

Diversifying the Teaching of the History of Rhetoric Series:

Women in the History of Rhetoric

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Rhetorica, Cornelis Cort, 1565

Locating Women in the History of Rhetoric

Rhetoric—whether spoken or written, embodied or digital—holds possibility and power; rhetoric can *do* something. It's a plastic art that enables us to (1) investigate issues; (2) challenge unjust systems; (3) re/invent ourselves as engaged citizens; (4) expand our rhetorical repertoire; and, thereby, cultivate and participate in a way of life we believe in. Aristotle's rhetor and audience were powerful, citizen-class, land-

owning men, who discussed and voted on issues in the agora, where they participated in the life they believed in. According to tradition, Athenian democratic life wasn't complicated by men of other nations and castes nor by women—all those so-called Others who comprise the complex democracy that constitutes the United States, who comprise the life (most of) twenty-first century America *now* believes in. "We the People," contested though the phrase has long been, now means "everyone."

Rhetorical studies, which rendered women invisible and silent for over 2,500 years—has recently begun to locate women on the rhetorical terrain, led by feminist scholars who want their rhetorical projects to do something, to make rhetorical studies a more inclusive, expansive, democratic endeavor. The last thirty years has uncovered women's contributions to and participation deep within the rhetorical tradition (from Enheduanna, Sappho, and Aspasia to Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, and Zitkala Ša) as well as within the more recent rhetorical scene (Barbara Jordon, Audre Lorde, Hillary Clinton, Emma Gonzalez). Feminist scholars (of every stripe) continue to map out projects that rescue, recover, and reinscribe women, girls, and femmes onto our rhetorical consciousness.

Feminist rhetorical scholars plot out their projects (1) with resistant readings of the patriarchal narrative; (2) with reconsideration of women-authored rhetorical works that, on reconsideration, are indeed comparable to already-accepted men-authored works; and (3) with broad definitions of *rhetoric* that move it from an *exclusionary* (powerful-men-only) discipline to an *inclusionary* enterprise that acknowledges the capacious rhetorical expertise of all people.

Even now, even after the "discovery" of women and other Others, rhetoric is still not yet a neutral territory. Indeed, rhetoric continues to inscribe the relation of language and power

at a particular moment (who may/not speak; what can/not be said; what must remain unsaid; who may/not listen; who is/not willing to listen; and what those listeners may/not do). Thus, as a field, we have been willing to believe that no one without power could have possibly participated in, contributed to the rhetorical tradition. We have been willing to believe the tautology that no women had been involved in rhetorical history because (until recently) not a single rhetorical treatise by a woman appeared in lists of primary works (we resolutely ignored Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca) and because, until recently, not a single woman has appeared in the indices of the most comprehensive histories of Western rhetoric.

For too long, the arbiters of canonical acceptance operated on the basis of $X + 1$. Whenever a woman accomplished the same goals as her man counterpart (theorizing, public speaking, successful argument, persuasive letter-writing, for example), the stakes immediately rose. She may have achieved X , but she needed $X \text{ plus } 1$ to earn a place in rhetoric. Men who have conceptualized theories of rhetoric are rhetoricians (X). Aspasia conceptualized rhetorical theories, but since we have none of her primary texts, she could not be considered a rhetorician. (That we have none of Socrates' primary texts did nothing to retract from his reputation.) Aspasia was not a rhetorician until feminist rhetorical scholars conducted the research, built the arguments, and then wrote her firmly into the history of rhetoric. The inclusion of Aspasia opened rhetorical history just a crack, allowing many more scholars to write women and Others into their rightful places in rhetorical history. By now, the gates are thankfully wide open, more welcoming to research about people, practices, abilities, and nations of all kinds.

For all these reasons, I'm smiling as I write this introduction to the representative annotated list, orchestrated by Kate Rich, of women rhetors/rhetoricians in this module. As I explain above, it really wasn't so long ago that our field had no women in the history of rhetoric. None. I remember clearly being in Mr. Corbett's (that's Edward P.J. Corbett to the rest of you) graduate seminar, "The History of Rhetoric," all of which he had condensed beautifully in chapter 5 of *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. It was the mid-1980s, and we (Krista Ratcliffe, Roxanne Mountford, Jaime Mejia, and I, among others) were slowly making our way through that singular history, reading Isocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian; jumping ahead to Puttenham and Vico; and crowning our study with Burke, Booth, Weaver, and Perelman. As an aside, Corbett mentioned that Perelman's co-author was a woman, she actually was Perelman's teacher. When I asked what her first name was (as she was indicated on the title page only by "L. Olbrechts-Tyteca"), Corbett said he had no idea.

