

## Towards a pragmatic outlook on rhetorical genres

Aviva Freedman, Peter Medway (ed.), *Genre and the New Rhetoric*  
(Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005)

Ioana-Maria MAFTEI

This volume stands as a collection regarding genres and the way in which they can be analyzed by device of a new rhetorical perspective, as we can easily see from the very title. Starting with a part dedicated to the theory of genre which offers new points of view on their definition and classification, it is continued by placing rhetoric genres in the sphere of pragmatics rather than semantics or semiotics. The last part targets the possible uses of these concepts in education. This volume is very well structured and oriented under the patronage of a logical and explicative thread which is conclusive enough. As such, the basic concepts are explained in the introduction written by Freedman and Medway, which shows that, if traditional definitions on genres are based on textual regularities, then a new definition of this term should be connected to the cultural essence of the used language (p. 2). For a better understanding of the subsequent texts, the two editors and authors show both the discursive context and the present consequences of the model that is to be inferred by compiling and admitting these texts' conclusions.

The new perspective is therefore linked with the fact that cultural forms have now dimmer borders and thus head towards a culture of the new. In fact, in *Genre as Social Action*, Carolyn Miller proposes an ethnomethodological classification of genres for the purpose of explaining the knowledge created by practicing rhetoric (p. 23). Thus, the genres can be sorted into classes by using the criterion of rhetorical situation and giving pragmatics a higher contribution in this endeavor.

While on the subject, we can note other views that come to complete Miller's. As such, Anne Freedman tries an analogy between game (a tennis game in particular – her article from the third chapter of this volume is actually entitled *Anyone for Tennis?*) and genre. The proposed alternative here would be to demarcate a genre based on the differences

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\* Universitatea „Al. I. Cuza”, Iași.

that occur between texts and not on the resemblances (p. 46) because, apart from understanding the actual genre in which a text can fit, the understanding of its tactics and strategies is also quite significant (p. 54).

The pragmatic outlook on genres is supplemented by authors such as Anthony Paré and Graham Smart with the purpose of establishing the constitutive elements of genres while understanding them as social action and thus extending Carolyn Miller's conclusions by showing that genres are a combination of standardized rhetorical actions and recurrent situations (p. 128). Moreover, Janet Giltrow also points out that the rhetorical genre is based on cultural background, analyzing in her study concrete situations such as trials with juries from a rhetorical stand.

To highlight the results of this new paradigm on genres in an actual, material way, the present collection of studies ends by a chapter dedicated to its results in education. We can note here Freedman's article regarding the educational action of teaching and learning the rhetorical genres for primary grade students that starts from the methods promoted by the Sydney School of rhetorical genres. The author notices and names a few impairments of this method, concluding that a comprehensive knowledge of rhetorical genres can only be the result of actual writing exercises (p. 173). The acquisition of the pragmatic outlook on rhetorical genres and its undeniable importance is thereby shown again.

To conclude with, we can easily realize that the current studies have not only a vast theoretical support, but they are also attractive due to the use of enjoyable examples, often times with a personal touch (Russell Hunt talks about the linguistic game played with his two year old daughter as a prologue to his conclusion that theoretical notions can be acquired through practice) that invites to persist upon the reading and properly understanding of the detailed theories. If we however want a look at the other side of the coin, we can conveniently return to the senior editor's foreword, where Allan Luke says jokingly that he wants to reform the general view on the editor's introductions which are rarely cited. Consequently, we will cite him here, taking into account that his idea regarding the issues that might stand up is based upon the definitions used in some of these studies for concepts such as mutual purposes, motivational strategies etc. – perceived only as contextual variables which is not the way in which they are viewed in other genre studies (p. vii). In other words, the articles in this volume leave just enough room for constructive criticism through a few rather problematic assumptions.