cific poems in which Frost’s dualism is clearly manifested. In all, Stanlis’ book is a ground-breaking and indispensable contribution to our knowledge of this great American poet, and a life’s work brilliantly consummated.

**The Way They Argue Now**
Scott F. Crider


It’s hard out there for a liberal literary critic, so, as an old-fashioned liberal who went to graduate school in the 1990’s when the approved theories did not allow for liberalism, let alone conservatism, I find Amanda Anderson’s *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* refreshing since her rhetorical goal is to refine and restore (through theoretical sophistication, not mere reaction) three principles of liberal thought which literary theory appeared for a time to vanquish—freedom, universalism, and reason—in order to defend and enact a Habermasian “communicative ethics” for the discourse of the academy. And she does refine and restore them, at least for the “we” of her audience—literary critics who may have noticed that their contemplative pronouncements are in a pretty serious quarrel with their active lives—though it should be noted that plenty of us who encountered literary theory did not give up on any of the above principles and said so.

On philosophical grounds, I am inspired by Anderson’s arguments and her example; even so, on literary ones, I am somewhat dispirited. She is the chair of English literature at Johns Hopkins University, but during the whole of her good book she fails to engage imaginative literature itself. This is due to her focus, to be fair: the theoretical assumptions of literary theorists. Yet, sadly, one of the ways they argue about literature now is that they don’t; instead, they argue about arguing about it. But let me discuss her theoretical achievement. The book has three sections, one for each of its topics: Part I concerns freedom; II, universalism; and III, reason.

Parts I and II are fascinating. In Part I, “Critical Practices,” Anderson examines “the Habermas-Foucault debate” within feminist literary criticism, during which the ancient question of freedom and fate is addressed through the topic of gender, first in a critique of Judith Butler’s strict constructionism in her discussion of gender, during which Anderson shows that its Foucauldian fatalism cannot be rationally reconciled with Butler’s own call for performative subversion since subversion presumes the very freedom denied, and then in a discussion of the same topic in Victorian literary studies. Anderson’s refutation is compelling.

In Part II, “Living Universalism,” she examines the revival of “cosmopolitanism,” which she sees as a corrective both to the imperialistic universalism that is really only a projected particularism and to the multicultural nativism that is really only an inbred tribalism. According to her, both universalism and nativism fail to do justice to the human capacity for moderate transcendence in relation to the traditions of one’s own culture in respectful response to those of other cultures. To develop her case, she...
examines the relationship between epistemological realism and ethical norms.

Though in Parts I and II Anderson mentions Habermas and the argument of “communicative ethics,” it is only in Part III, “Ethos and Argument,” the most original and important part of the study, that she develops the case at length, attempting to save reason from its poststructural detractors by arguing for ethos, instead of “identity,” as a qualifying influence upon Enlightenment reason. For Anderson, what is missing in both bureaucratic rationality and identity politics is virtue. The heart of her case comes in the last two chapters of Part III, during the first of which she manages the debate between Foucault and Habermas over the former’s apparent conversion from fatalism to freedom with respect to ethical reasoning, and during the second of which she uses Lionel Trilling’s distinction between “sincerity” and “authenticity”—the former operates within conventions, while the latter critiques and transgresses them—to defend liberal proceduralism. She employs ethos instead of “character” because, as she puts it, “[T]he term tends to cover both individual and collective understandings of practice” (134), and because she opposes the conservative argument in favor of “character” since it is, according to her, too individualistic. Anderson argues that the late Foucault argued for ethos, Habermas apparently for logos alone, but she then shows that Habermas too believes in ethos, the ethos of argument—that is, a habit, in theory and in practice, of rational argument open to its own limitations as it aspires to a true universalism.

Through its political culture of democratic debate and its legal one of constitutional law, modern liberalism offers the best hope for a multicultural America in a globalized world, and its central virtue should be the ethos of argument. (It should be noted that she does take up the most difficult test case, though too briefly—that of the West’s response to Islam—in her discussion of France’s political discussion of the hijab.) She concludes,

The process of argument is what enables the very act of pluralist self-clarification to occur, and the society in question must cultivate an ethos of argument if it is to meet the ongoing challenges of its political (re)constitution. (187)

One would like to know how Anderson would respond to moments when argument is impossible—when violence thwarts proceduralism—but should Anderson persuade contemporary literary theorists to re-think their suspicion of reason, she will have provided an important service to us all.

Much of her argument is indeed persuasive, yet not completely so to this reader because she neglects the study of ethos in the art of rhetoric. Though she is apparently not aware of the fact, ethos in Aristotle’s Rhetoric is a rich ethical and political term that can refer either to the speaker’s character or the audience’s. She does draw upon the Aristotelian ethical tradition, but she never refers to the Aristotelian rhetorical tradition, which is a surprising omission since the relationship between virtuous character and true argument in the service of the good in deliberative rhetoric, the just in judicial, and the noble in epideictic is perhaps his central interest there. Eugene Garver’s Aristotle’s Rhetoric: An Art of Character could have deepened her understanding of ethos and of the “virtue ethics” tradition itself. Habermas’ reliance upon both Kant and Marx keeps Anderson from the more ample understanding of ethos that informs Aristotle’s ethical, rhetorical and political understanding. For Aristotle’s Rhetoric, ethos is the result of a speaker’s practical wisdom, virtue and good will (2.1.5); that is, it is intellectual, moral and social.

