

Book Reviews

Reading Diverse Rhetors and Rhetorics: Rewriting History, Reimagining Scholarship

Women and Rhetoric Between the Wars, edited by Ann George, M. Elizabeth Weiser, and Janet Zepernick. Carbondale: SIUP, 2013. 302 pp.

The Rhetoric of Rebel Women: Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion, by Kimberly Harrison. Carbondale: SIUP, 2013. 241 pp.

Educating the New Southern Woman: Speech, Writing, and Race at the Public Women's Colleges, 1884-1945, by David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs. Carbondale: SIUP, 2014. 188 pp.

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Feminist historiography in rhetoric and composition has its roots in studying the gendered nature of texts and writing instruction, but it has also served to interrogate methodological approaches that value dominant rhetorical purposes, goals, genres, and teaching practices. Indeed, scholars in women's rhetoric have been calling for a revision of this dominant rhetorical tradition and our collective values as researchers for over 20 years. For example, Andrea Lunsford's edited collection *Reclaiming Rhetorica* argues that the rhetorical tradition has not recognized the "forms, strategies, and goals" of women rhetoricians (6). Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald offer a similar sentiment in their book's title, *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric*, which alludes both to Aristotle's famous reference to rhetors' "available means of persuasion" (xvii) and to the historical reality that, even while inhabiting marginalized social roles, women have used their available means to achieve rhetorical agency. The scholars and rhetors assembled in both Lunsford's and Ritchie and Ronald's volumes point to important questions feminist historiographers ask: Who are women rhetors? What counts as rhetoric? How do feminist practices inform our knowledge of the research, study, and canon of rhetoric? How will our scholarship change rhetorical practice and theory? The three books under review make compelling contributions to broadening and modeling where we seek out, how we interpret, and what it means to research women's rhetorical practices and women's rhetorical education.

The authors of *Women and Rhetoric Between the Wars*, *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women*, and *Educating the New Southern Woman* contribute to current scholarship that opens up what counts as women's rhetoric, including who counts

as a woman worthy of study, what histories and geographies are available for research, and what it means to practice rhetoric as a woman. In this regard, *Between the Wars*, *Rebel Women*, and *New Southern Woman* go beyond what Elizabeth Tasker and Frances B. Holt-Underwood identify as the recovery and revision method, which while dominant over the last forty years does not do enough to revise the rhetorical tradition. In fact, as Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch argue in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, research practices are in the process of “tectonic shifts” that move away from revision and recovery and toward at least four new methodological categories (279): “critical imagination, strategic contemplation, social circulation, and globalization” (306). While each of the works under review employ some element of recovery and revision, they also each engage in some of these emerging categories. Below I highlight the different contributions each text makes to feminist historiography and consider how these books can influence teaching and future research.

In *Women and Rhetoric Between the Wars*, editors Ann George, M. Elizabeth Weiser, and Janet Zepernick include a diverse range of subjects, rhetorical strategies, and research methods. The women researched across the collection include individuals and groups as well as white women, black women, an American Indian woman, a disabled woman, a Latina, poor women, wealthy women, and women who write about their global experiences or who are from nations outside the United States. While white, upper-class women’s rhetoric still dominates, the editors clearly attended to diversity in the collection. Ultimately, their book is an attempt to create a “usable past” (5), a way to recognize how the past can inform current and future activist, feminist, and rhetorical contexts. This usable past highlights women rhetors during the 1920s and 1930s, while also attending to how the analysis of these rhetors can inform our current conversations in feminist historiography. In particular, many essays in this collection contribute to an understanding of “social circulation” (Royster and Kirsch 369), as chapters reimagine women’s work, women’s rhetoric, and the impact of both on cultural phenomena.

The book is broken into three sections that cover the public, popular, and professional spaces of women’s rhetoric. The first section, “Voluntary Associations for the Civic Scene,” includes five chapters that point to the successes and challenges women faced in traditional rhetorical contexts, including activist work in the community and contributions to political policy. Section two, “Popular Celebrity in the Epideictic Scene,” includes six chapters that focus on women and media and how women used media to change challenging or inhumane circumstances. The four chapters in section three, “Academia and the Scene of Professionalism,” delineate what possibilities women had for profes-

sionalization as well as what public expectations women faced when seeking professional opportunities. All three of these sections reread diverse texts in new ways as well as emphasize the importance of relationships between women to support their rhetorical development. Below I focus on one chapter from each section to demonstrate the way the collection rereads women's rhetoric and revises research methodologies.

In section one, Janet Zepernick's "A Rhetor's Apprenticeship: Reading Frances Perkins's Rhetorical Autobiography" develops important research and analysis: most significantly, it revises the purposes of Perkins' political memoirs about her work with Franklin D. Roosevelt and Al Smith from personal memoir to rhetorical textbook. In that rereading, Zepernick highlights the strategies and values Perkins described for being successful as a woman in politics during a time when men dominated this sphere. Additionally, the chapter points to the importance of meetings and small group collaborations to understand how deliberative democracy works. While Zepernick focuses on a white woman with high status doing traditional rhetorical work, she is able to reimagine and reframe the value of that work through alternate readings and by highlighting heretofore invisible rhetorical spaces.

