

Applegarth, Risa. *Rhetoric in American Anthropology: Gender, Genre, and Science*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2014. Print. 267 pages.

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In *Rhetoric in American Anthropology: Gender, Genre, and Science*, Risa Applegarth tracks the discursive transformation of early American anthropology into a rigorous science of human culture. Winner of the 2016 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Outstanding Book Award, this book centers specifically on genre change and resistance in the field's "burgeoning culture of professionalism" (2) between the 1885 founding of the Women's Anthropological Society and the end of World War II. At its highest level of abstraction, Applegarth's book makes two key moves: first, it shows how American anthropology, once open even to amateurs and hobbyists, coalesced into an expert-driven scientific practice; and, second, it examines how the women and people of color marginalized by the narrowing of the discipline resisted and remade its dominant genres to carve space for themselves to speak. *Rhetoric in American Anthropology* weaves a textured rhetorical history of a nascent academic discipline that will appeal to a wide range of readers, including rhetoricians, genre theorists, historians, feminist scholars, anthropologists, and those interested in the dynamic interplay of discourse, knowledge, science, gender, race, and power.

Applegarth works within the long tradition in rhetorical and genre studies of viewing genres not merely as text types linked by shared rhetorical features but as discursive productions that perform social, ideological, and epistemological actions. Within this tradition, genres are themselves imprinted with the situations and interests they serve, and so they preserve something of their contexts of use. For that reason, Applegarth argues, examining competing and complementary genres produced at the same time for similar purposes can help us learn more about the situations they served. Applegarth focuses on four genres from early American anthropology, each comprising an individual chapter: the ethnographic monograph, which she identifies as the period's dominant genre, and three countergenres that emerged in response to it, the field autobiography, the folklore collection, and the ethnographic novel. Applegarth uses these genres and the historical contexts they preserve to tell

a larger story about “broader tensions between gender, race, and access to rhetorical resources of scientific discourse” (11).

Applegarth characterizes her approach as a “rhetorical archaeology,” which she aligns with digging through sedimentary layers to construct a narrative about not only the discursive forms that have survived but also those that have failed or faded over time. To explain the value of her approach, Applegarth extends Carol Berkenkotter’s earlier invocation of genres as historical artifacts akin to “pottery shards, bones, and rock strata” (3):

This research practice understands genres as material instantiations of a community’s norms, values, and priorities and investigates genre change to unearth and envision the prior life of a community. Like pottery shards, genres are only partial fragments of the rhetorical life they enable. Like bones, however, genres are also foundational fragments, structures upon which a host of more fleeting, less easily preserved rhetorical practices are built. And like rock strata, genres and individual texts can be read sequentially, revealing in their spatial and temporal relations the operation of incremental or abrupt processes of change. (175)

Whereas a conventional account of anthropology’s progress as a discipline might focus on the triumph of its dominant genre, the ethnographic monograph, Applegarth shows that early and nearly forgotten genres have equally important stories to tell—if only we have the patience and good sense to listen for them.

Listening to the stories of these alternative genres pays off in multiple ways. Most significantly, Applegarth’s rhetorical-archaeological approach is a feminist act of historical recovery. Although typical narratives of scientific progress naturalize science’s objective stance—its apparent “view from nowhere” (Nagel)—*Rhetoric in American Anthropology* instead reminds us that the discipline’s apparent neutrality is premised on the subjectivity of a particular (white, male) sort of observer. By shining a light on the subject positions that are erased within the discipline’s dominant genre, Applegarth creates space for us to hear the voices that were crowded out by that genre.

Although the chapters of the book build on and respond to those previous, each works individually as a case study of a different genre so it makes sense to discuss them in turn. The introduction, “Gender, Genre, and Knowledge in the Welcoming Science,” establishes the book’s context and core arguments, setting into place key threads that are picked up and woven together across the book: the effects of professionalization both as a point of access to the discipline and, somewhat paradoxically, as a means of masking inequality; the rhetorical construction of anthropology as a contribution to scientific

knowledge; and strategies of resistance employed by women and people of color to produce valid anthropological knowledge. Importantly, Applegarth's focus both in the introduction and in the rest of the book is bidirectional, examining how marginalized scholars gained access to professional anthropology and how they used that access to push back against the discipline's problematic norms. One thing I found unusual about the introduction is that it focuses more on the book's contributions to various fields of scholarship than on gathering together its core rhetorical principles or forecasting the chapters to come. More explicit signposting both in the introduction and over the rest of the book would have helped me stay oriented as a reader and keep its core arguments at top-of-mind. Applegarth's rich and generous analysis is sometimes more implicit than it could be.

The first chapter, "Ethnographic Monographs: Genre Change and Rhetorical Scarcity," explains in further detail the professionalization of early American anthropology vis-à-vis the rise of the ethnographic monograph as its dominant genre. Applegarth notes that, prior to the 1920s, anthropology was accessible to anyone capable of observing and faithfully recording observations. Women were particularly crucial to the enterprise because they were able to access and observe domestic customs that would have been out of reach of their male colleagues. Following the first world war, however, anthropology's boundaries shrank with its increasing alignment with science as the product of acquired expertise. Applegarth cites Bronislaw Malinowski's 1922 ethnographic monograph *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* as emblematic of this new professional science of anthropology, although she explains that it is not the text itself that was significant for this shift but the genre it "inhabits and alters" (29) because that genre "draws a tighter circle around a smaller community of legitimate practitioners" (27). Applegarth introduces the concept of *rhetorical scarcity*—"a manufactured situation of intense and increasing constraint within a genre that significantly restricts rhetors' access to key rhetorical resources" (29)—to explain how genres do not change only through natural evolution but can also be manipulated to restrict access to a genre and the contexts it serves. For the ethnographic monograph, such restriction is built into the genre itself through, for example, invocation of scientific methods and language, thereby marginalizing women and people of color in the production of anthropological knowledge.

