in the midst of veiled power agendas” (p. 241), the book illustrates the need for rhetorical analysis to undo the entanglement that is woven around them. Rhetorical studies can help restore a healthy relationship between words and the realities they attempt to describe or change, on the one hand, and between the participants to the human rights discourse, on the other. Ghere draws attention to the fact that ambiguity of international human rights debate is in fact maintained by participants who prefer using fuzzwords (author's pun on buzzwords) in order to advance their agenda. Rhetoric is thus meant to bring more clarity to this landscape and to improve the dialogue.

Decoding National Identity through the Lens of East Asian Ecocritical Discourse

**Simon C. Estok and Won-Chung Kim (editors),
East Asian Ecocriticisms. A Critical Reader
(Palgrave Macmillan, New York&Hampshire, 2013)**

Iolanda PRODAN

The development of environmental discourses since the 1970s has coined some concepts such as *deep ecology*, *ecofeminism*, and *environmental justice*. The discursive dimension of the complex relationship between humans and the environment can be better understood through the environmental and political discourses, on the one hand, and via literary works on this topic, on the other. Ecocriticism (the environmentally oriented literature studies) has made its debut in the 90s and has developed into an interdisciplinary field, being focused in its early beginnings on the Western languages area studies and researches.

Palgrave Macmillan's series *Literatures, Cultures, and the Environment* acknowledge the *ecocriticism's* rhetorical dimension and its socially and culturally embedded theoretical framework, challenging its readers to grasp an unconventional perspective on the discursive construction of the national identity through the ecocritical discourse. As Karen Thornber argues in her *Afterword* "literature traverses boundaries of all kinds: environmental, political and administrative, economic, demographic, cultural and social" (p. 243).

It goes without saying that *East Asian Ecocriticisms. A Critical Reader* draws in part from ecology and environmental studies. Nevertheless, for those scholars well familiarized with the East Asian academic discourse, the volume should be read and analyzed from the CDA (critical discourse analysis) and rhetorical perspective. The book consists of twelve studies related to *ecocriticism's* development in Japan, China, South Korea and Taiwan. Although the majority of contributors employ non-East Asian theories and concepts, the studies are articulated in a "East versus West" logic, reminding of the East Asian academic endeavors to break free from Western scholarship and to shed light on the East Asian values, especially those of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shinto.

Focused on the environmentally oriented East Asian literatures, the studies place much emphasis on the literary description. However, from the rhetorical point of view, the volume provides some useful hints about the discursive construction of the four national identities through the ecocritical discourse.

In the Japanese section, Masami Yuki analyses the literary contributions

of writer Kazue Morisaki to Japan's ecological discourse. Being a Japanese born in the Korean peninsula under the Japanese colonial rule, the writer's environmental discourse echoes her personal perception of national identity as a dual and ambiguous one. Masami Yuki argues that both national identity and language highlight the significance of cultural and social factors in developing the so-called "ecological identity". This kind of discourse&context approach has been successfully employed by Bruce Allen in his essay exploring the discursive dimension of the Japanese national identity through the stories related to Minamata environmental pollution incident (disclosed to the public in the 50s) and Fukushima nuclear incident from 2011. Both the Chinese and Taiwanese sections offer an interesting view on the ecocritical discourse, focusing on the relevance of the so much needed balance between the Western and Chinese perspectives on literary works about nature, environment and pollution.

By far, the most interesting section is the one concerning the South Korean ecocritical discourse. The studies related to the Korean peninsula highlight the undeniable and complex relationship between the socio-political context and the discourse. In this vein, Kim Won-chung argues that the Korean ecocriticism should to be considered a product of the close relationship between the division of the Korean peninsula and its environmental degradation. Kim's argument echoes the classical South Korean academic approach to discourse, focused on prioritizing the historical trauma and the constraining limits of social, political and cultural environment.

