
Gold, David, and Catherine L. Hobbs, eds. *Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education: American Women Learn to Speak*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2013. Print

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Scholarly efforts to position women in rhetorical history first addressed women as writers, placing them into established narratives of rhetoric and composition. Feminist rhetorical scholars are now expanding this work into material rhetorics, public and private rhetorical practices, and overlooked time periods—and they are doing so with broader definitions of rhetoric and rhetorical education. *Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education: American Women Learn to Speak* reflects this new agenda and draws attention to a wide range of spoken rhetorical practices including etiquette, conversation, and elocution. David Gold and Catherine Hobbs define the scope of the collection in expansive terms: oratorical education refers to “any educational practice that promotes the ability to instruct, delight, move, or engage in conversation with an audience, whatever its size” (4). Many chapters in the collection address individual women and their oratorical practices, and readers interested in specific women or historical moments will find thorough essays based on extensive archival research. As a collection, *Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education* highlights several themes of interest to feminist rhetorical scholars, including material and bodily rhetorics, race and class, and the nature of the public and private spheres.

The collection opens with three essays on oratorical education in the early republic, each of which reveals how rhetoric and oratory were used to subvert and maintain prevailing gender roles and political ideologies. M. Amanda Moulder, in “By Women, You Were Brought Forth into This World,” analyzes two speeches given in 1781 by Nanye’hi, a Cherokee woman living in what is now northeast Tennessee. These speeches, delivered to a white, male audience during treaty negotiations, are notable because they effectively used irony and invoked matrilineality, the clan structure that gave Cherokee women political, economic, and discursive power based on their reproductive power. In “A Vapour Which Appears for but a Moment,” Carolyn Eastman explores oratorical education in female academies. Perhaps surprisingly, teaching girls oratory “virtually never required justification or debate” (43) in part because female education was thought to produce better wives and more socially advantageous marriages. Although both boys and girls were taught belletristic

rhetoric from Blair, girls were taught to begin their speeches with apologies for their “feeble efforts” (45) and to include other hedges that indicated modesty and female excellence. Annmarie Valdes examines the influence of belletristic rhetoric on one woman, Eleanor (Nelly) Parke Custis Lewis—a granddaughter of Martha Washington who was informally adopted by the Washingtons. In “Speaking and Writing in Conversation,” Valdes traces Scottish Enlightenment influences in letters from Nelly to Elizabeth Bordley Gibson: a focus on beauty and taste, attention to important literary figures, and an appreciation of *dis-course* that fosters conversation about significant social and political issues.

As American entered the nineteenth century, women negotiated conflicting ideals: at the same time they were encouraged to learn oratory, practice elocution, and speak publicly, they were held to standards of modesty and femininity. The second section of the collection articulates these tensions as they existed in educational and public spaces. In “Negotiating Conflicting Views of Women and Elocution,” Jane Donawerth examines three rhetorical handbooks written by women to uncover contradictory perspectives. She finds, for example, that although Almira Hart Lincoln Phelps strongly advocated rhetorical education and reading aloud in her *Lectures to Young Ladies*, she nonetheless endorsed corsets and distrusted “bodily freedom and expression for women” (82); at the same time, Florence Hartley denounced corsets but saw the ability to read aloud as only a social grace. Kristen Garrison, in “To Supply this Deficiency,” analyzes Margaret Fuller’s 1839–1943 Boston Conversations as informal rhetorical education for middle-class women in conversation, systematic thought, and precise speaking (110). Along with other women studied in this collection, Fuller was influenced by eighteenth-century rhetorical theory, and Garrison argues that Whatley’s *The Elements of Rhetoric* “influenced the very purpose and subject matter of the Conversations” (100). In “God Sees Me,” Elizabethada Wright offers insight into Roman Catholic education in the late nineteenth century, specifically rhetorical education at St. Mary-of-the-Woods in Indiana. The school for girls functioned on intricate systems of internal and external surveillance, and teachers and students were publicly visible through performances and declamations. This constant surveillance may suggest the girls were subjugated, yet Wright argues the public demonstrations actually encouraged and rewarded oratory, helping girls become comfortable speaking to public audiences.