So, I bravely raised my hand and asked if there were any women in the history of rhetoric.

He thought for a while and then pronounced, "No."

Boy, have things changed. Just as he was delighted with my early work, Corbett would be thrilled at the progress our field has made in what seems to me like a very short time. In addition to a book series dedicated to women and rhetoric ("Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms" that Shirley Wilson Logan and I edit for Southern Illinois University Press), there is a biennial conference (Feminist Rhetorics), an organization (The Coalition of Feminist

Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition), and countless books, articles, workshops, conference presentations, graduate seminars, and undergraduate courses across the nation that focus on women's roles in rhetoric.

The more we correct/expand the historical record, the more we naturalize women's roles and contributions in the public, political, *and* private spheres—and the quicker we'll succeed in making rhetorical studies the inclusive, representative, democratic study and practice it was always intended to be. After all, the Athenians promoted the importance speaking, listening, dialogue—all in the service for a better future. May all our feminist rhetorical projects do the same: may they help us create possibilities for working together, for imagining and shaping the world we all want to share; working together for the good of a world that none of us may ever know but that our children and grandchildren might gladly enter.

Cheryl Glenn

Starting Points for Women in the Rhetorical Tradition

This section offers a guide to some individual female rhetors who have received scholarly attention in rhetorical studies. This list is not intended to be a totalizing representation of all women who have contributed to rhetorical history. In fact, I believe there is still work to be done in valuing the history of women rhetors who experience class, race, sexuality, ability, colonialism and culture in different ways. This collection, however, is grounded in the hope that well-informed attempts to build an inclusive curriculum can create an environment where the next student may bravely raise their hand like Cheryl Glenn and ask questions worth answering. Above all else, I hope we choose to listen to those who take the time to raise their hands and ask better of us.

Kate Rich

1. Aspasia

Aspasia of Miletus (470-410 BCE) was a speaker and influential teacher in Classical Greece. She was believed to have influenced Socrates and several other notable philosophers. She is one of the few women mentioned in early rhetorical theory. While some early texts and theatre productions depicted her as a foreigner and a prostitute, Greek philosophers spoke about her with admiration in various dialogues. During her life in Athens, she mothered a son with Pericles and faced exclusion due to her status as an immigrant woman.

Themes:

There are no surviving original works written by Aspasia. However, she is mentioned in popular philosophical texts such as Menexenus, Symposium, Oeconomicus, and Memorabilia. Socrates, in particular, is frequently depicted praising Aspasia's expertise and wisdom. While women and immigrants were treated poorly in Athens at this point in history, these rare instances of respect shown to a female immigrant offer rare glimpses of the hidden influence women played in the formation of early rhetorical theory. Studies in classical

rhetoric and female mentorship could especially benefit from incorporating writings about Aspasia.

Readings:

Carlson, A. Cheree. "Aspasia of Miletus: How One Woman Disappeared from the History of Rhetoric." *Women's Studies in Communication*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1994, pp. 26-44.

Glenn, Cheryl. *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1997, pp. 37-43.

Glenn, Cheryl. "Sex, Lies, and Manuscript: Refiguring Aspasia in the History of Rhetoric." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 45, no. 2, 1994, pp. 180-199.

Geraths, Cory and Michele Kennerly. "Painted Lady: Aspasia in Nineteenth-Century European Art." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2016, pp. 197-211.

Henry, Madeline. *Prisoner of History: Aspasia of Miletus and Her Biographical Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Jarratt, Susan and Rory Ong. "Aspasia: Rhetoric, Gender, and Colonial Ideology." *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, edited by Andrea A. Lunsford, University of Pittsburg Press, 1995, pp. 9-24.

Mattingly, Carol. "Telling evidence: Rethinking what counts in rhetoric." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2002, pp. 99-108.

2. Sappho

Sappho (630-570 BC) was a lyric poet who was born into an aristocratic family on the Greek island of Lesbos. Very little biographical information is known about her for certain, but she is believed to have several brothers and gave birth to a daughter at some point. She is known for writing about desire, particularly between women. As a result, her work is frequently interpreted as having homosexual themes.

Themes:

Sappho produced numerous pieces of lyrical poetry that often had romantic themes. Some of her poems have homoerotic themes that have led some to believe she is a queer historical figure. Sappho is credited for writing the first iambics, elegiacs, and epigrams. She also inspired several Hellenistic poems. Those interested in eros, early poetry, and sexuality may find her work very relevant.

