Peitho volume 10.2 spring 2006

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

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newsletter of the coalition of
women scholars in the history
of rhetoric and composition

Peitho

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Peitho fleeing the seduction of Leda appearing on an Apulian red figure vase, ca. 350-340 B.C.E.
J. Paul Getty Museum.
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A Brief Summary of Feminist Research Methodologies in Historic Rhetoric and Composition from the 1970s to the Present

by Elizabeth Tasker, Frances B. Holt-Underwood, Cantice Payton Greene, Gina L. Henderson, Letizia Guglielmo, Xiumei Pu, and Alexis Anne Bender

This brief summary offers a snapshot of an inquiry conducted by graduate students at Georgia State University on feminist research methodologies in historic rhetoric and composition over the past thirty-five years. We, the authors of the study, are seven women who represent various age groups, ethnicities, and areas of specialization, including rhetoric and composition, literary studies, sociology, and women's studies. Our study began as a project for Dr. Lynee Gaillet's graduate class on writing for scholarly publication. When Dr. Gaillet proposed a bibliographic essay, we knew the task would first entail restricting the scope of the project. Thus we focus solely on scholarship that theorizes, describes, or employs methods of *historical research*, and we include only those works that directly create, innovate or solidify *feminist* research methods in *rhetoric and composition*. In other words, if a work does not deal with *feminist research practices, historicism* of some type, and either *rhetoric or composition,* it is outside the scope of our study.

We began our research by asking what we felt were good research questions, beginning with "What is feminist research methodology?" and "How is feminist historiography different from traditional historic research?" We wondered how these questions are answered in the fields of rhetoric and composition. From the totality of our reading (and especially from Patricia Bizzell), we learned that feminist research strives to identify the researcher's emotional involvement with the subject; sees researchers as participants who are interested and often not neutral towards their subjects; gains its ethos not from objectivity but from community; and embraces pluralistic, rather than definitive, theories and conclusions (Bizzell "Feminist Methods of Research in the History of Rhetoric"). And, foremost, feminist research considers gender as a highly important factor in any study,

be it historical or otherwise.

We then focused our attention on distinguishing feminist historic research from traditional historic research. We learned that in recent decades the fact-finding mission of traditional historic research has broadened to include the practice of historiography, which views histories (written and/or oral) as stories with varying degrees of probability, some more verifiable than others. This broadened perspective of historic research has made room for feminist historiography, which emphasizes the need for historical *recovery* and *revision* to account for factors of gender. We found that *feminist historiography of composition* looks at gendered aspects of past composition instruction, teaching materials, student writing, and composition opportunities, while *feminist historiography of rhetoric* examines historic texts and contexts in which women had a voice, used language publicly, persuaded an audience, or were rhetorically silent or silenced. We also noticed that feminist theory in rhetoric and composition has created a revised vision of mainstream (masculine) historical rhetoric. Our understanding of these concepts and practices has been critical to our development of this bibliographic survey.

The survey begins with the 1970s and looks decade-by-decade at scholarship the field through 2005. While not exhaustive, our survey is extensive and makes clear the steady growth of feminist historical research in composition and rhetoric. Following the pictorial overview presented in the timeline below is our brief interpretation of the major trends and debates reflected in this body of work. [1]

Unsurprisingly, the time-line shows growth. Prior to 1990, during the 16-year-period from 1973 to 1989, only four works—three articles and one book—met the requirements of our study. In the 1990s, a sharp increase in publication rendered 18 publications: nine books, eight articles or book chapters, and one dedicated journal volume containing ten articles. From 2000 to 2005, we found 25 publications: 13 books, ten individual articles or book chapters, and two dedicated journal volumes with a combined total of nine articles.

What our timeline hints at and only further interpretation will reveal is how the methodological choices and debates of this period define ensuing trends. One choice confronting researchers has been whether to create a separate female history or to integrate female work into the mainstream (masculine) history of composition and rhetoric. Ritchie and Ronald's *Available Means* or Logan's *We Are Coming* are examples of separatist historiography, while Bizzell and Herzberg's *The Rhetorical Tradition* and Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold* are examples of an integrative approach. Yet such co-existence does not necessarily mean that feminist scholars in rhetoric and composition see the field as unified or all-embracing.

Over the thirty-plus years of this study, debates have emerged about canonicity and method. The well-cited exchange between Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Barbara Biesecker is about the formation of a female canon of rhetoric. Campbell combines traditional and feminist research practices to recover texts by individual women, and Biesecker critiques Campbell's text selection process as a reification of traditional elitist practices. In a second debate on canonicity, feminist attempts to modify or expand the canon are criticized by Maurice Charland, who calls for the preservation of an intact classical and humanist rhetorical tradition. A third debate was sparked by Xin Liu Gale's critique of postmodern feminist methods as too subjective and without rigor. These methods are defended by Susan Jarratt and Rory Ong, Cheryl Glenn, and, finally, by Patricia Bizzell, who suggests that Gale is uncomfortable with the open emotion shown in feminist research. Such debates serve, we think, to further define the field of feminist research in historic rhetoric and composition. Ironically, they may help realize Biesecker's hope that feminists will all run "under the same banner" ("Negotiating with Our Tradition" 240).

