

# Peitho

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

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### For a Sixth Year, "We Are All Bound Up Together"

Women Writing (talking, laughing, thinking...) as  
Writing Women

Come Together at The Annual Coalition Meeting,  
Atlanta, Georgia 1999

Tara Pauliny, Ohio State University

Anyone who has ever known or worked with me can most likely remember at least this one thing about me--I am often late, late for meetings, lectures, even meals. The 1999 coalition meeting was no exception. As my colleague and I approached the hotel after getting lost in downtown Atlanta, I jumped out of her car, ran through the revolving doors and directly up the escalator. After furiously scanning the signs posted around the main site of the convention, I spotted the sign for the coalition and jogged into the meeting. I breathlessly spotted a chair (and some friendly faces) and sat down.

I recount this personal tidbit about my attendance to say that I am glad I ran to catch the caucus. Had I not sprinted in, I would have missed the opportunity to attend my second coalition meeting, which once again proved to be the highlight of my CCCC's experience. As a Ph.D. student in rhetoric and composition, I focus my work around feminist rhetoric and issues of the body. Given these interests, I was pleased to see that once again the presenters addressed topics not only pertaining to female scholars

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Anyone wishing to contribute news items to Peitho 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.

in our field, but to the lives and scholarship of women we study. This year's speakers discussed issues of literacy, including the practices of women who could be said to inhabit the sidelines of culture--those involved in women's clubs, the temperance movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and contemporary women who continue to find their personal and professional roles enmeshed with one another. These presentations by women scholars, which articulated other women's relationship to their identities, their professions, and their wider cultural spaces helped me to recognize my own position within the field. As an addendum to my experience at the 1998 meeting, the 1999 Atlanta meeting allowed me to see that space has been and continues to be carved for women in the fields of rhetoric and composition. As a developing scholar and experienced student I am truly glad to have had this annual opportunity to hear the work of distinguished women. As a student it gave me rhetorical details and critical contexts with which to shape my sense of the field, and as a feminist it proved that strong work is being done by women to elucidate the complex interweavings present in women's rhetorical lives.

Chaired by Shirley Wilson Logan, the work presented under the heading "'We Are All Bound Up Together': Women Writing, Writing Women," asked us to recognize links between the material and visual representations of women, their political organizing, and the ways that their identities interact and inform their personal, professional, and theoretical selves. Essential to this work is the notion of complexity; whether June Hadden Hobbs argued for the condensed theoretical formation of cemetery iconography or Beverly Moss examined how current African-American women negotiate their public identities as they make a place for themselves academically, all eight scholars engaged with phenomena that refused to be boiled down. Rather, their work spoke to the complexities, and sometimes disjunctions, of the situations with which women have been and are currently faced.

The first panelist, June Hadden Hobbs (Gardner-Webb University) took us into the cemeteries and churches of the South where she examined how hymns gave voice to women who were otherwise silenced. Working to complicate this further, however, she presented us with the rhetorical configurations of cemetery icons and epitaphs. She postulated that the rhetoric of the nineteenth century, filled as it was with domestic images, shaped the American conception of feminized death that conflated sexuality and dying. Expanding the notion of text, she offered us tombstones as an alternative way to study the ubiquitous issues of race, class, sex, and death. Also attending to this issue of complexity, Anne Ruggles Gere (University of Michigan) read women's clubs as branches of a network of women's literacy, including the exchange of books, newspapers, and scrapbooks. This movement, like the tombstones in the cemeteries, proved to be equally as complicated and less initially visible. Rather than being clearly defined or solidified organizations,

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these clubs were filled with difference and pleasure; through these meetings the members interacted with larger social forces, mingled high and low culture, debated and influenced the Suffrage and Abolition movements, and found enjoyment in performing various written and oral tasks.

Again emphasizing the overlapping borders of the personal, professional, and theoretical, Mariolina Salvatori (University of Pittsburgh) presented us with *ex rotos*, small paintings of miracles, to highlight the interdependence of visual and graphic literacy and the viewers' visual, personal, and religious perspectives. Because the artists of these paintings were anonymous, they necessarily produced an erasure and constructed a silence that the viewer had to fill with her own subjectivity. It is through this visual medium, then, that artist, commissioner, and viewer interacted in such a way that their histories intermingled. In direct opposition to this messy notion of intermingling, Jennifer Cognard-Black (Ohio State University) laid out the constructed polarization and separation presented by the nineteenth-century ideal of pure womanhood. Although this theory purports to be a whole and stable category, Cognard-Black contended that it is just the opposite; pure womanhood is entrenched in deviant sexualities and rife with both English propriety and American frankness. Reading the Victorian creation of female artists such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, she uncovered the decisions made to rewrite the complex and disconnected personal in favor of a more unified (and proper) representation of womanhood.

