

Identity's Strategy: Rhetorical Selves in Conversion. By Dana Anderson. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007; pp 224. \$39.95 cloth.

Dana Anderson's new book masterfully weaves together new understandings of identity and Burkeian theory through the analysis of four public conversion narratives, or "stories of transformation that would transform us as well" (57). Anderson believes that identity is a rhetorical achievement, salvaging the concept from naive modernist essentialism that "mortifies the self at play" (168), or poststructural readings that simply reduce the term to fluid fraudulence. Identity is conceived as a doxastic performance and persuasive strategy grounded in cultural needs to attribute a sense of self to both others and ourselves.

Using "The Dialectic of Constitutions" and "Dialectic in General," from Kenneth Burke's difficult, understudied third section of *The Grammar of Motives*, Anderson builds a model of identities as substantial "constitutions." In the first three chapters, he notes how Burke's penultimate project to appraise identity in the unfinished work, *A Symbolic of Motives*, relates to "the power of a constitution" to "define substance" (42). Anderson uses Burke's theories to illustrate how individuals "round out" their own substance from the "interactions of constitutional principles" (52), or the unique process of dialectical, terminological adjustments that are both the means and ends of identity. Thus, "identity is a rhetorical situation" (168) that "can never simply 'be' for rhetorical inquiry. It must *do*" (165).

In the fourth chapter, we are introduced to Dorothy Day's *The Long Loneliness*, a conversion narrative that seeks "to transform public understanding of how religious faith can inform radical social intervention" (17). Anderson argues that Day wrote her autobiography to defend her ambiguous identity as a radical journalist and Catholic convert. Day also wrote her story to face the fading public interest in and understandings of the Catholic Worker Movement, of which she had been a leader for years. She worked through the seeming contradictions between her radicalism and religion, using scenic changes to construct a new substance of self, and dialectically merged the two competing principles into the synthesis "Catholic social activist" (85), a reformed identity (or constitution). Ultimately, Day "depict[s] the religious radicalism she embodies ... as a vital force for social transformation" (76), extending the invitation for her audiences to work for religious social justice based upon her account.

Next, Anderson turns to *Blinded by the Right: The Conscience of an Ex-Conservative*, the political autobiography of journalist David Brock. Brock was infamous for his polemic conservative writings against Anita Hill and the Clintons throughout the 1990s, and his subsequent party switch to the progressive movement in later years. Anderson uses Brock's account to argue

that ethos and identity mutually imply one another, as “articulations of *who* you are create expectations about *how* you act,” and vice versa (94). In this implication, “identity is more limited than character in its ability to shape itself to . . . situations, constrained by our cultural expectations about the realness of identity” (97). In short, “when identity fails, it is a lie,” because of common attributions of its trans-situational character (98). Anderson finds that Brock’s preconversion ethos of a vacillating, tortured identity invites reader sympathy, whereas his postconversion ethos, which should have exemplified a change in character given his newly substantiated identity, was betrayed by his postconversion acts. Brock’s “competing ethos of tell-all insider complicates the clean break of conversion Brock asserts” through his continued use of tactics such as name-calling and tabloid-esque gossip (113). Anderson leaves open the question of Brock’s ongoing public standing, and states that ultimately “what makes identity interesting is its ever-present potential for change and transformation” (117).

The subject of the sixth chapter is Deirdre McCloskey’s *Crossing: A Memoir*, an account of gender transformation by the famous professor of economics and history (formerly Donald McCloskey). McCloskey contends “that there are limits to our agency in determining who and what we are” (18), and that her journey from male to female involved finding a real gender identity beneath gendered social practices. Anderson identifies “agency and gender” (123) as McCloskey’s ambiguous dialectical terms, which result in a new circumference of identity, the god-term “gender *certainty*” (130). McCloskey’s chief obstacle to gender change came from the medical establishment, so she wrote her conversion narrative to unearth publicly the “pervasive mistreatment and to counter the medical misconceptions about gender identity that encourage it” (132).

The last conversion narrative, John G. Neihardt’s *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*, is “one of the most widely read, and most widely contested, narratives of Native American experience” (143). Neihardt’s claims to represent authentically the words of Black Elk, the revered Lakota holy man who witnessed the Battle at Wounded Knee, have provoked much controversy since it was first published in 1932. Anderson uses the narrative to demonstrate how identities, which are like constitutions (decreeing substances that would shape situations), are themselves actively acted back upon and dialectically reshaped by the changing range of social and historical scenes they address. In his words, “the constitution that would transform a given scene can find itself transformed by this scene as well” (160).

These autobiographical lifewritings provide a fitting scope for Anderson’s identity project. As such, readers should note that (as Anderson admits) it is identity, rather than conversion rhetoric, which he is seeking to define.

The book does not focus on possible conversion tropes, structures, or genre patterns across the narratives. The largely exclusive focus on Burkeian theory might have additionally been bolstered by engaging other theorists concerned with interactional identity-in-context, such as George Herbert Mead. There are also minor points in the book with which to quibble, such as the downplaying of the sheer degree of praise Brock acquired in his postconversion life—or the question of why so many did *not* find Brock's ethos and identity questionable.

Yet Anderson well achieves what he sets out to accomplish. He gets us beyond the selective scholarly reliance on identification as a Burkeian master term, and into dramatistic identity, with its attendant agons from within and without. He is wonderfully consistent with Burke's logological project, pursuing an empirical grasp of the persuasive uses of language rather than any abstract ontologies in the texts. The book is teachable (there's even a diagram on page 52 explaining the process illustrated throughout) and has a logical flow, building from dialectical identity to considerations of scenic recalcitrance in the final Neihardt chapter.

At a minimum, *Identity's Strategy* is an invaluable contribution to rounding out Burke's project on substance and constitutionality in relation to identity. Any scholar poring over Burke's writings will significantly expand his or her understanding of this corpus from Anderson's clear explanations. Those interested in constitutive rhetoric also stand to benefit from the connections charted in the analysis. Finally, the four intriguing historical conversion narratives alone merit attention. Each presents its own challenge to reigning interpretations of identity across disciplines, while precisely defining the terms of private-turned-public transformations. Overall, Anderson's luminous account promises to instruct and inspire our understandings of our very rhetorical selves for years to come.

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Governing Codes: Gender, Metaphor, and Political Identity. By Karrin Vasby Anderson and Kristina Horn Sheeler. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, a division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005; pp ix + 243. \$32.95 paper.

On November 10, 2006, three days after a historic election in which Democrats regained control of the House of Representatives for the first time in 12 years and Rep. Nancy Pelosi was positioned to become the first female Speaker of the House, the *Washington Post* published a feature article emphasizing not only this historic first for women in politics, but also Pelosi's choice of a Giorgio

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