

Peitho

Newsletter of the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition

volume 3 number 1

Winter 1999



Reflections on the Fifth Annual Coalition Meeting, Chicago 1998

Reweaving the Professional Ties that Bind: Teaching, Research, Writing

Shannon L. Wilson, Miami University (Ohio)

In April, I attended the caucus of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition. Since I was present at the first meeting of the Coalition in San Diego, 1993 as a new MA student, this was my fifth year in attendance. I feel fortunate that the Coalition has always been a significant part of my CCCCs experience. The Coalition has fundamentally shaped my understanding of the possibilities for both scholarship and community in the field of rhetoric and composition. The opportunity for new scholars to present their work to peers and mentors in the profession is a unique and valuable tradition in the Coalition. This year, as a panel participant, I experienced the exhilaration of speaking to peers and mentors who have supported and encouraged beginning scholars like myself by engaging our work seriously and including us in the conversations that define and redefine what it means to research, write, and teach in this profession.

The 1998 Coalition meeting, "Reweaving the Professional Ties that Bind: Teaching, Research, Writing," provided, once again, the opportunity for scholars in the history of rhetoric and composition to come together and demonstrate the strength and importance of our work. In the first hour of the meeting, seven brief presentations focused on women or feminist/womanist issues in rhetoric and composition. Illustrating the breadth of work being conducted by new scholars in the field, this panel figured histories of the present as speakers addressed such contemporary issues as the status of intellectual property, intersections of literature and literacy, and public education. Presenters considered historical figures marginalized by race, class, and gender for the substantial contributions they made in their own time and for what they can teach us today. These presentations, along with the small group discussions that followed, made

Peitho is published with editorial and financial assistance from the Departments of English of Miami (OH) University and The Ohio State University. The editors, Kay Halasek (OSU) and Susan Jarratt (MU), are assisted by Scott Lyons at Miami University and Tara Pauliny at Ohio State. The editors may be contacted at the Department of English, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056 or the Department of English, 164 W. 17th Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210.

This newsletter is produced in ClarisWorks 4.0.

Table of Contents

Reflections on the Fifth Annual Coalition Meeting	1
Join Together in Atlanta for the Coalition Meeting	3
Selected CCCS Sessions of Interest	4
"A Vichian Vindication"	5

Contributions Welcomed!

Anyone wishing to contribute news items to *Peitho*--and particularly its recurring epideictic corner--should forward information to Kay Halasek at the Department of English, 164 W. 17th Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210. She may also be reached via e-mail at halasek.1@osu.edu and by fax at (614) 292-7816. The editors welcome items regarding publications, dissertation defenses, awards, or other information of interest to the membership of the Coalition.

evident the value of interweaving multiple perspectives to create an increasingly complex understanding of the histories and practices of rhetoric.

Several panelists presented projects that revisit literacy practices of women previously overlooked in the history of rhetoric. Examining the rhetorical practices of Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, a nineteenth-century Paiute, and Nebraskan women born early in the twentieth century respectively, Malea Powell (Miami University) and Charlotte Hogg (University of Nebraska) contribute to research that recognizes significant rhetorical practices outside the canonized tradition. Powell's paper, "I Write the Words with Blood and Bone: American Indian Public Intellectuals," discussed the texts of Winnemucca Hopkins, tracing the intellectual practice of "tactical authenticity" to demonstrate Winnemucca Hopkins' role as an activist. In "My Grandma's Stories: Literacy Practices of Older Women in Rural Nebraska," Hogg described her ethnographic literacy study, emphasizing the rich picture that can be constructed by using a variety of overlapping research methods. She spoke specifically about the usefulness of qualitative research informed by a variety of intersecting theories: feminist, social, and cognitive. In "A Significant Place: Sites, Cites, and Over Sights," Linda Stingley (Ohio State University), looked more directly at the politics of forming and reforming a rhetorical tradition, arguing that the inclusion of representative works by African American authors is a crucial step in producing more inclusive histories of rhetoric and composition.

