

Re/Framing Identifications, edited by Michelle Ballif. Long Grove: Waveland, 2014. 360 pp.

Reviewed by Peter Brooks, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Assembled by Michelle Ballif, *Re/Framing Identities* contains thirty-four essays and speeches from the 2012 Rhetoric Society of America (RSA) Conference that respond to RSA President Krista Ratcliffe's call to (re)consider Burkean identification "as a place of perpetual reframing that affects who, how, and what can be thought, spoken, written, and imagined" (1). Some works in the collection directly address Burke/identification, while others intuit, invent, and interpret identification/identity within various artifacts and events. Inspired by the conference theme, and after describing Ballif's "rich substrata of themes," I will re/frame the traditional purview of this review in order to demonstrate the book's value to us as teacher-scholars.

Ballif sifts essays into six "arbitrary [and] very general but thematic" sections that embody the explorative, evolving ideas presented at professional conferences (2). The first, "Re/Framing National Identity" includes Jacqueline Jones Royster's plenary address alongside essays discussing U.S. identity construction through historic artifacts, while the second, "Re/Framing Deliberative Rhetoric, Democracy, and Ethics," focuses on ethical questions culled from pop culture, politics, and economics. Contributors to section three—"Re/Framing History, Memory, and Events"—analyze how historical frames reveal new information, conceal facts, or alternately reframe events, and those in section four—"Re/Framing Embodiment and Rhetorical Agency"—unveil the ways media reframes bodies of gender, race, or sexuality. "Re/Framing Racial, Ethnic, and Class Identifications," the collection's fifth section, looks at the rhetorical symbols used to identify race, ethnicity, and class, while the sixth and final section, "Re/Framing Disciplinary Identifications and Assumptions," contains essays that show alternate ways to view our academic community's scholarly foundations.

Ballif's self-described "arbitrary" organizational grouping is accurate. Essays could crossover from section to section without thematic disruption: for example, in section three, Shawn D. Ramsey's claim that cultural historical activity theory helps us better understand rhetoric's history links just as easily with Tonya Ritola's essay on disciplinary identification in section six. Considering the liberties participants take with a conference theme, I think it is fair to say that this collection establishes itself as a discursive and circumscribed—rather than a direct or comprehensive—Burkean tome. The few essays that tackle Burke's theories (identification or otherwise) do so adequately for a conference anthology, but are not as exhaustive as one would expect in traditional edited collections.

However, this is not problematic. Ballif's intention in this collection is to introduce readers to the best thirty-four essays from the 2012 RSA Conference, and she acknowledges that the contributors have different scholarly backgrounds, varied levels of professional experience, and diverse research identities. In as much, contributors present a breadth of rich ideas in various stages of development. But if I can re/frame at least slightly Ballif's intentions for the collection, I want to argue that *Re/Framing Identifications* offers us rich pedagogical applications for first year composition (FYC), in addition to innovative analyses and re/interpretations of Burkean theoretical tenets.

Indeed, *Re/Framing Identification* begs FYC pedagogical applications through essays containing analyses of rhetorical practice found in familiar artifacts and through its use of a range of writing styles. From my perspective as a teacher-scholar, I can think of no better way to invite students into our professional community than to ask them to read such a collection. In addition to using the essays as the basis for discussion and analysis, teachers could use RSA submission guidelines (350 word abstracts for a committee; 10-15 minute readable papers for a live audience; 4500 word submissions for publication) as an activity for FYC classrooms, challenging students to identify different context and audience considerations in the development of their own conference texts.

We often ask FYC students to analyze essays where the rhetorical mechanics melt into the written word, even though students often struggle to see such rhetorical nuance. William Duffy's essay on Jon Stewart's comedic and journalistic credibility carefully delineates the rhetoric woven within verbal interactions between Stewart and political pundits, and as such, Duffy's rhetorical unpacking could aid students to do future unpacking of their own. Because students are familiar with the content of *The Daily Show*, they can follow Duffy's claim that Stewart's ethos is "audience-conscious, rhetorically precise, and completely transparent in his construction of an argument" (72). Both Duffy's and Stewart's rhetorical techniques suggest rich activities for classroom practice.

Likewise, Katherine Bridgman's contribution is accessible to students, analyzing the Facebook page "We Are All Khaled Said" in interesting ways. She reframes Facebook using Burkean identification and embodiment, and then connects the social media tool to the 2010 Egyptian protests. Her central argument—that by responding to Facebook event pages, users declare ideological support—bridges digitally native FYC students to rhetoric in real life through multimodal social media artifacts. In a similar vein, M. Elizabeth Thorpe's Pledge of Allegiance analysis demonstrates the real life rhetoric of grammar. Thorpe scrutinizes the appositive "under God" to show how its rhetorical effect encourages consideration "of the assumptions about the flag, America, and the Republic" within a determined hierarchy: first God, then nation, then flag

(36). These essays introduce FYC students to an overt rhetorical unpacking of language. In short, they are worth sharing with FYC students because most will be thoroughly familiar with the essays' content.