Coretta Pittman's "Bessie Smith's Blues as Rhetorical Advocacy" stands out in section two because of the ways it points to tensions and conversations among the African American elite. Pittman analyzes songs as rhetorical texts, and argues that Smith—one of the most popular women blues singers of the 1920s and 1930s—created an unapologetic ethos, one that allowed her to examine taboo topics and sell millions of records. Smith's songs called for respect for everyday African Americans in general and African American women in particular, a sentiment that went against the dominant thinking of many African American intellectuals at that time. For me as a reader, this chapter serves as a model for feminist historiography and rhetorical listening because it not only draws on a nontraditional text but also gives voice to the working-class African Americans who found resonance in Bessie Smith's music.

Another example of research on alternate texts is the chapter that ends the collection and outlines a proposal for a new research methodology called "sideshadowing" (241). This method seeks to uncover invisible relationships, connections, and conversations that frame and contextualize women's work. Kay Halasek's "'Long I Followed Happy Guides': Activism, Advocacy, and English Studies" uses sideshadowing to focus on the work of two English teachers, Adele Bildersee and Helen Gray Cone. Sideshadowing is both a method and a genre, and throughout her essay there are several sideshadows that provide additional information about Halasek's subjects. I highlight Halasek's work because she and several authors in this collection value women's rhetorical

writing that is hard to find or altogether unpublished, yet represent significant historical relationships and moments of collaboration and community building.

While certainly this collection is meant to recover women's rhetoric between the wars—rhetoric that has been neglected despite its great contributions—it also represents new directions in researching and redefining women's rhetoric. As a whole, this collection highlights how women's rhetoric can be recovered and reinterpreted to give current readers and researchers new perspectives into what women rhetors and women's rhetoric look like; importantly, then, *Women and Rhetoric Between the Wars* provides insight into the larger cultural impact of women's rhetorical work.

In *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women: Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion*, Kimberly Harrison's feminist methodology includes a homogenous group of women rhetors, but challenges scholars' notions about the kinds of texts we use for rhetorical knowledge. While *Rebel Women* doesn't have the racial and class diversity of *Between the Wars*, Harrison does point to diversity even in the homogenous group of women she researches. Pushing beyond the examination of traditional rhetorical genres, Harrison's archive also includes women's diaries, which she argues provide important information about how women prepared for and learned from rhetorical situations. Harrison's interpretive practices help readers to understand the culture of the South and the culture of the era, while also analyzing pivotal moments of activism, shifting gender identity, and race relations. Applying Royster and Kirsch's methodology of "strategic contemplation" (341), rather than passing judgment on the women under study, Harrison's research seeks to understand the culture and contexts that led to racial, gender, and class biases commonly displayed by Southern women during the Civil War period.

In the introduction and chapters one and two, Harrison makes a case for diaries as artifacts of women's rhetoric, and she highlights that while women were fairly limited in their gender roles, they used the diary genre to adjust to new gender identities thrust upon them by war. To explain, many privileged Southern white women used what Harrison calls "gendered rhetorical honor for self-protection" (27), which were the rhetorical strategies women used to adjust to their changing roles, particularly new responsibilities to protect their homes, farms, and families. These gendered rhetorics were negotiated between the spaces of community values and traditional gender norms, and give insight into the ways women used diaries to negotiate their identity.

Chapter three, "Guarded Tongues/Secure Communities: Rhetorical Responsibilities and 'Everyday' Audiences," is a particularly important contribution to feminist historiography, as in it Harrison argues for a redefinition of

the space of the home. Focusing on audiences such as family, community, and slaves, Harrison asserts that women took up “domestic rhetorics” (85), which were choices in verbal and nonverbal communication used in everyday social practices. Challenging the public-private dichotomy, Harrison maintains that homes were places of work, power, and controlled labor. For example, one domestic context Harrison examines is how women managed slaves, including the use of “rhetorics of affection” (106) to persuade slaves to stay and continue to work postemancipation. This chapter demonstrates the breadth and depth of rhetorical knowledge Harrison acquired from women’s diaries, and points to the home as a political space where gender roles and race privilege shaped the decisions women made in everyday interactions.

In chapters four and five and in the conclusion, Harrison shows how during and after the war the purpose of diary writing shifted, with public and civic conversations dominating throughout the Civil War, transforming into local, family-oriented topics—or no diary writing at all—after. Harrison describes, for example, “writing-to-believe” practices to consider questions about the morality of slavery (132). Harrison argues that this kind of writing provided a space for many women to assert their race and class privilege in regard to slavery, and in tandem to justify other traditional hierarchies of race, gender, and class. In all, Harrison shows that diary writing provided important insights into how local and civic culture shaped the rhetorical practices of women.