Also working within the frame of the nineteenth-century, Carolyn Mattingly (Louisiana State University) posed a difficult question, asking why, as feminists and scholars, we have so often chosen to value only radical women. Revisiting the Women's Christian Temperance Movement, she argued that although it was perhaps the most influential women's movement of its time, it has been ignored or dismissed as being too conservative. Rather than focusing on the possible negative effects of its politics, Mattingly challenged us to take a more nuanced approach: to recognize its role in providing opportunities for women to become public speakers, writers, and activists. She added that as we so often see ourselves embedded in complex and often uncomfortable positions, we might also view our predecessors with a similar gaze. Speaking about just such contemporaries' perspectives, Beverly Moss (Ohio State University) carried the conversation through to the late twentieth century by researching how African-American women within rhetoric and composition today work to establish a public ethos. Her interest is in their ability to negotiate their public identities as they simultaneously create space for themselves within academic and administrative positions. Her work also speaks to the complexity of these women's lives as it highlighted their comments and posited them as speaking subjects who often see their space in the profession as shrinking and who call for less talk and more action.

As the final panelist, Cheryl Glenn (Pennsylvania State University) shifted us into a realm of silence, asking us to revalue silence as a rhetorical move. Widening our critical gaze once again, she investigated how silence has been ignored as a mechanism of cultural and social construction. Rather than assuming that the only articulations heard are verbal ones, she argued instead for investigating the rhetoric(s) of silence and the ways that they deliver meanings, especially when deployed by those historically under-recognized. Jacqueline Jones Royster (Ohio State University) responded to the panelists and was struck by both the room for discovery they presented and their ability to illuminate the lives of women in rhetoric and composition. All eight panelists, she remarked, "got to the materiality of what it means to live and to do work as women." They showed that materiality matters, and that this materialism is complex, overlapping, and above all, quite worthy of our close attention and study.

For the second hour of the meeting, attendees broke into seven groups led by fourteen caucus members to discuss numerous timely and necessary topics. These included working conditions faced by part-time instructors, the ins and outs of doing writing program administrative work, the complex and arduous task of getting work published, the equally compelling questions of finding and securing a position, handling classroom politics, writing grant proposals, and finally, completing that elusive dissertation. Many thanks to the scholars and mentors who led these discussions: Eileen Schell (Syracuse University), Karen Thompson (Rutgers University), Lisa Ede (Oregon State University), Jacqueline Jones Royster (Ohio State University), Theresa Enos (University of Arizona), Joy Ritchie (University of Nebraska), Julia Ferganchick-Neufang (University of Arkansas), Joyce Irene Middleton (University of Rochester), Duku Anokye (University of Toledo), Kathleen Welch (University of Oklahoma), Andrea Lunsford (Ohio State University), Cheryl Glenn (Pennsylvania State University), Kris Ratcliffe (Marquette University), and C. Jan Swearingen (Texas A & M University).

As always, you were informative, funny, and inviting; thanks so much for your continued commitment and support. Thanks also to everyone who helped plan, execute, and then attended the meeting. As a relatively new member of the field of rhetoric and composition, I find that this annual caucus proves to be personally and professionally fulfilling. It is truly one of the best activities at CCCC's and one I look forward to attending again in 2000--hopefully and on time!

**The 2000 Coalition Business Meeting**  
is scheduled for Wednesday, April 12, 2000 from 5:30-  
6:15. It will be followed by the general session at  
6:30. Please look for the location of the meeting in the  
CCCC Conference Program mailing or your CCCC Program  
when it arrives.

Eileen E. Schell. *Gypsy Academics and Mother-Teachers: Gender, Contingent Labor, and Writing Instruction*.

Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1998. 158 pages.

Reviewed by Ilene Crawford  
University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee

Eileen Schell sees a troubling contradiction in rhetoric and composition studies, one brought on by the field's desire to articulate an "emancipatory dimension" for itself. The field's "rhetoric of 'empowerment' and 'liberation,'" she points out, "becomes a vexed proposition in light of the vulnerable institutional position of those who predominantly teach introductory writing courses: teaching assistants, part-time faculty, and temporary nontenure-track faculty" (4). In *Gypsy Academics*, Schell persuades us to see this as a feminist problem. It is a feminist problem not only because women make up a disproportionate number of contingent writing instructors in the academy, but also because women's socialization to be caregivers in effect "disproportionately channels" women into these low-status positions (9). Schell's goal is to "make sense of the processes" that channel women to the lower rungs of the employment ladder. Towards this end, she offers a feminist analysis of the historical factors that affect the location of women in the academy and offers an overview of possible courses of action. Her suggested courses of action are practical and emphasize the need to work within local contexts and constraints. As a result of this emphasis, *Gypsy Academics* is a highly useful model for how feminists might discover their own "ways of living with contradictions that are presently ineradicable" (11).

These ineradicable contradictions, Schell argues, have their roots in the nineteenth century and the initial entry of women into the teaching profession, a profession that has been simultaneously empowering and disempowering for women. As the American university shifted from a focus on teaching to a focus on scholarship, composition was increasingly constructed as a service course, and women's supposed "service ethos" consequently made them "natural" occupants of lower ranking instructor positions. This trend continued into the twentieth century and has only intensified with the job market crash that began in the 1970s.