The collection also offers varied writing styles for student analysis. Two standout pieces are Royster's plenary address and Erik Doxtader's essay analyzing the Universal Doctrine of Human Rights (UDHR). Royster's brief speech provides context to and shares work from her upcoming book, focused on reframing women's roles in the Civil War. Doxtader's analysis of UDHR argues that "human rights discourse is simply a horde of words affording thin cover for imperial aspirations" (117). For FYC students, his essay is one to chew through, slowly: Doxtader bends and breaks language in complex yet beautiful ways. Royster's rhetorical approach is less dense, yet equally engaging. Audiences are afforded the opportunity to (re)visit her speech and read the emotionally invested narration of her walks around Atlanta that inspired her to consider the ways Civil War women "situate[d] their voices within the larger sociopolitical context of 'war work'" (18).

Teachers will also find the collection helpful in introducing notions of privilege to FYC students, who sometimes express denial or misunderstanding over this real life issue. Bryan Carr's "Reframing the Secret Identity of Whiteness" uses Burke cluster criticism to formulate three themes regarding privilege in superhero portrayals: (1) whiteness as default identity; (2) nonwhite identity stereotypes; and (3) white considered "classic" and "desirable." Carr's work is relevant in two ways. First, superhero portrayal is modally ubiquitous, presenting students with a deep pool from which to draw discussion examples. Second, Carr's possibilities and pitfalls open up space for further discourse by exploring how fan audiences react to changes in race and character identity. Specifically, he examines fan responses to comics author Idris Elba's portrayal of the Norse god Heimdall in the *Thor* series—who is drawn white in the comics—and Marvel Comics' decision to make a Hispanic version of Spider-Man. The preference for white characters as desirable, as Carr frames it, mirrors a trend in "geek culture" where young, white males communicate via social media hateful messages to those with alternate perspectives (e.g., Google the Gamergate controversy).

Carr's essay bridges us from the pedagogical possibilities within *Re/Framing Identifications* to the important theoretical tenets we should (re)consider about Burkean identification given the collection's contributions. Katherine Bridgman's essay on Islamic identity as well as Dominic Ashby's on Japanese rhetoric will educate Burkean neophytes and offer interesting, cogent examples of Burke's theory of identification. Alternatively, Burke mavens will appreciate Ashby's call "to adjust our rhetorical theories to account for those new perspectives" that challenge notions of dominant group privilege (313). Certain essays,

like the ones I discuss next, challenge Burke's concept of consubstantiation, an occurrence at the end of identification where parties "acting together [result in] common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, [and] attitudes" (Burke 20-21).

Janice Odom's vocally rich critique of Burkean identification likewise addresses interesting theoretical tenets. Funneling her critique through work by feminist rhetorical theorists Dorothea Olkowski and Barbara Biesecker, Odom's resolution to Burke's conflict ridden, masculine, and submissive approach to identification is to reframe it, using Luce Irigaray's concept of the interval. With writing befit of French feminist Hélène Cixous' poetic style, Odom describes the interval as "the labia—remind[ing] us that the gap is constantly opening and closing, rubbing, touching, never becoming one, yet never fully breached" (245). Instead of using warlike tactics to surrender to an opponent and seal the gap, our key approach should be to maintain two identities instead of succumbing to one through consubstantiation, to keep the gap in various stages of openness and closeness.

Ballif includes two other writers who also explore consubstantiation to interesting ends. Nicholas S. Paliewicz discusses consubstantiation problems found in artifacts emerging from the ten-year anniversary of 9/11. He claims a capitalistic religion further drives our "national consubstantiation [and] remains centered on the dissociation of our constructed scapegoat: Muslims and Arab Americans" (295). Katie Rose Guest Pryal's essay "Reframing Sanity" also analyzes consubstantiation through media portrayals of Tucson shooter Jared Loughner. Here, the scapegoat is mental health, and we have "through the process of identification, formed a social group, those external to the group are divided, cast out, and ripe for scapegoating to protect the cohesion of the identified group" (160).

My re/frame of *Re/Framing Identifications* as both pedagogical and theoretical risks rigid closure and the consubstantiation these writers warn against. I do not wish our students to become comp/rhet teacher-scholars; yet, I suggest the benefits of sharing with them the professional conference community embodied by this anthology. Through accessible writing that re/frames traditional rhetoric, contributors to the volume show their passion for the field. If we share selections from this volume, then we share topics relevant to our students' lives, showing them that what's at stake in a written text is more than just a grade.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Works Cited

Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1969. Print.