Furthermore, Shin Doo-ho's essay underlines the influential power of the environmental discourses which have contributed to the democratization of Korean society in the late 80s. Last but not least, Wu Chan-je's essay addresses the ecological implications of the geopolitical division of the Korean peninsula, focusing especially on the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) along the 38th parallel. The author argues that the division has framed new discursive patterns of the Korean ecological identity, the last one seen as an essential part of the Korean national identity. Wu analyses three contemporary Korean novels -Choi In-hoon's *The Square* (1960), Park Sang-yeon's *DMZ* (1997), and Kang Hui-jin's *The Ghost* (2011)- and shows that the DMZ has created a kind of "hybrid identity" torn apart between the values of the two Koreas. Though in a less obvious manner, Wu's essay reminds of the long-standing debate among the South Korean scholars on the blurred line between national and ethnic identity.

In spite of its emphasis on literary descriptivism, the volume succeeds in capturing East Asian Ecocriticism's originality in its attempt to address the environmental issues through literary works. Although understanding *East Asian Ecocriticisms* requires a strong background in the field of East Asian literatures and environmental studies, as a whole, the volume provides some unconventional yet useful tools for a rhetorical analysis of the discursive construction of national identity and historical experiences through the environmentally oriented literary works. However, for the reader's convenience, some remarks on the historical development of the East Asian eco-nationalistic

discourse (especially the one disseminated in Japan and South Korea) would have been very useful for a better understanding of the relationship between the context and the ecocritical discourse production.

Rhetorical Style: A Deeper Look into Discourse Architecture
Jeanne Fahnestock, *Rhetorical Style, The Uses of Language in Persuasion*
(Oxford University Press, 2011)

Mădălina MOCANU

One can be born with the gift of proficient public speaking or you can have a talent for writing. However, most of the times, to be skilled in each of these domains one needs practice and experience, as well as solid documentation and research. *Rhetorical Style. The Uses Of Language In Persuasion* proposes a new perspective related to discourse analysis and presents, at the same time, methods for a better understanding of the process of discourse creation and gives valuable information about the use of the right words, clear sentences and phrases. Also, the book is focused on rhetorical figures and the use of these figures in order to attract the audience.

The book makes reference to a fragment of a speech that was held by F.D. Roosevelt in front of the Congress, in 1941. The fragment was accompanied by various versions of the text and spelling corrections, a form of reminding us about the carefulness, accuracy that was used in creating powerful speeches. Also, the example points out the attention that was given to details, the constant search for the right words and forms of expression. Even if examples are given in English, a language rich in possibility for word choices, the indications and examples given by the author can be useful in every other language.

The idea that stays at the center of this book is the fact that tradition is too rich and valuable \ not to be used in creating relevant and superior materials, opposed to empty shapes that populate the world of communication nowadays. The author presents one of the most influent theoretical proposals related to style and puts the concept of style in a new perspective. In order to give value to traditional models, the author separated the book in four parts as it follows.

The first part focuses on word choice. The author approaches this issue in a fresh and interesting way. This part of the book opens with a look into the depths and the history of the English language. Direct character, sincerity, multitude of word possibilities, linguistic borrowings, the dynamics and permanent changes that take place in the vocabulary are studied in this section. The words are seen as elementary particles that together give shape to bigger forms. Their structure and characteristics are essential to the reception of the discourse.

The second part of the book looks closely at the construction of phrases and sentences. The scope of this part is to offer the reader new forms and models of discourse analysis. Anchored in subtleties of the English language, this part of

the book talks about possibilities that we have in creating a solid and harmonious architecture for our discourse.

The third part of the book focuses on that figurative breathe that the artists use in order to give life to their work. The author speaks about the relation of the author with his public and explains the mechanisms that put in motion the entire architecture of the discourse.

The last part of the book looks deep into the process of speech creation and puts the light on the invisible parts of the process that are available only for those who have an eye for them. In this section of the book we encounter concepts like coherence, composition, amplification, and other aspects that can be considered tools that can be used in order to give life to powerful ideas.

The book has a rather technical character; it provides tools for word engineers. It can be a valuable material in the hands of those who seek a profound analysis of the elements that are related to discourse creation. This book gives life to ideas left in the forgotten past of tradition, too valuable to be ignored and useful in bringing vitality to contemporary discourses.