Understanding the implications of rhetorical practice for education and other public practices was of central importance for the other panelists. Arnetha Ball (University of Michigan) shared her insights on the difficulties involved in teaching diverse student populations. Her research will lead to teacher preparation courses that will better prepare educators to attend to the needs of minority communities. Anita Helle (Oregon State University) presented "Integrating Concerns of Literature and Literacy," an exploration of what happens when rhetorically constituted research creates new working "sites" for poetry's relationship to the public sphere. In "Intellectual Property, Feminist Historiography, and Electracy," Jennifer Bay (University of Texas at Arlington) spoke about a specific challenge facing women scholars in the history of rhetoric: how to reconceptualize feminist historical scholarship with respect to issues of intellectual property. Also emphasizing questions of method, in "Recognizing a Rhetoric of Rights and Choice," I discussed the effectiveness of layering feminist historiography, cultural studies, and postmodern narrative theories in an examination of the forces that construct current beliefs about U.S. public education.

Ann Berthoff responded to the panel, bringing together the varied projects with her insights into the ways feminism has both gained from historical methods and transformed them. Whether research aims at historical recovery or histories of the present, feminist projects draw strength from combined methods: archival work; theories of race, gender, sexuality, and language; field work; literary analysis. From these multimodal methods, feminist research in the study of rhetoric and composition provides perspectives not available through unified, traditional historical approaches.

The connections between research, writing, and teaching were further demonstrated in the second part of the meeting as those attending continued the tradition of mentoring so central to the Coalition. Travel fatigue and the late hour make it tempting to sneak out of the Coalition meeting during the intermission, but the mentoring groups were so energizing that I was grateful I had stayed. The small group meetings covered topics as divergent as professional preparation for graduate students, understanding promotion and tenure guidelines, surviving and thriving as a WPA, and securing grants. Led by scholars who embody both professional excellence and the gracious, sharing disposition that defines the organization, these mentoring groups provided an opportunity for everyone to gain information about specific questions and concerns. Many thanks to Duku Anokye (University of Toledo), Lisa Ede (Oregon State University), Theresa Enos (University of Arizona), Maria Gonzalez (University of Houston), Win Horner (Texas Christian University), Susan Jarratt (Miami University), Shirley Logan

(University of Maryland), Andrea Lunsford (Ohio State University), Joyce Middleton (University of Rochester), Kris Ratcliffe (Marquette University), Joy Ritchie (University of Nebraska), Marie Secor (Penn State University), Amy Shuman (Ohio State University), C. Jan Swearingen (University of Texas at Arlington), and Kathleen Welch (University of Oklahoma). Your leadership, energy, and humor provided, once again, much needed advice and, even more importantly, the feeling of inclusion in a profession that is intellectually stimulating and compassionate.

Of course, additional thanks go to Cheryl Glenn, president of the Coalition, for the hard work and excellent planning that made the meeting possible.

As we go through the year, variously content and harried and scrambling to keep up with our personal and professional goals, the support that can be found in the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition remains a subtle but significant strength. I am looking forward to next year's meeting in Atlanta.

Join Together in Atlanta for the Coalition Meeting

The Coalition caucus meeting, "We Are All Bound Up Together": Women Writing, Writing Women," will take place on Wednesday, March 24 from 6:30-8:30 pm. Speakers appearing during the first hour include Shirley Wilson Logan, June Hadden Hobbs, Ann Ruggles Gere, Mariolina Salvatori, Jennifer Cognard-Black, Carolyn Mattingly, Beverly Moss, Cheryl Glenn, and Jacqueline Jones Royster.

During the second hour, participants will break into small mentoring groups, led by

Eileen Schell, Syracuse University and Karen Thompson, Rutgers University, working conditions for part-time writing instructors;

Lisa Ede, Oregon State University and Jacqueline Jones Royster, Ohio State University, writing program administration;

Theresa Enos, University of Arizona and Joy Ritchie, University of Nebraska, getting published;

Julia Ferganchick-Neufang, University of Arkansas and Joyce Irene Middleton, University of Rochester, handling classroom politics;

Duku Anokye, University of Toledo and Kathleen Welch, University of Oklahoma, finding and securing a position;

Andrea Lunsford, Ohio State University, and Cheryl Glenn, Penn State University, writing grant proposals; and

Kris Ratcliffe, Marquette University and C. Jan Swearingen, Texas A & M University, completing the dissertation.

conference announcement

The Second Biennial Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) Conference, "Challenging Rhetorics: Cross-Disciplinary Sites of Feminist Discourse," will be held October 7-9, 1999, at the University of Minnesota.

