

Peitho

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

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Dear Coalition Members:

I am happy to report that the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition is having a very busy year, thanks to initiatives begun by past officers and the hard work of its many members.

Our new treasurer, Kate Adams, has updated our membership lists and recruited new members; her successes will be published in the Treasurer's Report in the next edition of *Peitho*. Nan Johnson and Jackie Royster are working to include more history panels at major conferences. Susan Jarratt and Kay Halasek are continuing their good work in publishing *Peitho*, and Kay and Kathleen Welch are collaborating on eventually publishing *Peitho* online. Speaking of the web, Kathleen has agreed to oversee efforts to build and maintain an official Coalition web page, where we could all access membership information, membership lists, current projects, mentoring information, etc.

At the 2000 CCCC's meeting, the Coalition Board voted to make the Coalition the institutional home for the Biennial Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference. In short, we are developing procedures for selecting conference sites and also setting up a schedule of conferences so as to keep the conference planning running smoothly. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford have already been working with me toward this end. As a result, I am happy to announce that Nancy DeJoy at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois, has volunteered to host the Third Biennial Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference during October of 2001. Most of you are no doubt familiar with Nancy and her stellar organizational skills from her annual Summer Seminars in Rhetoric and Composition.

Finally, I'm very excited about our 2001 Coalition meeting in Denver. Our CCCC's panel is entitled "Why History Matters" (Yes, I stole the title from Gerda Lerner's excellent book by the same name!). Our panelists include Jacqueline Royster (The Ohio State University), "Using

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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.

History to Invent a Speaking Self"; Win Horner (Texas Christian University), "'Been There, Done That': Women's Roles in the History of Rhetoric and Composition Studies"; Christine Farris (Indiana University), "'I See Dead People': Making Sense of Institutional Histories"; Wu Hui (University of Central Arkansas) "Talking Cross-culturally about the History of Her Own"; Annemarie Simpkins (Auburn University), "Examining the Writing Practices of Black Women Publishers." The respondent will be Pat Bizzell (College of the Holy Cross).

So, please, put our Denver meeting on your CCCC's calendar: Wednesday, March 14, 6:45-8:45 p.m. We'll spend the first hour talking history and the second hour talking about mentoring issues that concern us all. See you there!

Best wishes,

Kris Ratcliffe

P.S. On a personal note, I'd like to thank the immediate past presidents Shirley Logan and Cheryl Glenn for all the advice they've offered me. If any of you have ideas concerning the Coalition's current and/or future endeavors, feel free to e-mail me at krista.ratcliffe@marquette.edu. Thanks!

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Rhetoric and Women's Political Speech in *The Lecturess, Or Woman's Sphere*

Jill Swiencicki, California State University, Chico

The 1830s was a decade when women ascended the podium in record numbers to discuss matters of political importance. Issues such as female suffrage, abolition, and other moral and political reforms were the subjects of such orators as Maria Stewart and the Grimke sisters. The ground-breaking feminist rhetorical history of this period is largely shaped by the study of those who orated and those who warned against the inappropriateness and even danger of women speaking in public (see Khors Campbell, Wilson Logan, Matthews, Peterson). In this essay I hope to extend this fine work on women's rhetoric, not into a further examination of the polarized sides, but into the messiness of the in-between. One text of the period helps in this regard.

In 1839 a novel appeared that captured the tensions over female political speakers from both the perspectives of the women lecturers and adherents to conservative, dominant ideologies. The novel, *The Lecturess, Or Woman's Sphere*, is largely a cautionary tale about the threat that one woman's desire for political, public lecturing posed for her family, her nation, and her "nature." It is attributed to Sarah Josepha Hale, one of the most influential public women of the nineteenth century. For much of that century, Hale was editor of *Godey's Ladies Book*, one of the largest circulating magazines in the antebellum period, a magazine whose combination of fiction, instructional essays, book reviews, embroidery patterns, and fashion plates championed the conservative values of "separate spheres" (see Okker, Tonkovich). Such values took shape in the doctrines of true womanhood, in which women are attributed by nature to be pious and moral, and to be associated with the private sphere of home and family. They also took shape in the notion of republican motherhood, the idea that it was women's highest calling to educate their children and thus strengthen the nation by nurturing its citizenry. Such was the dominant ideology of the antebellum period, one in which women were creating female rhetorical identities at a time when they were largely prohibited from public, political speech.