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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 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. You may also e-mail submissions to [jarratsc@po.muohio.edu](mailto:jarratsc@po.muohio.edu) or fax them to (513) 529-1392.

Schell debunks the major myth now circulating about women contingent writing instructors: that they are earning a supplementary income with their teaching, income that primarily gives them the "psychic reward" of being able to say they work in the university. Instead, Schell's discussion of how the material realities of these women's lives often conflict with the institutional realities of the university provides a more persuasive explanation for their location as contingent labor. In subtle and not so subtle ways, Schell reminds us, the university is not set up to accommodate the needs of many women, often forcing women to think in either/or terms about work and family. The women she talks to have developed a bifurcated view of the university as a result: many love their work in the classroom but have little more than frustration for the institutional policies that marginalize them.

Schell believes that some strands of feminist pedagogy reinforce the marginalized position women contingent writing instructors occupy, though. Specifically, she identifies maternal feminist pedagogies, which stress nurturing students and establishing non-hierarchical classrooms, as problematic for several reasons. Maternal pedagogies do not construct women as authoritative and knowledgeable. Rather, Schell argues, they reinforce the mistaken belief that women are naturally caregivers. While Schell by no means sketches a complete picture of feminist work in rhetoric and composition studies, I share Schell's doubt that maternal pedagogies can enable women to make material changes in their working conditions when these pedagogies encourage faculty and administrators not to take them seriously or to value their emotional labor more than their intellectual labor.

Most troubling of all for Schell, maternal pedagogies presume white middle class teachers and students. Teachers further marginalized by race, class, and other differences have even more to lose, Schell believes, if they adopt pedagogies that construct them as caregivers instead of authorities. I would have liked to see Schell go even further with this line of analysis. She notes that many of the white middle class women she talked to uncritically described themselves in racialized terms, such as "gypsies, field hands, migrant workers, transients, slaves, and other minority or disadvantaged groups that perform devalued or working-class labor" (62). Such labels obscure the privileges they

receive as a result of their whiteness. Clearly there is an opportunity here to develop an even more complicated critique of feminist pedagogies, a critique that reveals women teachers as *racialized* subjects as well as demonstrating the disadvantages of constructing women teachers as caregivers.

What can we do about the conditions contingent writing instructors work under? Schell has done much of our work for us here, gathering a wealth of data and generating four possible solutions to this problem. While cautioning that there is no "one size fits all" solution, she sees four types of possible action: converting nontenure lines to tenure lines, reforming current nontenure line working conditions, forming contingent labor unions and collective bargaining units, and abolishing the first year writing requirement. She weighs the pros and cons of these solutions, illustrating her arguments with examples of concrete changes undertaken by English departments across the country. Schell sees various reformist solutions as most practical while holding out the hope that contingent instructors can be more successful in their attempts at forming collective bargaining units.

Attendant to any of these solutions, Schell believes, is the necessity for each of us to develop our academic citizenship, which means developing a critical literacy in the labor and managerial discourses and practices that are changing the way the university works. In short, Schell argues that it is high time we make connections between our intellectual work and our status as workers. We continue to construct contingent labor as a problem that doesn't concern us at our peril. While tenure track faculty are often aware that contingent labor makes their time for research and their lighter teaching loads possible, Schell also encourages tenure track faculty to consider how a failure to address the exploitative conditions under which contingent faculty work is related to the increasing erosion of tenure.

Schell offers a cogent critique of the system that once took fierce advantage of her as a contingent worker, the same system that she now draws immense benefits from as a tenure track faculty member. I appreciated how she draws attention to her own complicated location in the university throughout *Gypsy Academics*. By doing so, Schell paves the way for each of us to turn a feminist lens on our own complicated locations in the university as the same time she demonstrates how we might take action in our own local contexts.

## Please Join Us for the Coalition Meeting at CCCC 2000

Graduate Education in Rhetoric and Composition: Who? What? Why?  
A Caucus Sponsored by the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of  
Rhetoric and Composition

April 12, 2000  
6:30-8:30 p.m.

Shirley Wilson Logan (Maryland) will chair a roundtable discussion during the first hour. Contributors include Resa Crane Bizzaro (East Carolina), Brenda Jo Brueggemann (Ohio State), Jeanne Fahnstock (Maryland), Rebecca Jackson (New Mexico State), and Nan Johnson (Ohio State). Andrea Lunsford (Ohio State) will respond.

Mentoring group discussions in the second half of the meeting will be led by Lisa Ede (Oregon State), Julia Ferganchick-Neufang (Arkansas), Cheryl Glenn (Penn State), Andrea Lunsford (Ohio State), Joyce Irene Middleton (Rochester), Cindy Moore (Indiana), Kris Ratcliffe (Marquette), Joy Ritchie (Nebraska), Jacequeline Jones Royster (Ohio State), Karen Thompson (Rutgers), and Kathleen Welch (Oklahoma)

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