As well, the Rhetoric would have given her the understanding of emotion or pathos she
mentions as a good, yet does not discuss in any detail. Habermasian liberals might be tempted to neglect the rhetorical tradition since, as Anderson explains, Habermas is critical of civic republicanism—the child of humanism and rhetoric in the early modern period. They should resist the temptation in order to cure liberal proceduralism of potentially inhumane tendencies; after all, procedures without persons do not necessarily lead to justice. Might one go so far as to recommend to liberal theorists Edmund Burke, whose own important understanding of prudence as a political virtue is throughout a rhetorical understanding? Someday, liberals will recover Burke as one of their own, as important to us as Mill. Be that as it may, the art of rhetoric, properly understood, could reconcile person and procedure by emphasizing the judgment of audiences, the counsel of rhetors, and the ethical and political association of their mutual decisions.

Even so, Anderson’s paraphrases of the positions of her contemporaries are always clear and usually measured, including those with whom she disagrees; she is usually a model of ethical intellectual engagement and a fine counter to the rhetoric of reductivism that characterizes so much of our academic discourse, and she deserves to improve its conversation. And yet, having granted that Anderson’s book, especially its third part, is important, I still find myself perplexed by its own avoidance of imaginative literature, especially since imaginative literature has quite a lot to say about the difficulties of believing in freedom (think only of Shakespeare’s Hamlet), in universalism (Virgil’s Aeneid), and in reason (Dante’s Paradiso). One brief exception proves the rule when she discusses Toni Morrison’s Beloved, and borrows heavily from work in narrative and sympathy by Martha Nussbaum, a philosopher whose literary understanding is thoroughly Aristotelian; that is, the only time a literary critic may now discuss literature as such is when citing a philosopher who does so.

Might the rhetorical “character” of literary discussion be related to the poetic characters within literature itself—until very recently a taboo topic in literary studies? Someone needs to tell the tale of English literature professors who stopped talking about literature—or, to put it more precisely, stopped talking about literature in literary terms. I do not have the space to do that here; I only note that for at least thirty years Anglo-American literary critics under the influence of contemporary European philosophy, especially in its deconstructionist and historicist forms, have stopped teaching students how to read, discuss, and write about imaginative literature as such. I am all for historical awareness and philosophical acumen, but literature is a discipline, and historicists without history and theorists without philosophy might want to question their own academic authority. I am all for interdisciplinary study, but interdisciplinarity begins with discipline; and, listening to literature professors in my professional associations, I have begun to suspect that some of us do not know what literature is or how it works, and that some read literature only to illustrate theoretical points less sophisticated than literature itself. One of the strange features of our strange critical age is that those of us invested with the responsibility of defending poetry in its quarrels with both philosophy and history have simply forfeited. The demands to theorize and historicize might have very well allowed for a refinement of the discipline; instead, they overwhelmed it.

As a rhetorical analysis of contemporary literary theory and as a thoughtful defense of refined conceptions of freedom, universalism, and reason, The Way We Argue Now is quite good; and one hopes its academic audience of literary theorists will be per-
suaded not only by Anderson’s arguments, but also by her example. Nevertheless, as an instance of literary study at a time when people, especially young people, read less and less imaginative literature, the book gives me pause. It is certainly true that my own graduate school experience was frustrating because it so often went without saying or arguing that liberalism was craven and conservatism, evil, but it was more frustrating because we so seldom discussed literature as such. If Anderson persuades literary theorists to agree that we are free as human beings to reason toward a better understanding of things, perhaps the first topic of conversation could be a literary one.

Aristotle, in the Poetics, first championed the notion that literature is mimēsis, an argument suggesting literary texts represent the type of reality in which human persons live and act. When considered as mimēsis, literature, which is paradoxically fictional, can and does illuminate the human condition because it is intimately linked to the type of environment and actions typical of the human person. The more authentically mimetic a literary work is, the more we see our humanity magnified in it. In these two books, Nuttall saves both Shakespeare studies and the classical concept of mimēsis from being hopelessly fragmented by two of the fashionable ideological juggernauts of the late twentieth century: structuralist and poststructuralist linguistic theory on the one hand, and the New Historicism on the other.

A New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality was first published in England in 1983. It serves two distinct but related purposes: it is a polemical foray into the arena of contemporary literary theory, and it also offers a series of brilliant close readings of several of Shakespeare’s plays. Nuttall deliberately places his book in conversation with Erich Auerbach’s magisterial Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (initial publication, 1946). Auerbach was perhaps the most influential figure in comparative literature in the twentieth century and remains to this day a prominent theorist of mimēsis. Auerbach’s book impressively surveys European literary figures ranging from Homer to Virginia Wolf, carefully studying how each uses language to represent certain dimensions of human experience. Nuttall’s book similarly addresses the theoretical dimensions of mimēsis, but through the lens of one figure: Shakespeare.

In one sense A New Mimesis is a dated book; in another sense, it speaks powerfully to the state of literary studies today. Literary theory at present still operates under the powerful influence of structuralist and poststructuralist theories of language which, in the 1980’s, were current and highly influential (even today the name Jacques Derrida is still murmured with great reverence in English departments across the country). A New Mimesis was written during the heyday of

Shakespeare and Mimesis
Aaron Urbanczyk


AARON URBANCZYK teaches English literature at Southern Catholic College in Dawsonville, GA.