Readings:

Original Work –

An archive of her poetry: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sappho>

Scholarship about her work -

Enoch, Jessica and Jordynn Jack. "Remembering Sappho: New Perspectives on Teaching (and Writing) Women's Rhetorical History." *College English*, vol. 73, no. 5, pp. 518-537.

Glenn, Cheryl. *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1997, pp. 21-28.

Jarratt, Susan. "Sappho's Memory." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2002, pp. 11-43.

Klinck, Anne L. "Sleeping in the Bosom of a Tender Companion: Homoerotic Attachments in Sappho." *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 49, no. 3/4, 2005, pp. 193-208.

Stigers, Eva Stehle. "Sappho's private world." *Women's Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1/2, 1981, pp. 47-63.

Winkler, Jack. "Gardens of nymphs: Public and private in Sappho's lyrics." *Women's Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1/2, 1981, pp. 65-91.

3. Julian of Norwich

Julian of Norwich was an English anchoress who lived in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. She lived in seclusion and devoted herself to a life of prayer for St. Julian's Church of Norwich. Little is known of Julian, as she anonymously wrote several religious manuscripts from her cell. Even so, her texts are the only known writings from an English anchoress.

Her most well-known work, *Revelations of Divine Love*, is a book originally published in Middle English and is believed to be the first English book by a female author. These writings described sixteen visions Julian experienced while ill. She referred to Jesus as Mother and used maternal themes to describe god's love. Over the course of her life, Julian is known for being a major figure for women's involvement in medieval Christianity while intertwining mysticism and femininity throughout her writings.

Themes:

Julian of Norwich's writings evidence how Christian apophatic theology and mysticism could be used to argue for the importance of women in society. Her descriptions of religious figures also stray from masculine frames and allow for feminine interpretations of Christianity. Julian offers valuable insight for those interested in mysticism and religious rhetoric.

Readings:

Original Work -

Revelations of Divine Love, translated by Barry Windeatt.

Scholarship about her work -

Baker, Denise Nowakowski. *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, Princeton University Press, 2014.

Chandler, Erin. "The Present Time of Things Past: Julian of Norwich's Appropriation of St. Augustine's Generative Theory of Memory." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2012, pp. 389-404.

Glenn, Cheryl. *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1997, pp. 93-102.

Masson, Cynthea. "The Point of Coincidence: Rhetoric and the Apophatic in Julian of Norwich's Showings." *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, edited by Sandra J. McEntire, Garland Publishing, 1998, pp. 153-180.

Peters, Brad. "Julian of Norwich's Showings and the Ancrene Riwe: Two Rhetorical Configurations of Mysticism." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2008, pp. 361-378.

4. Margery Kempe

Margery Kempe was a Christian mystic in Bishop's Lynn (now known as King's Lynn), England during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. She began having spiritual visions after the birth of her first child and claimed to have mystical conversations with god. Unlike women who dedicated their life to the church by becoming celibate nuns, she married a town official and is believed to have mothered fourteen children. Despite women being forbidden to preach, Kempe frequently gave public speeches about her religious convictions and openly sobbed since her tears were thought to be the gift of the spirit. These public acts put her at odds with the institutional church and she was tried (but never convicted) for heresy throughout her life. Some believe her spiritual autobiography, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, is the first autobiography written in the English language. Not only does her book offer an understanding of married middle-class female life in the middle ages, but it represents the rhetoric of English religious dissent that arose during the era. Although the book depicts Julian of Norwich meeting with Kempe and approving of her visions, Margery Kempe is thought to have faced more public scrutiny than Julian due to her eccentricity and speculations about her mental stability. It is also believed that while her writings evidence clear knowledge of Christian scripture, her middle-class upbringing may have prevented her from receiving the formal education other mystics may have gained access to.

Themes:

Margery Kempe's writing differed from the predominately male interpretations of Christianity of her time by describing her spirituality through bodily enlightenment. Unlike female nuns, her connection to god was constructed through the bodily experience of maternal womanhood and the tears she produced from weeping. She also provides a rare feminine voice of religious dissent in medieval England that was faced with rhetorical gaslighting. Scholarly conversations about the rhetoric of hysteria and female religious leaders could learn a great deal from Margery.

Readings:

Original Work -

The Book of Margery Kempe, translated by Lynn Staley.

Scholarship about her work -

Glenn, Cheryl. "Reexamining The Book of Margery Kempe: A Rhetoric of Autobiography." *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, edited by Andrea A. Lunsford, University of Pittsburg Press, 1995, pp. 53-72.

