

Steven Mailloux. *Rhetoric's Pragmatism: Essays in Rhetorical Hermeneutics*. Penn State University Press 2017. 248 pp. \$89.95 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780271078472); \$29.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780271078489).

Rhetorical Pragmatism is an object lesson in rhetorical hermeneutics, using 'rhetoric to practice theory by doing history' (1). Steven Mailloux takes as his central conceit the fundamental interplay between rhetoric and pragmatism. The former provides a 'metalanguage' and the latter a focus on 'practical effects' (1-2). When combined in rhetorical hermeneutics, they serve as useful tools for ranging across disciplinary boundaries, informing and being informed by the traditions they encounter. Mailloux's book is an engaging addition to his decades-long goal of exploring this sort of interdisciplinary interplay.

The book is comprised of four parts, prefaced with a concise introduction. It includes a useful acknowledgements section, complete with a detailed listing of the essays' original sources of publication. It ends with notes for each essay, an updated bibliography, and an index.

Part One includes four essays which serve as an introduction to Mailloux's interest in rhetorical hermeneutics and rhetorical pragmatism. 'From Segregated Schools to Dimpled Chads: Rhetorical Hermeneutics and the Suasive Work of Theory in Legal Interpretation' uses the work of William James to assert that theories are '*instruments*' (9). Accordingly, rhetorical hermeneutics is interested in specific contexts just as much as it is engaged in studying historical practices. In this chapter, Mailloux takes as his objects of study the Fourteenth Amendment and the court case *Bush v. Gore*, with stopping points that encompass *Huckleberry Finn* and *Brown vs. Board of Education*. His overall point is that interpretations of specific laws are always predicated on the manner—good, bad, or ideologically otherwise—in which they are interpreted in rhetorically constructed contexts. 'Euro-American Rhetorical Pragmatism: Democratic Deliberation and Purposeful Mediation' is more of an argument about rhetorical pragmatism. Therein, Mailloux reminds readers of the sophistic, which is to say Protagorean, legacy at play in the works of British philosopher F.C.S. Schiller (1864-1937). The implications of Schiller's corpus are then applied to 'contemporary debates over the future of democratic deliberation' (25); specifically, the pragmatic underpinnings of Barack Obama's political worldview. In 'Humanist Controversies and Rhetorical Humanism,' Mailloux supplements rhetorical pragmatism with a focus on humanism as the practical counterbalance to Platonic-styled searches for 'supernatural absolute truth' (34). He presents two humanist controversies as case studies: the conflicts between Martin Heidegger and Ernesto Grassi, and the more recent attempt by communication studies scholar Michael Leff to raise a Grassi-like challenge to postmodern questions of human agency. In 'Rhetorical Pragmatism and Histories of New Media: Rorty on Dreyfus on Kierkegaard on the Internet,' Mailloux works to show that Rorty is a rhetorical pragmatist even if he never claimed such a title. In making his case, he again uses a case study: Rorty's debate with Hubert Dreyfus over the application of Soren Kierkegaard's philosophical arguments to questions of new media.

Part Two is comprised of three essays which further Mailloux's rhetorical pragmatist agenda by 'focusing on the problem of comparison across space and time' (4). 'Making Comparisons: First Contact, Ethnocentrism, and Cross-Cultural Communication' takes as its object lesson American Studies. In so doing, Mailloux uses Rorty's work as a way to examine how a still evolving discipline deals with theorizing external and internal issues of cultural difference. He engages the work of James, philosopher Hu Shih, and the (fictional) captain Jean-Luc Picard. While not mitigating against the problems of contextualizing 'us' and 'them' in matters of cross-cultural study and communication, Mailloux nonetheless argues that 'certain notions about incommensurability' need to be rethought (69). 'Enactment History, Jesuit Practices, and Rhetorical Hermeneutics' finds Mailloux further

interrogating notions of otherness. He suggests that, yet again, a rhetorical approach to the question of hermeneutics is pragmatic insofar as we ‘establish meaning for the otherness of the past in ways similar to understanding others in the present, by relating all to our own future enactments’ (70). Taking the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) as his primary focus, Mailloux shows how different *theorhetorical* practices—‘particular tropes, arguments, and narratives’ (79)—inform, influence, and complicate each other. The relatively short ‘Jesuit Comparative Theorhetoric’ continues the preceding discussion. Mailloux argues that comparative (theo)rhetoric ‘mediates differences and explores similarities’ as a practice and ‘accounts for how such mediation and exploration takes place’ as a theory of the same (87). He notes how Jesuits, specifically those who worked to bring sacred texts to foreign lands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were engaged in a complicated series of rhetorical negotiations: influencing and influenced by the cultures in which they found themselves, they also faced criticisms from the larger church for the choices they made.

