Review of James D. Hester and J. David Hester, eds., *Rhetorics in the New Millennium: Promise and Fulfilment*. Studies in Antiquity and Christianity. New York: T & T Clark International, 2010.

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Rhetorics in the New Millennium: Promise and Fulfillment is a collection of essays that promotes an approach to the rhetorical criticism of the New Testament in which "the hermeneutics of analysis are informed by the development and use of rhetorical theories beyond those found in the handbooks of classical Greco-Roman rhetoric" (x). The goal is to engage these texts in such a way that "the examination of literary influences or the analysis of style become contributions to criticism and not ends in themselves" (x). Some of the essays contained in this ambitious project do much to inform scholarly discussions of biblical texts and of methods for interpreting those texts. Nevertheless, it is not entirely clear that the work as a whole accomplishes its intended purpose.

The introductory essay by James Hester discusses the book's approach to rhetorical criticism and summarizes some of its content. Hester expends a significant amount of effort to distinguish between "rhetorics" and "rhetoric" and between "analysis" and "criticism" in order to argue that much of what passes for rhetorical criticism is merely rhetorical analysis. By contrast, he characterizes the present collection of essays as an attempt to move beyond analysis to criticism and as an attempt to appropriate the various criticisms that have been developed outside the field of Biblical Studies to generate new meanings for the texts that would later be included in the New Testament. Hester hopes that, by reconceptualizing rhetorical criticism in terms of present-day theories of rhetoric, it will be possible to produce meanings that are more closely related to the various contexts in which New Testament texts are read.

Chapters 2-4 compose the first major part of the book and are concerned with the elaboration of theoretical frameworks for rhetorical criticism that are in line with the book's stated purposes. The contribution by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Chapter 2) translates her long-standing interest in developing a hermeneutic of liberation into the language and methods of rhetorical criticism. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that too much contemporary rhetorical criticism operates on the basis of modernist epistemological assumptions that cannot be maintained in the present, postmodern context. She argues that what is needed is a "rhetoric of inquiry" that examines texts as persuasive acts of communication with "emancipatory" potential.

The contribution by Gary Salyer (Chapter 3) argues that, in order to make the Bible intelligible in the current cultural context, its rhetoric must be reconstructed so that it is based on premises that are consistent with the dominant rhetoric of public discourse. He argues that this can be accomplished through the application of critical methods developed by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca to biblical texts and illustrates how this might be done through a rigorous re-examination of 1 Corinthians 15. The contribution of William Wuellner (Chapter 4) tackles a substantially different issue. He contends that a broader definition of rhetoric enables the scholar to understand better its importance for the development of early Christian traditions, documents, and communities. Furthermore, he demonstrates that, especially with respect to Paul, the shape of this rhetoric reflects the culturally sophisticated nature of the environment in which the Christ-movement arose.

The second major part of the book (Chapters 5-10) contains six essays that illustrate how reimagining rhetorical criticism can revitalize the interpretation of New Testament texts. The essay by L. Gregory Bloomquist (Chapter 5) summarizes developments in socio-rhetorical criticism. It also

illustrates how a socio-rhetorical analysis of Mark 4:2-9 based on *topoi* might provide more useful information for the pericope's interpretation than an approach that is only interested in "textures."

The essay by Lewis Snyder (Chapter 6) applies Kenneth Burke's method of "indexing" to the interpretation of Matthew 25:15-46. In Burke's parlance, *indexing* is a process by which an interpreter maps the "topographical" arrangement of words and figures in order to generate "data" that can be used as a "scientific" basis for understanding the author's thought-world (149). Nevertheless, the point of indexing is not to reconstruct a historical person's way of thinking, but rather to discern the meaning of the text "to its reader" (150). Snyder also briefly discusses a collection of five questions ("the dramatistic pentad") that Burke developed to aid in the analysis of texts.

The essay by Dale Sullivan (Chapter 7) wrestles with the thorny issue of assigning a genre designation to Acts. After surveying the various alternatives proposed by contemporary biblical scholars and teasing out the various ways in which these options were developed, Sullivan utilizes the insights of contemporary genre criticism to demonstrate that Acts participates in a number of genres and constitutes a creative attempt to address a particular rhetorical exigence within a specific rhetorical community. The essay by Greg Carey (Chapter 8) focuses on how a specific *topos*—ignorance—is used in the Pauline letters. Carey argues that ignorance is a powerful rhetorical device that Paul sometimes used to build common ground with his audience and at other times used to set limits on a particular discourse.

The essay by Frank Hughes (Chapter 9) uses what is known about Jewish and Greco-Roman rhetorical practices to explain how and why pseudonymity occurred in the ancient world. This explanation is constructed in order to defend the notion that pseudonymity is present within the Pauline corpus. The essay by Carol Poster (Chapter 10) analyzes James as an example of "philosophical protreptic." Poster does not merely compare James to the formal characteristics of protreptic, but rather examines how James both shapes protreptic as a form of communication and appropriates it to address a particular set of issues within a particular community. Poster further asserts that, when speech-act theory is applied to James' rhetoric of "faith" and "works," it emerges that the contrast is really between carefully crafted "proofs" of the gospel and a life full of actions determined by the gospel. The book also contains five very helpful appendices that provide explanations of rhetorical theories referenced in the essays and a select bibliography of recent works that use rhetorical critical methods.

A number of the contributions to this work contain stimulating discussions of biblical texts and the methods for interpreting them. For example, Snyder's essay presents an approach to analyzing texts that can be used with profit by almost anyone. Poster's analysis of James demonstrates how an awareness of ancient rhetorical practices can provide new solutions to old interpretive problems, and Bloomquist's essay illustrates how further reflection on a contemporary rhetorical theory can bring added precision to the process of interpreting biblical texts.

Other contributions, however, are more difficult to affirm. The essays by Hester and Schüssler Fiorenza are well argued, but they collapse under their own weight if their postmodern presuppositions cannot be sustained. The essays by Schüssler Fiorenza and Salyer display a surprising degree of Eurocentrism, and, although Salyer's discussion of the relationship between "public knowledge" and the persuasiveness of a given act of communication is very well done, his proposal of a "universal audience" seems highly problematic.

More importantly, there are problems with the work as a whole. The schema Hester establishes for the use of rhetoric-related vocabulary helps the reader understand the contrast he draws between a rhetorical criticism that is slavishly devoted to the ancient handbooks and a rhetorical criticism that takes full advantage of more recent developments in the field, but that schema is not used consistently in most of the other essays. Furthermore, the final two essays in the collection

have little or nothing to do with contemporary theories of rhetoric. The reader cannot help but wonder whether all of the contributors to this project are fully on board with its stated agenda.

Furthermore, the book's structure is muddled at best. Hester only summarizes the six essays in the second part of the book, leaving the reader to guess about how the three essays in the first part help the book achieve its stated objectives. Wuellner's essay is well done and contributes significantly to the book's goal of expanding the reader's thinking about what counts for rhetoric, but it does not seem to fit with the essays that surround it. It is difficult to understand why Salyer's essay should be placed in a different part of the book than the essays by Bloomquist and Snyder. Salyer's essay contains a significant amount of engagement with 1 Corinthians 15, and the essays by Bloomquist and Snyder focus on the theories they are trying to explain as much as—or more than— they do on the biblical texts they are trying to interpret. While there is important symbolism in the fact that the project does not contain a formal conclusion ("the dialogue has just begun"), it probably needs one in order to resolve some of these issues.