Glenn, Cheryl. *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1997, pp. 106-115.

Johnson, M.K. "'No bananas, giraffes, or elephants': Margery Kempe's Text of Bliss." *Women's Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1992, pp. 185-196.

Smith, Julia Marie. "The Book of Margery Kempe and the Rhetorical Chorus: An Alternative Method for Recovering Women's Contributions to the History of Rhetoric." *Advances in the History of Rhetoric*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2014, pp. 179-203.

Vitto, Cindy. "Margery Kempe: Medieval Mother and Mystic." *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1991, pp. 50-65.

5. Christine de Pizan

Christine de Pizan (sometimes referred to as Christine de Pisan) was a French female writer in the fourteenth century and early fifteenth century. She became the first woman of letters in Europe under the patronage of wealthy French nobles. As a professional writer, she produced several works of poetry, prose on the lives of nobles, stories of female leaders, and political thought pieces. Unlike other authors in her time, Christine was known for using her writings to defend women and denounce misogynistic texts.

Themes:

Christine de Pizan judged the quality of leaders and engaged in political commentary with Aristotelian ethics. She depicted France as being the most ethical and ideal political state. Additionally, Christine incorporated humanist themes into her arguments for the respect and importance of women in France. Her writing frequently used allegorical figures, examples, and metaphor to critique societal norms through fictional stories. Such a wealth of rhetorical devices might not only inform studies of medieval rhetoric and ethics, but narrative criticism as well.

Readings:

Original Work -

The Book of the City of Ladies, translated by Jeffrey Richards.

Scholarship about her work -

Bell, Susan Groag. "Christine de Pizan (1364-1430): Humanism and the Problem of a Studious Woman." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 3, no. ¾, 1976, pp. 173-184.

McCormick, Samuel. "Mirrors for the Queen: A Letter from Christine de Pizan on the Eve of Civil War." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 94, no. 3, 2008, pp. 273-296.

Ramsey, Shawn D. "The Voices of Counsel: Women and Civic Rhetoric in the Middle Ages." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 5, 2012, pp. 472-489.

Redfern, Jenny R. "Christine de Pisan and The Treasure of the City of Ladies: A Medieval Rhetorician and Her Rhetoric." *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, edited by Andrea A. Lunsford, University of Pittsburg Press, 1995, pp. 73-92.

6. Juana Inés de la Cruz

Juana Inés de la Cruz was a nun, writer, and scholar in seventeenth century colonial Mexico. She was self-educated and taught young children during her lifetime. Throughout her time as a nun, she advocated for women's rights to education and criticized misogynist practices in her writings. She became controversial figure who was often involved with the intellectual and political scene in Mexico City.

Themes:

Juana frequently wrote with poetic forms and contested gender norms through playwriting. Scholars in numerous fields have contested which literary dramas and comedies can be accredited to her. Nonetheless, her use of theology and humor to combat gender normativity was uncommon for her time. Scholars interested in performance, religious rhetoric, and satire may find her dramas especially interesting.

Readings:

Original Work –

Poems, Protest, and a Dream: Selected Writings, translated by Margaret Sayers Peden.

Scholarship about her work -

Bokser, Julie A. "Sor Juana's Rhetoric of Silence." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2006, pp. 5-21.

Bokser, Julie A. "Sor Juana's *Divine Narcissus*: A New World Rhetoric of Listening." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2010, pp. 224-246.

O'Donnell, Rachel. "Gender, Culture, and Knowledge in New Spain: Sor Juana's 'To the Gentleman in Peru'." *Women's Studies*, vol. 44, no. 8, 2015, pp. 1114-1129.

7. Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) was born as a slave in New York and later escaped to freedom with one of her children. She was the first black woman to win a court case against a white man, and became a powerful voice in the abolitionist and women's rights movements. Her most well-known speech, entitled "Ain't I a Woman?", has been rewritten in various ways and there is no transcription of it that has gone without controversy. Throughout her lifetime, she gave several other speeches to equal rights conventions, organizations, and other gatherings. Her simultaneous advocacy for both anti-slavery and suffrage efforts provided rare insight during the nineteenth century.

Themes:

Truth's speeches were often extemporaneous so they are difficult to directly study. However, her use of evangelicalism to promote anti-slavery and suffrage causes shifted public perceptions. The influence she had on these movements and the American public in the nineteenth century confirm her significance in rhetorical history. Understanding her legacy is not only necessary for rhetoricians interested in religion and abolitionists, but the historiography of oratory.