Harrison’s work is valuable to readers and researchers of women’s rhetoric because it analyzes antebellum Southern women in their historical context while also connecting the significance of their actions to the present. Her focus on gender identity and race privilege demonstrate the limits of women’s rhetoric, but also hold the women under study accountable for their privileged and—by contemporary scholarly standards—often offensive perspectives. Harrison’s book illuminates the challenges of working toward equality both in that historical period and in current contexts, and one of the most fascinating and informative elements of *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women* is how it describes the power of class and race privilege in Southern white women’s social spheres. All told, the book highlights the challenges of addressing structures of power and shows one view of the limited motivations those in power can have to change their practices.

The last book in this review, David Gold and Catherine Hobbs’ *Educating the New Southern Woman: Speech, Writing, and Race at the Public Women’s Colleges, 1884-1945*, builds from the historical time period just after *Rebel Women* and encapsulates the time period of *Between the Wars* and beyond. Unlike the other two books under review, however, it focuses on how women

were taught rhetoric in college, giving readers a new perspective of this era's educational landscape. The purpose of the work is to argue for key distinctions between Southern women's colleges and more commonly researched Northern women's colleges, but the authors also revise conversations about the histories of women's rhetorical education and women's purposes for going to college. Gold and Hobbs' research demonstrates what Royster and Kirsch call "critical imagination" (315), a process that uses traditional documentation and inquiry, but also applies a method of meaning making that reads between the lines, revises previous assumptions, and redefines key frameworks.

Overall the book provides insight into several key issues about women's education in the South, as well as contributes to conversations about conducting archival research. To begin, Gold and Hobbs explain their research methods, including their method of collaborative research. They describe their meaning making with concepts such as "rough consensus," which they define as a consensus on the interpretation of larger, important issues (rather than fixating on smaller, lesser important ones), and "running code," which refers to their practice of creating working theoretical frames and testing them rather than working from just one frame (13). Their purpose is to challenge notions that Southern women's colleges were simply finishing schools for the privileged, and while they underscore that these colleges were founded for white, often wealthy women, they emphasize that many women enrolled were of moderate means. The ultimate goal of the book is to redefine current frameworks for thinking about women's college education during this period, to show similarities and trends among institutions, and to demonstrate key differences between institutions that can change the narratives we currently have about the purposes, practices, and outcomes of Southern women's college education.

In particular, chapter two, "Effective Literacy: Writing Instruction and Student Writing," illuminates how the authors revised prominent frameworks about women's education through their methods. Gold and Hobbs build on previous historical arguments that current-traditional pedagogy dominated during this period, and they complicate popular scholarly conceptions of current-traditional pedagogy. While the authors don't try to remake pedagogical taxonomies, they argue that even those using tenants of current-traditionalism did not do so monolithically. According to Gold and Hobbs, teachers taught writing and rhetoric to address particular local and national circumstances, and each institution had its own approach to teaching writing, which was driven by the faculty who taught as well as students' extracurricular activities. The authors show that while there was a lot of formulaic writing being taught—with a strong emphasis on correctness, the rhetorical modes, and the ordering of ideas—some teachers placed a surprising emphasis on writing for social purposes and writing to make meaning.

Chapter five also reframes key conversations in regard to rhetorical education. The authors draw on student writing to show how students engaged with issues of race, pointing to both students' development of their ideas about African Americans as well as their racist complicity. Gold and Hobbs highlight the influence of particular faculty, administrators, and organizations that supported—or did not support—integration, understanding, and appreciation of the African American community. In part the authors show the limits of the public's willingness to consider integration and how that lack of willingness affected decisions by administrators and, in turn, students' interpretations and analyses. But the authors also point to how some teachers exposed students to African American literature, which allowed students to write about and thus better understand African American perspectives.

In all, *Educating the New Southern Woman* covers a lot of ground, which makes the book sometimes read like a list of important people, places, and social movements. Gold and Hobbs cover eight institutions and a timeframe that exceeds sixty years, focusing on the history of women's institutions; literacy, public speaking, and home economic emphases in college programs; work opportunities in relation to educational emphases; and gender identity construction and race relations. They include multiple kinds of documents in their research as well, such as course catalogues, meeting memos, syllabi, textbooks, and student writing, as well as faculty publications, newspaper reports, and other writing from that time period. This book offers a valuable record of rich topics and historical figures for future students and scholars to investigate. The authors use their critical imagination to reframe current knowledge about the purpose of women's education in the South, as they open up expansive territory for future scholars to navigate.

All three books in this review engage in some revision and recovery research, but all three also challenge traditional feminist historiography by pointing readers to a larger view of the landscape, redefining what it means to be a rhetor, reconsidering what rhetoric is, and reimaging how history informs our present and future. While these texts build on scholarship in new and important ways, they also represent innovative models for research possibilities in women's rhetoric. *Women and Rhetoric Between the Wars* not only models diverse choices for researching rhetoric and rhetors, it also ends with Kay Halasek's argument for a new research methodology, sideshadowing. *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women* ends by describing several possibilities for further research, such as focusing on the rhetoric used in post Civil War women's organizations. *Educating the New Southern Woman* points readers to many, many influential individuals who could be the focus of further study. What's

more, its authors describe a collaborative writing and research methodology. All three texts illuminate new practices and purposes for ways to engage imaginatively with women's rhetorical history and future directions in feminist historiography.

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