One thing is clear: feminist scholarship in historical rhetoric and composition is a thriving field. Despite different views on canonicity and methodological approach, researchers will continue to look for, as Lunsford suggests, "the forms, strategies, and goals used by many women as 'rhetorical'" (6). Collaboration will continue, as will a broadening of the canon to include working class, African American, Asian, Native American, and Latina women. Indeed, based on our survey of over 60 works, we are confident that researchers will continue to define, expand, question, and rethink feminist research methodology, theory, and canonicity. Our own more detailed discussion of this research will, we hope, be forthcoming. For now, we offer this summary to both new students and seasoned scholars of historic rhetoric as a resource for research and course development.

Publications Relating to Feminist Research Methods in Historic Rhetoric and Composition

twentieth-century depictions of preaching and contemporary manifestations of "muscular Christianity" such as the Promise Keepers, but her treatment of the nineteenth-century context was much more sustained than the twentieth. Painting a more thorough picture of the state of gendered preaching performances might have made her ethnographic research richer and enhanced the stories of Pat, Reverend Barb and Pastor Janet.

Patricia Bizzell, in "Feminist Methods of Research in the History of Rhetoric: What Difference Do they Make?" surveys the gains of recent feminist research in rhetoric and raises a few methodological questions. How do feminist research methods change the landscape of the history of rhetoric? What happens when traditional historical research meets feminist ideology? Must we adjust our attitude towards our subjects? Bizzell's answer to the final question is particularly provocative: "We perhaps need more discussion of the part played in the setting of scholarly research agendas and the constructing of scholarly arguments by our emotions about our research topics—or subjects—and our imagined readers" (200). Mountford's work is a realization of this goal and expands the scope of the history of women's rhetoric.

Mountford clearly states her personal relationship with her subject matter, but at the same time is aware of the fine line between reflection on her emotional attachment to her work and confession: "While avoiding the temptation to confess, I nevertheless offer stories—both my own and others'—that bring into view the relationship of rhetorical performance and gender" (15). It is this attunement that makes her book both readable and interesting to someone outside the field of rhetoric as well as meaningful to scholars within the field.

Mountford's book offers exciting new directions for the future of rhetorical studies. Although religious rhetoric is all around us (not only in religious communities, but also in politics and popular fiction and entertainment), there is a dearth of scholarship on it. Mountford reminds us that it is in these everyday spaces that feminist rhetoricians should spend more time and study women preachers, their architectural, physical, and embodied space of rhetorical performance. She leaves her readers with a clear direction for the future of feminist scholarship—to explore "the impact of national manhood on American life" as well as "the difference it makes when women engender the word" (158).

Footnote

[1] For the sake of anonymity, Mountford changes the names of the ministers and their churches throughout the book.

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membership

Officially founded in 1993, The Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition is a learned society devoted to supporting women scholars committed to research in the history of rhetoric and composition.

Additionally, we work to build and sustain a network of scholars interested in the role of women in rhetoric and composition.

The network serves both as a forum for discussion of related issues and as a vehicle for mentoring newcomers to the field.

If you would like join us, please fill out the on-line application at the Coalition website:

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All Coalition members receive two issues of Peitho a year and are invited to the annual meeting at the Conference on College Composition and Communication.

and the gains of women in the social life, the clergy lost status. To compensate for this loss, Mountford argues, homileticians used preaching manuals as a way to reassert the clergy's importance by emphasizing masculinity. Christian piety and morality became synonymous with manliness and physical prowess—a kind of "muscular Christianity."

But Mountford is ultimately more interested in exploring not the institutional constructions of masculine delivery styles, but the diversity of women's performances. How do women find their own delivery style? How do women earn (or at times fail to earn) the respect of their congregations through rhetorical performances? How do localized contexts play into these performances? In chapters 3, 4, and 5, Mountford fast forwards from the nineteenth-century manuals to twentieth-century delivery styles. In her ethnographic research from the early 1990s, Mountford looks at three different female preachers who transgressed sacred space to find their gendered delivery style. She looks at the local knowledge of these ministers and the rhetorics of everyday life to consider what makes these self-presentations acceptable to their congregations.