For further information, visit the conference website at <http://femrhet.cla.umn.edu>

Book Reviews Needed

The editors invite readers to submit book reviews for possible publication in Peitho. The reviews should consider books published by, about, or for women in rhetoric and composition. Please limit reviews to approximately 750-1000 words. Reviews must also conform to the MLA Guidelines for non-sexist language.

Forward reviews to Susan Jarratt at the Department of English, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056.

SELECTED CCCC SESSIONS OF INTEREST TO COALITION MEMBERS

Wednesday, March 24

- SO.1 Working Across Differences: Exploring the Status of Women in Composition
- A.2 The Construction of Female Identity
- A.10 Recovering Lost Voices: Perspectives on Three Women's Colleges

Thursday, March 25

- C.18 Becoming Visible: Women's Access to Literacy from the 18th to the 20th Century
- C.25 Women in Labor: The History of Roles of the Para-Professional in Composition Studies
- E.15 Delivering Delivery: A Feminist Roundtable on Rhetoric's Fifth Canon
- F.36 Figuring the Feminine in Rhetorics of Nation Making

Friday, March 26

- G.4 Making Visible Histories of Women and Education
- G.6 Visible Practices: Reading, Writing, and Reflecting on the Sites of Women's Literacies
- G.10 Techno-Realism, Ethnotech Modalities, and Ethics: Reading, Race, and Gender in the Cyber Classroom
- G.19 Rendering the Visibility of Battered Women's Stories in Religious, Criminal Justice, and Legal Contexts
- G.21 Silent Violence: Contrapower Harassment and Sexual Harassment in the Writing Classroom
- G.27 What One Can See: Black Women's Visions
- G.31 Writing the Issues of Power in Cyberspace: Student Diversity, Gender, and Corporate Action
- I.13 Cruzando/Regresando: Critical Issues of Identity, Gender, and Spirituality in Rhetoric and Composition Pedagogy
- I.30 The Self You Disclose May Not Be Your Own: The Politics of Constructing Identity in the Feminist Classroom
- J.1 Female Figures of Rhetoric
- J.15 Applications of Technical Writing Pedagogy: Feminist Pedagogy, Intercultural Studies, and Legal Writing
- J.26 Feminism, Post-Feminism, and Power
- K.15 Viewing New Teacher Preparation Through the Lens of Feminist Rhetoric
- K.34 Feminists Reread Rhetorical Tradition
- S2.16 CCCC Women's Network Session: Mentees and Mentors: Reflections on the Graduate Student Experience
- L.26 New Considerations on the Feminization of Composition
- L.30 Writing Women in Rhetorical History: Pan Chao, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, and Frances Power Cobbe
- M.10 Women's Ways of Writing: Composition and Pedagogy at a Women's College
- M.36 Telling Rhetoric: Women's Voices in the Tradition
- N.31 Close Encounters: Race, Gender, and Power in Conferences and Tutoring

Membership in the
Coalition

Scholars interested in
women in rhetoric and
composition are invited
to join the Coalition.

Annual faculty (\$10) and
student dues (\$5) may
be sent to
C. Jan Swearingen
Dept. of English
Texas A&M Univ.
College Station, TX
77843

For information, you
may also e-mail jan at
cjan@tamu.edu

Please forward your
e-mail address along
with your name, U.S.
postal address and dues.

A Vichian Vindication: Rescuing Wollstonecraft from the Discomfort of "Reason"

Jacqueline Rhodes, University of Southern Mississippi

As Jamie Barlowe points out in Reclaiming Rhetorica, Mary Wollstonecraft's critics have too often "argued that [her] personal life betrayed her feminist positions" (118). Barlowe claims that Wollstonecraft's life embarrasses contemporary feminists, causing them "ideological discomfort"(126-7): Wollstonecraft was in love with a married man, her critics write; she had a child out of wedlock; she tried to commit suicide--twice. Susan Gubar cannot resist trying to explain Wollstonecraft's work through her troubled personal life, asking: "Did anyone better understand slavish passions, the overvaluation of love, fickle irrationality, weak dependency, the sense of personal irrelevance, and anxiety about personal attractiveness than Wollstonecraft herself?" (460). Similarly, Syndy McMillen Conger finds a "nagging contradiction" in Wollstonecraft's work, in that "although she often preaches rationality, she just as often succumbs to irrationality" (143). Most reclamations of Wollstonecraft and her work resolve the "contradiction" between private event and public text by extolling only the public Wollstonecraft: the rhetorical stylist, the author of the first feminist manifesto, the champion of women as rational beings. The ideological discomfort noted by Barlowe, however, makes any reclamation of Wollstonecraft's work for rhetorical history or critical use tricky at best.