Readings:

Scholarship about her work -

Lipscomb, Drema R. "Sojourner Truth: A Practical Public Discourse." *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, edited by Andrea A. Lunsford, University of Pittsburg Press, 1995, pp. 227-246.

Mandziuk, Roseann M. "Grotesque and Ludicrous, but Yet Inspiring: Depictions of Sojourner Truth and Rhetorics of Domination." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 100, no. 4, 2014, pp. 467-487.

Pearson, Kyra. "Mapping rhetorical interventions in 'national' feminist histories: Second wave feminism and Ain't I a woman." *Communication Studies*, vol. 50, no. 2, 1999, pp. 158-173.

Washington, Margaret. *Sojourner Truth's America*. University of Illinois Press, 2011.

Additional resources -

The Sojourner Truth Project, www.thesojournertruthproject.com/

8. Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) was a well-known suffragist in the United States during the beginning of the women's rights movement. She frequently gave speeches regarding women's rights to property, parental custody, wages, and participation in voting. She is often

recognized for her organization of the Seneca Falls Convention, her two year position as president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and countless speeches advocating for social justice. After the Civil War, Cady Stanton abandoned her abolitionist activist roots when she feared black men would receive the right to vote before women. Contemporary scholars have critiqued her for pitting black men against women and utilizing racist rhetoric in the process. Outside of her activism, Cady Stanton had a large family and actively socialized with other feminists in the era such as Susan B. Anthony. Before marrying and parenting seven children with her husband Henry Brewster Stanton, she insisted that the traditional phrase “promise to obey” would not be said in her wedding vows. Even with a large family and a husband who sometimes disagreed with her feminist stances, Elizabeth Cady Stanton spent most her life traveling throughout the United States to promote suffrage.

Themes:

Cady Stanton’s writings and speeches were often controversial, even among fellow suffragists. Her book, *The Woman’s Bible*, excluded religious individuals within the suffragist movement by preaching unorthodox ideals of gender. Her feminist activism also went far beyond voting rights and extended to (white) women’s personal lives. Cady Stanton’s ideas of marriage being an equal partnership and women having more control over their childbearing timeline helped to move the women’s rights movement towards advocating for gender equity on legislative and personal levels. Elizabeth offers important texts for feminist rhetoric, whiteness studies, and nineteenth century oratory.

Readings:

Original works –

An archive of her speeches:

<https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/directory/elizabeth-cady-stanton/>

Scholarship about her work -

Engbers, Susanna Kelly. “With Great Sympathy: Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s Innovative Appeals to Emotion.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2007, pp. 307-332.

Huxma, Susan Schultz. “Perfecting the Rhetorical Vision of Women’s Rights: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Anna Howard Shaw, and Carrie Chapman Catt.” *Women’s Studies in Communication*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2000, pp. 307-336.

Poirot, Kristan. “(Un)Making Sex, Making Race: Nineteenth-Century Liberalism, Difference, and the Rhetoric of Elizabeth Cady Stanton.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 96, no. 2, pp. 185-208.

Skinnell, Ryan. “Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s 1854 ‘Address to the Legislature of New York’ and the Paradox of Social Reform Rhetoric.” *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2010, pp. 129-144.

Solomon, Martha. "Autobiographies as rhetorical narratives: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Ann Howard Shaw as 'new women'." *Communication Studies*, vol. 42, no. 4, 1991, pp. 354-370.

Stillion Southard, Belinda A. "A Rhetoric of Epistemic Privilege: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Harriot Stanton Blatch, and the Educated Vote." *Advances in the History of Rhetoric*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2014, pp. 157-178.

Strange, Lisa S. "Dress reform and the feminine ideal: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the 'coming girl'." *Southern Communication Journal*, vol. 68, no. 1, 2002, pp. 1-13.

Tell, Dave. "Stanton's 'Solitude of Self' as Public Confession." *Communication Studies*, vol 61, no. 2, 2010, pp. 172-183.

Additional Readings on Women in Rhetorical History

Bizzell, Patricia. "Opportunities for Feminist Research in the History of Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1992, pp. 50-58.

Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. *Man Cannot Speak for Her: Volume I A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric*, Praeger, 1989.

Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. *Man Cannot Speak for Her: Volume II Key Texts of the Early Feminists*, Praeger, 1989.

Logan, Shirley Wilson, editor. *We are Coming: The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1999.

Sutherland, Christine Mason and Rebecca Sutcliffe, editors. *The Changing Tradition: Women in the History of Rhetoric*, University of Calgary Press, 1999.