Chapter 3 focuses on the Reverend Patricia O'Connor ("Pat" to her congregation) from St. John's Lutheran Church, chapter 4 on the Reverend Barbara Hill ("Reverend Barb") from Eastside United Church of Christ, and chapter 5 on the Reverend Janet Moore ("Pastor Janet") from Victory Hills United Methodist Church. Pat and Reverend Barb exhibit a more intimate than authoritarian style.[1] Although within the broad categorization Pat and Reverend Barb have their differences (much of Reverend Barb's authority and delivery style come from the African American tradition of the jeremiad), Mountford analyzes how the physical moves these female preachers made away from the pulpit and into the aisle amongst the people enacts a populist theology. In practice, these women challenged Durkheim's conception of religion as the separation of the "sacred" from the "profane" and closed the distance between them and their congregations. Mountford argues that they brought a localized intimacy to the art of preaching not found in the traditionally masculine biblical exegesis.

Mountford, using Michel de Certeau's theory of the act of walking, argues that this intimacy is an act of transgression and dialogue. Both Pat and Reverend Barb use religion as a ritual communion between the sacred and profane. Mountford draws historical links to this phenomenon in that throughout the history of the Protestant church, women have largely been defined as profane and kept out of institutionally sacred realms. Mountford makes the convincing argument that these women are literally building an ethos on new ground. These women construct a gendered authority through their rhetorical performances that promotes experiential messages of communal values and egalitarianism.

The book takes an interesting turn in its analysis of Pastor Janet, whose boundary and authority struggles are located outside of her delivery style. Although her congregation complained about her low voice, Pastor Janet spoke from the pulpit. This is in part, Mountford suggests, because she was never invited to move into a space outside of the pulpit like the other preachers (or she never felt comfortable making that move). This distance comes from Pastor Janet's larger boundary issues of inviting and welcoming the local gay community into the established congregation of elderly and conservative work-class people. Mountford's analysis of Pastor Janet problematizes the "easy" conclusions one could potentially draw from Pat and Reverend Barb's chapters. Instead of bringing herself (and her ideology) closer to her congregation, Pastor Janet insists that her congregation move closer to her. Mountford points out that this is a moral and justified position, but nonetheless, this is an authoritarian position. Here we see the muddling of gender definitions. We get the sense that the implications of women entering the art of preaching are not as simple as a change from authoritarian, individualistic and masculine content and styles to communal, egalitarian, and feminine ones. "Gender ideology," Mountford reminds us, "always manifests itself in local, historical contexts and is ever on the move" (130).

Overall, Mountford's book is compelling. As promised in the Introduction, she addresses central questions in the practice of feminist historiography: "What does it mean for a field of knowledge to take into consideration the experience of women? In what way is a speech act or rhetorical performance 'gendered'? How does a woman earn the respect of an audience conditioned to regard her body itself as symbolic of lack (of authority, eloquence, power, substance)?" (13).

I would liked to have seen more continuity from Mountford's historical discussions of gendered spaces and preaching manuals from the nineteenth-century into her ethnographic analysis of twentieth-century women's preaching. She does mention

📖 = book 🗐 = dedicated journal volume
📄 = journal article or book chapter

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Footnote

[1] We are currently in the process of submitting a detailed narrative of our study to a journal that features lengthier works.

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The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces
Roxanne Mountford, Southern Illinois UP, 2003
Reviewed by Emily Crawford
University of South Carolina

In *The Gendered Pulpit*, Roxanne Mountford presents a feminist reading of the rhetorical spaces of nineteenth and twentieth-century American Protestant traditions. In doing so, she responds to three distinct needs in the field of feminist rhetoric: a focus on the materiality of rhetorical performances (the physical space, the body); a recuperation of the importance of delivery; and an expansion of scholarly attention to religious subjects. Her research is largely ethnographic, but she situates her subjects both historically and theoretically. Most of Mountford's chapters examine the delivery styles of three female preachers in different denominations as she probes the question of how or where these women find their authority to preach, or their *ethos*, within a historically masculine defined practice. Mountford asserts, "the twin legacy of a textbook tradition privileging the masculine body of the preacher and an architectural/cultural tradition that gives the body a home sustain gender bias and leave contemporary women preachers searching for ways to accommodate themselves to the physicality of preaching" (3).

For Mountford, material space is rhetorical space. Chapter one focuses on the architectural structure of the pulpit as symbolic of rhetorical authority. Using scenes from *Moby Dick* and *Adam Bede*, Mountford shows how the pulpit (or lack thereof) amplifies a speaker's gender. Men become manlier behind this architectural marker of authority while women find a feminine authority on makeshift pulpits (like a horse cart in the case of *Adam Bede*). Mountford argues that these two different kinds of pulpits become metonymic for the Protestant Church and how men and women have constructed their authority within this institution. Here, Mountford lays out the premise for the rest of her book: that the pulpit is a gendered space. Indeed, historically, the pulpit was not built for women, and Mountford spends the majority of her space here on women's reactions to this architectural object that was not meant for them.

Building on her argument of an historical relationship between sacred space and the male preacher, Mountford uses chapter 2 to explore how, in the second half of the nineteenth century, preaching manuals reasserted the importance of masculinity to the character of preachers. With the incremental disestablishment of American clergy from national life