Even as reclamation efforts secure Wollstonecraft's place in feminist rhetorical history, her overt appeals to reason in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman exacerbate the very discomfort that challenges her place. Wollstonecraft is in a peculiar double-bind: her personal life indicates that she's not rational enough, and her writings that she's too rational. In this sense, contemporary readings of Wollstonecraft's work often derive from the idea that her life of unrestrained passion subverted Enlightenment reason. That is, as Orrin Wang argues,

It is this early nineteenth-century monument of Wollstonecraft, as an individual aspiring to rational discourse while hopelessly repressing irrational emotion, that we have inherited and that has haunted even the most sympathetic perceptions of her by contemporary feminist critics. (129)

Even while these scholars are troubled by the apparent contradiction in Wollstonecraft, they seem not to question the binary opposition of male reason/female emotion that creates that contradiction. The reason they tend to invoke is the reason of syllogistic logic and objective truth--in short, a traditional, patriarchal view of the term. Wollstonecraft situates reason, however, in a terminological constellation different from that to which her critics point. In Burkean terms, Wollstonecraft's reason is continuous with such Vichian concepts as contingency, dialectic, civic duty, and common sense. I suggest that Wollstonecraft's cluster of terms around reason removes this god term from mainstream eighteenth-century rhetorical thought, and in fact more closely aligns her terminological system with that of Giambattista Vico.

For many contemporary cultural feminists, reason has become what Kenneth Burke would call a "devil term" associated with patriarchal dominance and thus the term is not continuous with the term woman. Wollstonecraft, however, unlike her twentieth-century critics and unlike her eighteenth-century audience, posits a continuity between reason and woman in the very act of producing her text. She places her Vindication in its wider rhetorical context of rational conversation, creating a temporary consubstantiality with other Enlightenment thinkers in order to make her case. Through this temporary shared space, she challenges what Susan

New SIU Series Announced

Southern Illinois
University Press has
initiated a new book
series, "Studies in
Rhetorics and
Feminisms," edited by
Cheryl Glenn. SRF
seeks scholarly works
that both examine and
extend traditions of
rhetoric; works that span
the sexes, disciplines,
cultures, ethnicities,
constructions of race, and
sociocultural practices as
they interrogate the
rhetorical "tradition."

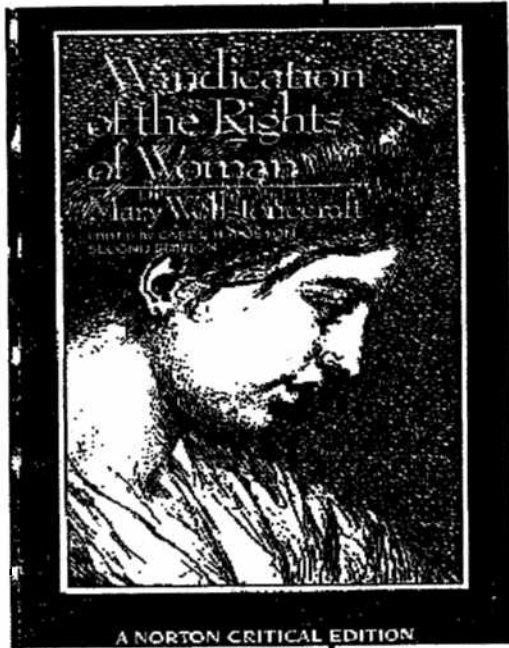
Please forward queries
and submissions to

Cheryl Glenn
SRF Editor
Dept. of English
142 S. Burrowes Bldg
Penn State Univ.
University Park, PA
16802-6200

cjg6@psu.edu
814-237-5665 (h)
814-863-0271 (o)
814-863-7285 (fax)

Griffin calls the rhetoric of patriarchy; this rhetoric, Griffin writes, denies the possibility that an individual can be both weak and strong, dominator and dominated, free and confined, or familiar and unfamiliar. As a rhetoric of hierarchy, patriarchal ideology is a rhetoric of denial accompanied by the illusion of possibility. (309)

In her negotiation of identification, Wollstonecraft places herself continuous with both denial and possibility, a move that challenges the very rhetoric of patriarchy that, ironically, contemporary cultural feminists advance. Wollstonecraft's uneasy consubstantiality creates an ironic rhetorical context in which she as a woman argues rationally against the idea that women cannot be rational.



