Review

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Review by: Don Paul Abbott

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century (p. 517). Can we also conclude that classical early modern philosophy did contain a (hidden) philosophy or philosophies of rhetoric in the sense of attempts to justify rhetoric? This question is important, especially with respect to Descartes and Spinoza. The answer must be negative. The results clearly show that rhetoric does not contribute to the meaning of signs in the work of these authors. Only Bacon, who grew up under nearly ideal circumstances with respect to humanist education and rhetoric, arrives at something like a philosophical theory of rhetoric. To a much lesser extend, this can still be said with respect to Hobbes, who is much more than Bacon a critic of rhetoric, but still in search of an new rhetoric. In Descartes and Spinoza we still find rhetorical education and many reflections on rhetoric (it is one of the great merits of this book to have shown this). At the same time they were convinced that rhetoric constrains the expressive power of language. The conclusion must be that the way the early modern thinkers distinguish between *res* and *verbum* prevents them from providing a powerful theory of meaning which is the cornerstone of a philosophy of rhetoric. Not a prejudice against rhetoric, but the idea that language only provides a deficient expression of thought proves to be inconsistent with the very idea of a philosophy of rhetoric. In Descartes and Spinoza these effects are enforced by the rationalist assumption that thought is a sphere of reality to which the mind has access independently of linguistic expressions. This book thus proves to be a strong contribution to the literature. Rothkamm enables us to see the real limitations of early modern rationalism with respect to rhetoric much clearer than before.

Temilo van Zantwijk
Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena

Christopher D. Johnson, *Hyperboles: The Rhetoric of Excess in Baroque Literature and Thought. Cambridge: Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature*, 2010. 695 pp. ISBN: 9780674053335

According to Christopher Johnson the hyperbole is the "most infamous of tropes, whose name most literary criticism does not praise, and whose existence the history of philosophy largely ignores" (1). As a result of this neglect "no full-scale defense has been made of the Baroque's most Baroque figure. This book aims to remedy that lack" (16). And what a remedy it is. To say that this is a study on a grand scale is certainly not hyperbolic. In nearly 700 pages Johnson "moves from the history of rhetoric to the extravagances of lyric and then through the impossibilities of drama and the aporias of philosophy" (521).

The grand scope of *Hyperboles* is made necessary by the protean role of hyperbole in discourse: "as a discursive figure integral to the success of classical and Renaissance epic, Shakespearian tragedy, Pascalian apology, as

well as the viability of the Cartesian method, it can be narrative, dialogic, or structural" (8). Thus hyperbole is no mere figure of speech but rather, says Johnson, following the lead of Kenneth Burke, it is "a 'master trope,' one that vies with metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony for our attention" (3). Indeed, Burke's approach to the four "master tropes" in *A Grammar of Motives* might serve as a preview of Johnson's method in *Hyperboles*. Say Burke: "my primary concern with them here will not be with their purely figurative usage, but with their rôle in the discovery and description of 'the truth.' It is an evanescent moment that we shall deal with—for not only does the dividing line between the figurative and the literal usages shift, but also the four trope shift into one another" (*Grammar of Motives,* 503).

The hyperbole, now rechristened a "master trope" supersedes the merely figurative. It is more than a stylistic device, so much more that at times it is difficult to say what a hyperbole is—or what it is not. It is a figurative element, to be sure, but hyperbole is also an argumentative technique, an inventional device, a philosophical critique, and ultimately a world view. In establishing the hyperbole a "master trope" Johnson begins with an examination of the place of hyperbole in the rhetorical theory of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian (in particular), and Longinus. In this survey it is soon apparent that hyperbole is not one in a long list of figures but an essential, if overlooked, element in rhetoric. Indeed, these earlier chapters, and probably the entire book, might be read profitably as an alternative history of the rhetorical tradition.