The Lecturess takes a startlingly different approach from the ideology of Godey's and does a different kind of cultural work. Less a polemic than a dialogue on women's public role, the novel gives room to arguments on behalf of political female speech, and even shows how rhetoric is used to figure women in a space of anxiety over locating themselves as speaking, political beings. Here I'll discuss the importance of including representations of such tensions in rhetorical history for their ability to disrupt ideas about rhetorical practice and its relation to subject formation for women. In this way I further a notion of rhetoric that sees it not as a single set of options for realizing one's self, but a set of discursive and spatial norms which bring certain selves into being and which validate certain selves over others (see "Afterward," *Reclaiming Rhetorica*).

Theories of the public sphere first outlined by Jurgen Habermas explain the connection between fiction and cultivating a public, rhetorical identity. In his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas claims that, beginning in the eighteenth century, "experiments with subjectivity" occurred in fiction where readers began to "imagine and define public selves through their private relationships" (49). Fiction provided a rhetorical, "audience-oriented subjectivity" by employing the conventions of letter writing, diary, and dialogue where "the privacy of the [novel] was oriented to the public nature of the [bourgeois self], and as the subjectivity of the privatized individual was related from the very start to publicity, so both were conjured in literature" (50). This connection between private and public spheres via literary convention helps us to bridge genres in rhetorical history—such as fiction and oratory—that have been divided by disciplinary biases related to the rise of the English department in the nineteenth century. More to my point here, Habermas's argument also helps us to see that the public personae that is the focus of the rhetorical tradition became intimately dependent upon and produced within literary genres which were rendered private cultural spaces.

Hale's novel complicates Habermas's observations through its focus on gendered public

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participation and female subject formation, exposing tensions involved in creating a female subjectivity within dominant rhetorical parameters. Specifically, *The Lecturess* shows how rhetorical norms both enable and limit women in their desire for a public, political identity. Lecturess Marian's continual participation in and withdrawal from rhetorical practice expresses the frequent incommensurability of those experiences, locations, and public possibilities for women at this time. In the afterward to *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, Arabella Lyon sees it as a frequent characteristic of women writers to construct themselves as "subjects-in-process," often deliberately mapping themselves with less certainty in dominant rhetorical paradigms, which reflect larger epistemological paradigms of knowing, being and feeling. For these women writers and speakers, rhetoric is a process of locating one's self within several discursive parameters: within oratorical public spheres, with their influence on civic rhetorics within bourgeois public spheres, with their influence on true womanhood, sentiment, and domesticity; and within women's political counterpublics, with their emphasis on social critique, action, coalition, and (conflicted) racial alliances.

The Lecturess foregrounds one female lecturer's attempts to negotiate these different discursive parameters and their radically different demands on the space, place, and content of her speech. I'll briefly engage an example of these negotiations, but first should provide a brief summary. The novel focuses on the wealthy cousins William and Edward Forrester, Edward's timid, dutiful fiancé, Sophia, and Sophia's brilliant, bold school friend, Marian Gayland. Upon graduation, Marian decided to support herself and her aged mother by launching a lecture tour on a subject she was passionate about: female education. When Marian's tour reached Boston, Sophia, Edward, and William decided to attend her lecture. They did so less in support of her topic than in support of an old friend, firmly believing that it is improper for women to speak publically on political issues. As Marian's involvement with Sophia, Edward, and William deepens with Marian's eventual marriage to William, she must vigorously defend her desire to speak publically about women's suffrage and abolitionism and negotiate her desires with their social expectations, ultimately with disastrous results for herself.