Toward the end of the first chapter, Applegarth establishes her warrant for the remaining chapters: "Historical genre study can remind us that the textual practices that won out in a community existed in relation to other rhetorical possibilities" (55). One of those "other rhetorical possibilities" is the subject of the second chapter, "Field Autobiographies: Rhetorical Recruitment and Embodied Ethnography." Whereas the ethnographic monograph assumes a

scientific prose style that deemphasizes the researcher's own subjective experience in the field, the field autobiography places that experience at the center. Blending technical elements of scholarly research with personal, narrative elements of autobiography, researchers working within this genre speak from an identifiable position grounded in a body and a set of experiences that cannot be divorced from the researcher's observations. Key to her analysis of Ann Axtell Morris's *Digging in Yucatan* and *Digging in the Southwest* and Gladys Reichard's *Spider Woman*, Applegarth argues that the field autobiography performs what Wendy Sharer calls "genre work," wherein the invocation of a specific generic form allows a writer both "to meet and to contest community-based discursive norms simultaneously" (63). I will note that I was surprised to learn, nearly 10 pages into the chapter, that there are only 3 examples of the field autobiography genre, two of which are by the same author. Because of the small corpus size, Applegarth's summative statements about the field autobiography as a *genre* sometimes felt under-resourced.

In chapters three and four, Applegarth showcases her rich historical research and careful, close analysis of her primary materials. In "Folklore Collections: Professional Positions and Situated Representations," she examines how two women of color, Yankton Nakota writer Ella Cara Deloria, and African-American novelist, playwright, and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, countered or subverted the colonial impulses of the academic genre of the folklore collection. From the perspective of rhetoric, I found this chapter particularly compelling because Applegarth enumerates and describes a set of four rhetorical strategies that enact colonial values in typical folklore collections (101) and then offers a detailed discussion of how Deloria's *Dakota Texts* and Hurston's *Mules and Men* subvert those strategies. Applegarth demonstrates how both writers employ the genre to simultaneously establish their professional identity as producers of legitimate anthropological knowledge and stretch the boundaries of that identity to encompass their own (nonwhite, nonmale) subject positions: "by taking up the folklore collection genre *differently*—by writing from an overtly racialized and gendered position, as well as enacting other kinds of disruptions—these authors remake the knowledge that genre enacts" (98).

The final chapter, "Ethnographic Novels: Educational Critiques and Rhetorical Trajectories," continues Applegarth's detailed analysis, this time focusing on ethnographic novels such as Gladys Reichard's *Dezba, Woman of the Desert*. According to Applegarth, ethnographic fiction combines the generic affordances of narrative fiction with the specificity of ethnographic observations by presenting close-up detail about an individual or group within a fictional story arc. This chapter's key insight is that, through discursive strategies within the ethnographic novel genre such as realism and holism, "anthropologists

position themselves as experts, assert the accuracy of their claims, and reinforce their authority to speak publicly about a specific culture or community" (144). These strategies "transfer epistemic authority to the portrayals and critiques located within even these fictional texts," thereby enfranchising marginalized authors by "position[ing] their fictional portrayals as *knowledge*" (144).

I came to *Rhetoric in American Anthropology* from several half-steps outside its subject area (I am a rhetorician of health and medicine and a health humanities scholar), and so my main criticism of the book is also kind of a half-compliment: I would have liked to have heard more throughout—more about the historical-professional contexts about which Applegarth writes; more about the texts themselves (their antecedents, their circulation and impact, their rhetorical construction); more about the extent to which other scientific disciplines viewed anthropology as a science; more about Applegarth's own research methods; and more about the specific rhetorical concepts that she discusses throughout. Applegarth weaves a compelling and lucid history of how marginalized researchers gained voices in early American anthropology but the story itself is somewhat elliptical and it often took me a while to connect the dots. Bringing the book's structure closer to the surface might make Applegarth's stunning rhetorical archaeology somewhat more accessible. This criticism should not, however, diminish the importance of Applegarth's contribution to rhetorical genre studies, feminist scholarship, and the history of anthropology. In the final pages of her book, Applegarth argues that

feminist scholars should create historical accounts that can help us resist viewing historical erasures as markers of merit, or as evidence confirming the limited roles women have played in rhetorical and scientific traditions. Instead, we might actively investigate such gaps and erasures, perhaps finding evidence instead of discriminatory memory practices that have systematically eclipsed the rhetorical, scientific, and public innovations of people of color, women, and others positioned disadvantageously relative to official memories. (181)

Rhetoric in American Anthropology: Gender, Genre, and Science makes a crucial and stunning first step toward this larger project of feminist recuperation.

Works Cited

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