After surveying the place of hyperbole in rhetorical theory, Johnson turns to the function of hyperbole in literary texts through a series of close readings as insightful as his earlier incursions in theoretical texts. These readings begin with some of the usual suspects of baroque literature: Góngora, Quevedo, Gracián, Sor Juana, and finally Shakespeare's *Lear.* While not surprising to find hyperbole at play in the literature of *conceptismo* and *culteranismo*, it is perhaps unexpected to discover it at work in the philosophical writing of Descartes, Pascal, and even Kant. Indeed, in Johnson's view, hyperbolists are at least as likely to be philosophers as are poets. Thus Kant, that notorious enemy of rhetoric, utilizes hyperbole extensively but, true to his anti-rhetorical bias, never mentions its name. According to Johnson, Kant's analysis of the sublime in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is rooted in hyperbole. Indeed, almost any philosophical discussion of the expanses of space and time must necessarily involve hyperbole. The sublime, with its emphasis upon the power and majesty of nature, requires Kant to resort to hyperbole. In Johnson's account of Descartes, Pascal, and Kant the hyperbole is transformed from a rhetorical figure and a literary technique into a "philoseme," that is, a method of philosophic analysis.

As befits such a polymorphous figure, Johnson shows that hyperbole is inextricably linked with *copia, amplificatio,* and *inventio.* These key concepts of rhetoric, like hyperbole itself, depend upon processes of expansion and extension and thereby transcend the boundaries of style and substance. Perhaps inevitably and necessarily, *Hyperboles* is itself an exemplar of am-

plification, a corpus of copiousness, an encomium of invention, a . . . well; it is difficult to read such a long book about excess and extravagance without resorting to the hyperbolic. But, hyperbole aside, this is a remarkable book. It is difficult to imagine that Johnson has left much unsaid about his subject. The display of erudition can be both dazzling and daunting—and occasionally bewildering. Simply surveying the 129 pages of notes can be remarkably instructive. In telling the story of hyperbole he seamlessly interweaves ancient rhetoricians, mannerist poets, Enlightenment philosophers, and post-Modern critics—sometimes in the same sentence.

In *Hyperboles* Johnson makes a compelling, and certainly exhaustive, case that his subject "is more than a figure of style: it is a mode of thought, a way of being" (4). This formerly neglected figure is now elevated to the status of an "*über* trope" situated in the very center of human consciousness. Or as Johnson puts it in a probably irresistible paraphrase of Descartes: "I hyperbolize, therefore I am" (376).

Don Paul Abbott
University of California, Davis

L. Albert et L. Nicolas, *Polémique et rhétorique de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, De Boeck – Duculot, Bruxelles, 2010. ISBN: 9782801116394

La dynamique équipe du GRAL de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles consacre un nouveau volume, fort de vingt-six contributions et d'une abondante bibliographie mise à jour, aux mécanismes de la polémique. L'ouvrage s'ouvre sur une synthèse claire et inspirée de la problématique abordée, qui est signée par les deux co-directeurs. Luce Albert et Loïc Nicolas y précisent d'emblée les objectifs du recueil et justifient l'intérêt d'une approche rhétorique. Aux antipodes de la vision réductrice d'une parole purement violente, échappant à tout contrôle, la polémique est ici conçue comme « un duel par les mots » , ce qui la rend disponible pour l'analyse rhétorique et discursive. Dans leur synthèse, les deux auteurs s'attachent à identifier les modalités *du* polémique au-delà de ses incarnations dans *des* polémiques particulières, qui dépassent les frontières des genres qu'elles investissent. Selon eux, la polémique met en scène, sur un terrain commun et fictionnel, deux adversaires irréconciables ainsi qu'un Tiers, qui peut être tantôt l'arbitre, tantôt l'un des enjeux du duel. Les acteurs du conflit passent entre eux un pacte implicite qui engendre un ensemble d'attentes et d'interdits supposés, crée le cadre d'une fiction régulée et fixe les limites de violence verbale. La polémique correspond donc à une forme de rituel qui fait peser des contraintes sur les participants, mais cette ritualisation n'est pas déterminée à l'avance et les contraintes sont propres à chaque polémique. Les contradicteurs construisent ensemble et tentent d'accaparer à tour de rôle le lieu de la lutte qui n'existe que comme espace d'échange. Ils entrent ainsi dans