In the longer version of this paper, I divide the discourses Marian negotiates into three: one is a negotiation of affective postures in which Marian is derisively "faulted" as too "enthusiastic" in spaces where she is lecturing publically, and where she is praised as "eloquent" in her apolitical, private, appreciative discussions with William at home. The second is a look at the dialogic structure of the novel, its composition as a series of debates among Marion and her friends about women's public role, and how that structure enables sympathetic space for Marian's political arguments. The third, which I'll discuss here, involves the tension between what I call Marian's two pedagogues: her mother, who inspires but cautions against Marian's desire to lecture, and the narrator, who at first gives Marian's "enthusiasm" narrative space and then moves toward a censoring, moralistic response to her lecturing.

The December 1839 advertisement in *Godey's Ladies Book* for *The Lecturess* states the novel's purpose as promoting moral didacticism: "we have looked over this little book, and commend it to the consideration of married people-husbands as well as wives will find lessons worth learning in this unpretending story" (286). *The Lecturess*, in other words, teaches husbands and wives how to negotiate the proper location and content of women's speech, and teaches couples how to squelch women's desires should they crave the podium. The advertisement is in keeping with the notion of the period that the novel could be "instructive" rather than morally corrupting, emphasizing its positive persuasive effects. The novel teaches readers by exposing the efforts of Marian's friends to teach her how to accept her place within the sphere assigned by "nature." But the pedagogy is less a straightforward cautionary tale than an exposure of the discursive motives and parameters which comprise her conflicted rhetorical identity. These discourses take the form of two teachers: Marian's mother, who initiates Marian's battle with social and gender norms and, surprisingly, the narrator, who emerges as a robust commentator who tries to teach Marian that it is actually a private, individual, internal battle she is waging with her own unruly desires. This battle results in an anxious struggle for Marian's capitulation to private, domesticated rhetorical identity.

Marian's mother, a woman whose convictions were forged in the lived experience of hardship and struggle, offered her daughter a vision of women in the public sphere that was based in materialist critique

of their gendered social circumstance. Marian's female education was an education in depravation, in observing her mother's relentless labor in exchange for unfair wages, and social and public isolation. It was an education taught to her by her mother, who was left by her husband to provide for Marian using her skills as a seamstress:

[Marian's mother] taught her [. . .] the value of industry and independence; explained to her the lonely, friendless situation to which poverty consigns woman; and her lessons, colored by suffering, sunk deep into her pupil's mind, who soon from listening, learned to question, and from questioning, to argue upon the justice of those laws and regulations of society, which exclude women from honorable and lucrative employments. She could not understand why a man should receive so much larger compensation for his labor than her mother, who rose daily with the sun, and worked incessantly till night, and then received payment in paltry sum, scarcely able to furnish them with bread. It seemed to her the height of injustice, and she sought to fathom the cause. (16)