Part Three includes four essays which examine cultural rhetoric through the lenses of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul de Man, Kenneth Burke, and again the Jesuits. In ‘Hermeneutics, Deconstruction, Allegory,’ Mailloux takes the first two figures as representatives of hermeneutics and deconstruction respectively, and then explores the nuances in their approaches to allegory. He argues that, for both, significant differences in interpretation exist even as ‘allegory turns out to stand as a synecdoche for rhetoric itself’ (102). ‘Theotropic Logology’ starts by establishing a definition of the same: ‘the study of words about words related to words about God’ (105). The discussion that follows finds Mailloux examining how three different scholars—J. Hillis Miller, de Man, and Burke—engaged in that pursuit, the former two grappling with the approach of the latter. Mailloux alludes to the fact that the act of reading, of treating the text as sacrosanct or subject to the conditions of its existence that extend beyond it, will impact the nature of the study thus engaged. ‘Jesuit *Eloquentia Perfecta* and Theotropic Logology’ extends the discussion of Burke in the previous discussion. Mailloux examines the purposes of Jesuit rhetorical education and how the terminology of Burke might be useful for reconceptualizing the same. The resulting interaction creates a framework whereby ‘Jesuit rhetorical practice (and rhetorical pragmatist theory) treat terminologies *as tools by way of which* an actor acts in a world in dealing with self and others’ (123). ‘Rhetorical Ways of Proceeding: *Eloquentia Perfecta* in U.S. Jesuit Colleges’ notes that a Jesuit education is not merely about reading, but about doing. Less a theoretical chapter and more a historical survey, Mailloux traces the path by which a Jesuit rhetorical education came to emphasize ‘the connections among eloquence, learning, and virtue’ (126).

Part Four is comprised of three essays and an interview. They provide ‘additional examples of cultural rhetorical studies and comment on the past and future of rhetorical hermeneutics’ (6).

In ‘Judging and Hoping: Rhetorical Effects of Reading about Reading,’ Mailloux ruminates on the nature of thought; specifically, ‘the effects of getting people to think about thinking through or because of reading’ (137). The specific case study is Azar Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003). He is interested in the multiple contextual layers of reception surrounding this text: for those who read classic Western works in a non-Western context, no less how Western readers and reviewers responded to the same. Mailloux cautions, as he did in part one of *Rhetoric’s Pragmatism*, that receptions are never unburdened of ideological implications. ‘Narrative as Embodied Intensities: The Eloquence of Travel in Nineteenth-Century Rome’ uses the works of Paul Ricoeur and Burke to interrogate the nature of temporality, as configured in narratives and in experience. Mailloux examines how American visitors experienced The Eternal City both as ‘literal bodies wandering through material circumstances, as well as figurative bodies used imaginatively to move thought and feeling into new locations’ (146). ‘Conversation with Keith Gilyard’ finds Mailloux confronting and defending a number of the cherished conceptualizations that anchor the rest of the book: *cultural rhetoric, rhetorical hermeneutics, rhetorical pragmatism*, no less their relationship to disciplines

such as English and philosophy. In the final and most engaging section of the interview, he turns his attention to the question of religion in the public sphere. After discussing the particular cases of Edward Said and Rorty, he urges: ‘if we don’t as rhetoricians pay more attention to how religious rhetoric works, then we’re just throwing up our hands at really being public intellectuals’ (173). ‘Political Theology in Douglass and Melville’ serves as a parting cultural rhetoric study. Herein, he traces the different contextual receptions of the works of St. Paul. Central to this discussion is his definition of *political theology* as ‘the connection between political practice and religious belief’ (178).

If there is any quibble regarding this collection, it is slight. Certain sections, particularly Parts Three and Four, might have been better served by adjusting the order of the materials. But that is, again, a quibble. Mailloux’s overriding claim is that ‘rhetoric is as thoroughly pragmatist as pragmatism is deeply rhetorical’ (9). *Rhetoric’s Pragmatism* serves as yet another proof of concept for his work. Touching on issues of transdisciplinary interest, Mailloux’s book will attract readers from varied disciplines. Not only that, readers will be forced consider and reconsider the assumptions that undergird their interests in philosophy, rhetoric, and cultural and reception studies. Eschewing defined borders and instead seeking to build academic bridges, Mailloux once again opens up space for engaging intellectual conversations.

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