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Cinthia Gannett and John C. Brereton (Eds.), **Traditions of Eloquence: The Jesuits and Modern Rhetorical Studies**, New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2016, 487 pp., $125.00 (hardcover), $45.00 (paperback).

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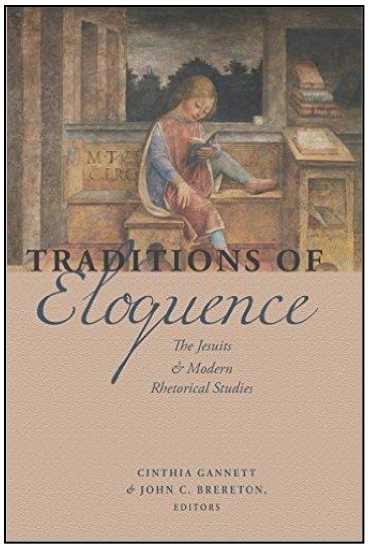

In the aftermath of what was perhaps the least eloquent election in U.S. history, it is difficult not to read to this collection of essays without a certain longing, bordering on nostalgia, for the *eloquentia perfecta* that was so cherished and propagated in Jesuit higher education. ***Traditions of Eloquence: The Jesuits and Modern Rhetorical Studies*** is divided into three sections that trace the origins, dissemination and impact, and future prospects of the "classical ideal of the good person writing and speaking skillfully for the public good" (p. 165). The essays that compose this volume are primarily intended for scholars and teachers in the composition tradition of rhetorical studies and will mainly be of interest to specialists in this area. However, this work may also prove useful to historians and theorists of higher education, especially in the critical study of higher education, as many of the themes that emerge in its 26 essays speak profoundly to contemporary problems plaguing the modern university. Moreover, as alluded to in the opening of this review, there are also sociocultural and political implications embedded in these works that reflect many of the pressing issues of our current age.

The Jesuits, it is claimed here, administered the first system of higher education in the world, with a professed goal of bringing education to people remote from the centers of power both geographically and by economic circumstances. Guided by the Ignatian Order's mission—ably spelled out in the first section of this work—to be engaged in the world as part of their missionary project, the Jesuits developed a reputation for a certain degree of epistemic "flexibility" based in Ciceronian probability and expressed in the notion of casuistry, or of speakers adapting themselves to "concrete places, times, and persons" (p. 69), instead of general, unbending rules that had been a hallmark of other religious orders that had aimed at a kind of separation or isolation from worldly concerns. This Jesuitical elasticity led to the Roman Catholic hierarchy repressing the order for a time and, arguably, established the fundamental theoretical problem worked out in this text: how to maintain a core center of beliefs (as provided by religious faith) while accommodating the ever-shifting needs of believers—or, as the case may be, students—in a world experiencing the tumults of accelerating social, technological, and intellectual change. In other words, how do speakers adjust to the contextual needs of their particular audiences and circumstances while remaining faithful to a core set of values to which they must adhere? It is no wonder that rhetorical theorists like Stephen Toulmin, with his professed goal of developing a method of arguing that steers a middle course between absolutism and relativism, count themselves (even if not always acknowledged by others) as having been influenced by the Jesuit tradition.

It is this central problematic, which formed the basis of the Jesuit curriculum, that the authors of the second section of this work describe so clearly, with its influence on a range of thinkers including Walter Ong, Paolo Friere, Bernard Lonergan, and Edward P. J. Corbett, as well as contemporary rhetorical scholars such as Frank D'Angelo, S. Michael Halloran, Gerard Hauser, Mike Rose, and Paul Ranieri, who reflect on the influence that the Jesuit Order and educational practices had on their own lives. The effort to identify a specific Jesuitical influence on this diverse group of thinkers appears, at times, a bit strained, although this is owing mostly to the fact that this cohort (if it is one) came of age at a time of profound change in higher education, especially the Jesuit goal of *cura personalis*, the education of the whole person with the study and practice of rhetoric at its core. The traditional curriculum as embodied in the *ratio studiorum*, which had formed the basis of Jesuit pedagogy for generations, came under pressure to adapt to a more heterogeneous study body, the increasing professionalization of the academy, and the fragmentation of knowledge. In spite of resistance, rhetoric was dethroned, its prominence and importance making way for more specialized training in increasingly narrow academic disciplines with, perhaps, their own unique standards of eloquence, but, regardless, at the cost of displacing the goal of developing a capacity for discernment or reflection on moral consequences and the relationship between personal desire and public good.

The final section of the book details contemporary efforts to reimagine Jesuit education for the 21st century by an increasingly secularized and, it must be said, proletarianized professoriate that finds within its Jesuit institutions the roots of a not yet forgotten tradition of scholarship and pedagogical practice that may address many of the shortcomings of the contemporary, corporatized, neoliberal university. Most of the Jesuits have left the field while the universities they founded have expanded, and their teaching staffs are now predominantly composed of secular faculty. This new generation of secular, but Jesuit-inspired professors find—in the Jesuit effort to grapple with the dialectic of maintaining a core set of beliefs while adapting to the shifting needs of a rapidly changing social, cultural, and intellectual milieu—a useful, if frequently ambiguous and fraught, touchstone for their own efforts to respond to the accelerating changes happening in the contemporary academy. In programs clustered around terms like "writing across the curriculum," a new generation seeks to reimagine what cultivating a cura personalis, eloquentia perfecta, and discernment might look like for a 21st century culture that looks even more heterogeneous, fragmented, and perhaps intellectually incoherent than anything the Jesuit tradition had wrestled with before. In other words, what does it mean to teach "the whole person" in an era where personhood itself is held up simultaneously as the sine qua non of proliferating social discourses and as a hopeless anachronism?

This essay began with the suggestion that the 2016 U.S. presidential election was perhaps the least eloquent in our history. On one level, this is, of course, utterly wrong. As Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1988) has documented, our standards of eloquence have changed over the decades, and so what was observed in this election cycle is simply the continuing evolution of a certain "tradition" of eloquence. However, it is difficult to have experienced this presidential campaign period without wishing for more of what the authors of this text are striving to recover and bring back to life: a core set of beliefs that finds itself in productive dialogue with external circumstances without losing sight of either the center or the margins, a discourse that is both firm in its convictions and flexible in its expression and implementation. The Jesuit tradition is certainly an imperfect place to begin such a project, but this text demonstrates that

it is a beginning. If my own education in a Jesuit-inspired high school (I walked to class past a large painting of a quote by the Jesuit priest and philosopher Teilhard de Chardin every day) provides any guidance, I learned there that the perfect should never stand in the way of the good, and in this text, scholars who care about such things will find a good place to begin.

Reference

Jamieson, K. H. (1988). *Eloquence in an electronic age: The transformation of political speechmaking.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.