Marian's need to assert a public voice is born of a critique of the interconnectedness of gender and poverty. As a young girl, her mother taught her how to enter into rhetorical dialogue, a dialogue that leads to action. Indeed, Marian begins a kind of master-pupil relationship as she "listens" to her mother's instruction on the importance of work for women, and to the painful acknowledgment that work for women is, paradoxically, a life of "suffering," "poverty," and "friendless[ness]." In the act of dialoguing with her mother, she "learned to question." She problematizes such occurrences as unequal wage conditions based solely on gender and gendered tasks, such as her mother's sewing earnings. From questioning she moves on "to argue upon the justice of those laws and regulations of society, which exclude women." In seeking to "fathom the cause," Marian brings the dialogue to its fullest potential, as she literally creates meaning from reasoned debate and real life experiences-not abstract notions of women's nature, or their proper sphere, or appeals to higher religious power-and pledges to share that new meaning with other women. Indeed, as a knowledge based not in a distanced, enlightened rational thinker but in a socially-located yet broad-based experience, Marian's maternal dialogues are an earlier version of the "click experience" second wave feminists experienced over a century later, ones where women described in essays and consciousness-raising groups an awareness that crystalized their understanding of women's oppression (Hogeland 24). They also demonstrate a rhetorical pedagogy that values argument, not as confrontation between entrenched positions, but as a process of meaning-making in which awareness of the place from which one speaks generates the ability to position, reposition, and collaboratively approach urgent issues, engendering what Susan Jarratt might see as a productive "case for conflict" within feminist discourse. Her expansive subjectivity is shaped by the rhetorical education she gleaned from her mother's labors and she utilizes it to enrich herself, her family, and her society. The narrative makes expansive room for this kind of personal history, and also gives room for Marian's debates among friends on the issue of the role of women in the public sphere. Indeed the second third of the novel is structured as a series of methodical dialogues about the role of women, and the narrative lingers on Marian's forceful claims and rebuttals.

But it is after Marian rejects the "affection" of the wealthy man of leisure, William Forrester, that the narrator emerges as a more distinct personality and begins to forcefully critique her decisions. Just after Marian rejects William's proposal of marriage, signaling a break with a private, nurturing rhetorical identity he'd sanctioned for her, Marian's desire to speak publically on behalf of women faltered: "That night an assembled crowd gazed in admiration upon the faultless beauty of the lectress, and listened to her eloquent appeal on behalf of women [. . . but] there was in that vast crowd not one being for whose approval she now cared. One form was missing [. . .]" (43). The joy in Marian's life-work, to become an eloquent speaker on behalf of the oppressed, has been perverted as Marian's notion of who her audience is begins to shift. While an audience of women and reformers "gaze [at her] in admiration," she can only search for the gaze she can never meet: William's. The pedagogic work of the narrator-to undo her focus on critiquing ideological constraints and refocus her attention on her own supposedly misguided desires-is underway. The narrator frames this new narrative desire as a search for the "truth":

[. . .] truth compels me to proceed. It is my duty to leave nothing untold, but to hold up as a warning to every woman, the folly, the wickedness of a stubborn, unyielding disposition; to

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 or fax them to (513) 529-1392.

show the beauty of a mild and gentle forbearance; and to prove that happiness in the married state can result only from amiable desire in both man and woman, but especially and above all the latter, to promote the happiness of the being with whom she is destined to pass her life. (92)

Where in the first half of the narrative, Marian was given space to argue her positions, the narrative now disallows this and casts her decisions as the consequence of her "pride." After refusing William, she decides to embark on a lecture tour to Charleston, South Carolina, real life home of the Grimke sisters, who left the south in a show of allegiance to abolitionism. As Marian ascended the stage and took the podium, she was met with "hissings and revilings" as she "openly expressed her disapprobation, in the most decided of manner, of slavery, asserting that the curse of God must sooner or later fall heavily upon any country or section of country in which the horrible system is countenanced" (54). As the crowd hears this, they not only become violent, but they set fire to the lecture hall. After narrowly escaping, Marian contracted a "fever of the brain" and was unconscious for several days (57). According to the narrator, she awakes "to find that her actions, instead of flowing from a pure desire to benefit her fellow-beings, were in fact the result of obstinate, unyielding pride, and a craving for popularity. Instead of a desire to raise her sex, her wish had been to manifest her own superiority. Poor Marian!" (57). William comes to South Carolina to rescue her and the scene of the burning is recast from a mob of slavery proponents whom she attempts to confront, to a personalization of her efforts and a pathologizing of her activism as "pride." Indeed, Marian's "pride" now becomes almost another character in the novel, standing in the way of all her attempts to love William truly and submit to his will (50). It is these moments of coalition activity-when Marian begins to publically forge links between women's rights and the rights of African Americans, and later when she agrees to lecture on behalf of a society for the advancement of African American education-that the narrative becomes most anxious, inducing "brain fevers" in Marian and forcing her to flee her home rather than imagine a site in which these groups can converge to enact radical social change. In *The Lectress*, the suggestion of an alliance based in gender and race oppression marks the most dangerous limits of female political publicity.