Wollstonecraft Illustrations

The two illustrations that accompany Rhodes' article appear on the front and back covers of the Norton Critical Edition of Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Right of Woman (2nd ed., ed. Carol H. Poston. New York: Norton, 1988.) They appear here much as they do on the Norton, occupying dramatically different spaces in the book. The profile of a young woman (above) takes up almost the entire front cover, suggesting that it is, in fact, a representation of Wollstonecraft herself. We find by reading the small type on the back cover, however, that this is a work by Angelica Kauffmann (1741-1807), "one of the most acclaimed artists of the eighteenth century" (back cover). It is titled "A Bust of a Girl With an Earring," dated 1770; the subject is not named.

Wollstonecraft's god term is reason; just as the god term of Enlightenment thought is reason; the sacred god term creates confusion for those critics who view reason as essentially male, whether those critics live in the eighteenth century or the twentieth century. However, when Wollstonecraft argues for rationality, she is doing anything but colluding with patriarchal authority in her descriptions of "female irrationality," she is careful to note that this gendered type is socially constructed and perpetuated through prejudice. Even in her description of women as slaves "in every situation to prejudice" (151), Wollstonecraft also claims that prejudice is a natural consequence of a reason that relies heavily on its continuity with hierarchy and patriarchy. If the mainstream system of reason encourages women to associate ideas in non-rational, stereotypically feminine ways, then women will not later develop the common sense that lets them judge their actions wisely. Clearly, then, Wollstonecraft's devil term is

neither reason nor feminine; it is prejudice. For Wollstonecraft, prejudice is an insidious by-product of Cartesian rationality; that is, she believes that a too-strict adherence to a seemingly objective truth denies the possibility that one's truth is, in fact, false.

To combat the stunting of women's reason, Wollstonecraft advocates a terminological system that sees reason and civic duty as continuous terms. She writes that females,

denied all political privileges, and not allowed, as married women, excepting in criminal cases, a civil existence, have their attention naturally drawn from the interest of the whole community to that of the minute parts, though the private duty of any member of society must be very imperfectly performed when not connected with the general good. The mighty business of female life is to please, and restrained from entering into more important concerns by political and civil oppression, sentiments become events, and reflection deepens what it should, and would have effaced, if the understanding had been allowed to take a wider range. (183)

In order to combat indolence, prejudice, weakness, and servility in women, Wollstonecraft posits an active, dialectical, public reason--and it is in this continuity of reason and public life that we find a key connection to Vico.

Reason, for Vico, is not the process of a lone philosopher deducing objective truth, but is instead applied, public reason. Thus it is dialectic, contingent, probability-based--in a word, rhetorical. Public life and reason become linked in the figure of an actively rational speaker, one who speaks with both a dialectic common sense and eloquence. For Vico, eloquence is the means by which speaker and audience become consubstantial; it is "wisdom, ornately and copiously delivered in words appropriate to the common opinion of mankind" (78). As such, it depends on more than absolute truths to meet its persuasive purpose. That is, eloquent speakers adjust their

individual contingent truths in association with their contexts in order to create contingent truths, the temporary “ends” of associative thought. Reason thus does not rely on passive observation but instead requires the constant exercise of speculation and generalization in order to deal with contingent truths.

Like Vico, Wollstonecraft posits reason as an active, dialectic process that perpetuates and perfects its own existence; as she puts it, “the mind gains strength [through] exercise” (109). Those without this type of reason, according to Wollstonecraft, cannot cope with the real world and its accompanying disorder. She writes:

If the power of reflecting on the past, and darting the keen eye of contemplation into futurity, be the grand privilege of man, it must be granted that some people enjoy this prerogative in a very limited degree. Every thing new appears to them wrong; and not able to distinguish the possible from the monstrous, they fear where no fear should find a place, running from the light of reason. . . . (151)

