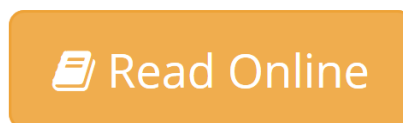


The Poetics of Fear: A Human Response to Human Security

By *Chris Erickson*



The Poetics of Fear: A Human Response to Human Security By Chris Erickson

The Poetics of Fear looks at how fear is used for political purposes, focusing on the binary logic of "this is the way things are, and there is nothing (else) you can do about it" -a logic that underlies the realist tradition in international relations theory. The Shield of Achilles from Homer's Iliad is used as metaphorical analysis to look at what the politics of fear is, how it works, and how it can be resisted. It aims to provide a human response to human security matters. The work first shows how the Shield works to paralyze its audience. How can it be resisted? One response is to offer a warning about the hazards of bearing the Shield. After looking at thinkers such as Plato, Baudrillard, and Nietzsche, the work concludes with an examination of ekphrasis as a critical tool. With a unique and fresh perspective, The Poetics of Fear will be relevant to those interested in security studies and critical theoretical approaches to political science.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Subtlety of analysis and fearlessness in the face of complexity characterize Erickson's work: he reads poetically, seeing not just models for thought (and hence action), but also ways in which the very texts he reads complicate the matter. Erickson has a salutary awareness of metaphor, the reverberations of literary context, and the imaginative attitudes encouraged by various texts and methodologies.

We rarely find in political thought such sensitivity to the deeper and more unsettling aspects of poetics, but here Erickson rejects the oversimplifications of 'realism' and shows how the cultural allies from the past that are enlisted on its side can themselves qualify, question, make problematic, or undermine the positions they are enlisted to support.

This book compares favorably to the best of those that use Ancient Greek and Roman texts to think with and think through, in company with, e.g., the psychologist Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*, or the legal scholar James Boyd White's *Heracles' Bow: Essays in the Rhetoric and Poetics of the Law*.

In the end Erickson does come out with a clear position, but it is a position that is complex and flexible : we are often seduced by the simplicity of Realpolitik, but we can escape its unfit logic by resisting flattening and ham-fisted readings that use Classical texts to support political 'realism.' Erickson uses the ways in which the Shield of Achilles in the Iliad can encourage us to think of representation and mediation, in terms of a negotiated engagement with versions of the world. Erickson uses this as a springboard for careful interpretations not just of passages from the Iliad, but also Sophocles, Thucydides, Plato, Machiavelli, Nietzsche, Derrida, and Baudrillard, culminating in the use the Homeric Shield of Achilles to shape an analysis of a pair of speeches, one by George W. Bush, one by Barack Obama.

Such intellectually fruitful use of poetics to understand politics is as impressive as it is rare." —Dr. Andrew S. Becker, Associate Professor of Latin & Ancient Greek Languages, Literatures, & Cultures and Co-Director, Spring Semester Liberal Arts Program, Center for European Studies & Architecture, Riva San Vitale, Switzerland

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About the Author

Dr. Erickson teaches political science at the University of British Columbia, Canada. His research focuses on contemporary political thought and critical theory, as well as radicalism in international politics, and contemporary security issues.

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