Here is Marian at the end of the novel, speaking a deathbed recantation to her loyal maidservant:

[A]pproaching death taught me how wrong were all my opinions. It taught me that true pride, true independence in a woman, is to fill the place which her God assigns her; to make her husband's happiness her own; and to yield her will to his in all things, conformable to her duty to a higher power. By such conduct will a woman attain her rights-the affection of her husband, the respect of her children and her world, and the approval of Heaven. (120)

Devastatingly, Marian erases herself, her own desires for eloquence, and the social critiques her desire engendered. Very different from the woman who, throughout much of the novel, could be heard uttering such arguments:

The proper sphere of woman! Where is it? In the kitchen, or in the laundry room? Or, to rise up one step in civilized life, to sit beside the cradle, and bow her head meekly to her husband's will, be it everso arbitrary or unreasonable? [. . .] or, still higher, is

it woman's sphere to spend her days in listless inactivity, or in a giddy race for amusement? I do not believe the creator intended her life to be spent in any of these ways.
(39)

Unlike her stance throughout the novel, in her deathbed conversion, Marian realizes that there is no place for her to be both a wife and a public, political woman; there is no place for her arguments, and so Hale has her deny her own complicated subjectivity and write herself out of the script.

The Lecturess is not subversive, certainly, when we face the doleful, desperate Marian at the end of the novel in comparison to the vital, uncompromising Marian of the narrative's beginning. But it is the gaps in this narrative, the moments that entertain Marian's position, that make it an interesting chronicle of the difficulties of advancing feminist and antiracist rhetorics to combat entrenched rhetorics of space, self, and gender. Indeed, along with being a conservative iteration of the period's dominant views of women, publicity, and speech, the novel gives voice to the reasoning behind Marian's compulsion to orate on social justice, and connects her passion for what she calls "the cause" of female education to other contexts, such as anti-slavery activism. Further, the dialogic nature of the text-its organization into a series of largely one-on-one debates between Marian, her husband, and her friend-allows for anxiety to emerge in the expression of what's at stake for disenfranchised subjects in women's public speech. These aspects of *The Lecturess* are as important to consider as its ultimate privileging of the period's dominant viewpoint. Ultimately, it is the coexistence of these conflicting elements-its tension-that makes the text an important exposure of the ironies involved in upholding the value of separate spheres, and an important exposure of the interconnectedness of gender, class, and race in claiming an eloquent identity.

For the continued development of adequate feminist histories of rhetoric, we have to define what counts as a rhetorical text and situation with greater breadth, taking our cues from public sphere theories that expand our notions of how place and space effect discourse. We also have to take cues from the historical moment under investigation to understand the gendered conditions of rhetorical production and expression. In the antebellum period, for example, women were imagining a female rhetorical publicity in novels at a time when women were largely prohibited from public, political speech. Along with valuing the powerful work of public women, we need to continue to search relentlessly for texts, tropes, performances, and representations in which hopes, fears, eloquences, and feminisms emerge and find expression.

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The third
Biennial Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference,
Feminist Literacies
will take place at
Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois October 26-28, 2001.

Current featured speakers include:

Susan Applegat Krouseon
on the absence of Native American women's voices
in the undergraduate curriculum
&
Beatrice Quarshie Smith
on adult women's literacy.

Other featured speakers include *Cheryl Glenn, Lisa Ede, and Krista Ratcliffe.*

Please contact Nancy DeJoy at ndejoy@mail.millikin.edu for more info.

Call for papers and additional info. will be out in Spring.

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