Wollstonecraft ties reason to comparison and speculation, that is, the ability to “distinguish the possible from the monstrous.” The knowledge that even strong women attain, she writes, is “acquired more by sheer observations on real life, than from comparing what has been individually observed with the results of experience generalized by speculation” (23). Wollstonecraft notes that thus far, women’s education has done little to encourage the play of ideas. She argues that

the severest sarcasms have been leveled against [women], and they have been ridiculed for repeating ‘a set of phrases learnt by rote,’ when nothing could be more natural, considering the education they receive, and that their ‘highest praise is to obey, unargued’—the will of man. If they be not allowed to have reason sufficient to govern their own conduct—why, all they learn—must be learned by rote! (117)

It is in this sense that Wollstonecraft advocates a Vichian eloquence in women; eloquence would be the natural result of an education that encourages both the capacity and the will to associate contingent truths. That is, this type of education would supply not just the “man of genius” but all people “with knowledge to give variety and contrast to [their] associations” (116).

For Wollstonecraft, then, reason is neither gendered nor absolute; instead, it is a rational capacity that grows as people “exercise their understandings” (119). In Wollstonecraft’s work, the development of reason mirrors the development of Vico’s common sense, which is, as William Covington writes, “the enlargement of the capacity to express what is probably true at the time” (59). It is this conception of common sense that is continuous with Wollstonecraft’s god term in the Vindication. In Wollstonecraft’s case, if we acknowledge the tensile web of consubstantiation that informs her work, we can recognize her simultaneous continuities with mainstream Enlightenment thought, revolutionary discourse, cultural feminism, and Vichian anti-Cartesianism. We can also recognize the alternative consciousness, the alternative rhetoric and system of reasoning that derives from her disruption of “contradictions” through her consubstantiation with those contradictions. If Wollstonecraft discomforts us, it is because she demands our consubstantiation with her; and until we see our own revolutionary projects as continuous with hers, that consubstantiation will not happen.

Wollstonecraft Illustrations (continued)

The second image appearing on the Norton edition of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, that of a mature woman looking directly at us (below), appears on the back cover in a tiny oval at the top with no identifying information. Perhaps it is a reproduction of Wollstonecraft’s portrait in the National Portrait Gallery referred to in the editor’s introduction to the critical material (227).

In addition to these images are two brief visual descriptions of Wollstonecraft in the editor’s introduction to this section (221-27). One occurs in a letter from poet Robert Southey to his publisher describing a meeting with Wollstonecraft in 1797. Southey refers to her as one of the “lions of literati” he met in London but speaks not of her writing but of her appearance: “her eyes are light brown, and although the lid of one of them is affected a little by paralysis, they are the most meaning [sic] I ever saw” (qtd. in Poston 227).

Doesn’t it seem odd that Norton (or Poston) chose the lovely nameless profile for the cover of this book rather than the portrait of Wollstonecraft herself? The choice seems to reproduce, two centuries later, the very ideology of the feminine as most valued for youth and delicate physical beauty against which Wollstonecraft marshalled her prodigious rhetorical energies.



Works Cited

- Barlowe, Jamie. "Daring to Dialogue: Mary Wollstonecraft's Rhetoric of Feminist Dialogics." Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition. Ed. Andrea A. Lunsford. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1995. 117-36.
- Conger, Syndy McMillen. "The Sentimental Logic of Wollstonecraft's Prose." Prose Studies 10 (1987): 143-58.
- Covino, William A. The Art of Wondering: A Revisionist Return to the History of Rhetoric. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1988.
- Griffin, Cindy L. "Rhetoricizing Alienation: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Rhetorical Construction of Women's Oppression." Quarterly Journal of Speech 80 (1994): 293-312.
- Gubar, Susan. "Feminist Misogyny: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Paradox of 'It Takes One to Know One'." Feminist Studies 20 (1994): 453-73.
- Vico, Giambattista. On the Study Methods of Our Time. Trans. Elio Gianturco. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990.
- Wang, Orrin N. C. "The Other Reasons: Female Alterity and Enlightenment Discourse in Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman." The Yale Journal of Criticism 5 (1991): 129-49.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Ed. Carol H.

"When I dare to be
powerful--to use my
strength in the
service of my vision,
then it becomes less
and less important
whether I am
afraid."

-Audre Lorde

**The Coalition of Women Scholars in the
History of Rhetoric and Composition
Department of English
Miami University
Oxford, OH 45056**