Composition scholarship often characterizes the turn of the century in terms of current traditional rhetoric, an era when women entered American colleges and normal schools in increasing numbers. In the third section of the collection, Lisa Suter and Paige Banaji explore instead how the New Elocutionists revived elocution in the Delsarte movement. Suter argues in “The Arguments They Wore” that Delsartists wore togas for rhetorical effect: they

invoked classical orators, signifying their rhetorical education and fitness for public life. Togas also served as a conciliatory gesture to audiences because they were vaguely feminine and modest, enabling women to avoid criticisms associated with contemporary reform dress. Banaji focuses on the relationship between elocution and physical culture, noting that the Delsarte movement brought gymnastics and calisthenics into elocutionary education. In “Womanly Eloquence and Rhetorical Bodies,” she explores how the Delsartists revived the classical idea of bodily eloquence in specifically feminine and increasingly public terms.

The final section of the collection includes three essays on women rhetors in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Nancy Myers reads Emily Post’s 1922 *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home* as a “rhetoric of self-reliance” that offered strategies for greater social mobility (178). In “Rethinking *Etiquette*,” Myers outlines the ways in which the *Etiquette* offers women instruction in conversation, rhetorical invention, bodily gestures, and politeness—instruction that was particularly important as women entered public life in new ways. Two generations after Emily Post, Barbara Jordan was the first African American woman elected as to represent a southern state in the United States House of Representatives. Linda Ferreira-Buckley, in “Remember the World Is Not a Playground but a Schoolroom,” examines how Jordan carried her oratorical training into her political career. African American public schools in Texas and the Southern Baptist Church encouraged girls to participate in oral performance, training them in declamation and forensics. Finally, in “Learning Not to Preach,” Emily Murphy Cope explains how Beth Moore has recently become a popular figure in the evangelical movement despite prohibitions on women preachers. By blurring the genres of Bible study (appropriate for women) and preaching (appropriate only for men), Moore preaches to large audiences of women through her dialogical, collaborative video messages.

Rhetoric, History, and Women’s Oratorical Education addresses a regionally, racially, and socioeconomically diverse group of women. Taken together, these essays speak strongly to the relationship among women, the private sphere, and the public sphere. Discussions of public rhetoric often suppose a male public sphere (associated with oratory) and a female private sphere—and both spheres are assumed to be not only separate but also quite stable during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The collection first demonstrates that women were not simply restricted to the private sphere. Women orators in fact participated in the public sphere as it is conventionally understood: Moulder finds early Cherokee women in treaty negotiations, and Buckley chronicles the oratorical education of an American politician. Beyond this clear public participation, oratorical education for women took place in public and aimed toward public life. Eastman and Wright describe how young

girls publicly performed declamations, readings, and debates, and the quality of their education was accountable to the public—to towns and churches and citizens. In their work on Delsarte, Suter and Banaji frame the movement as elocutionary education concerned with public participation, intended to “level the competitive playing field of life” and prepare women for diverse rhetorical situations (Suter 134). Women entered the public sphere carrying conflicting, gendered expectations, but these essays affirm that women nonetheless participated in public discourse and taught each other how to enter the public sphere.

Ultimately this collection also complicates the idea that the public and private spheres were separate and stable, directing attention to the hybrid spaces women orators have occupied. Although Valdes addresses letter writing—perhaps ordinarily understood as a private rhetorical practice—she frames it as an act of public participation implicated in societal and political issues. Margaret Fuller hosted the Boston Conversations in a bookstore, a space with public and private attributes, and she taught women how to participate in philosophical discussions on public issues (Garrison). And in the 1920s, learning etiquette prepared women to participate in the social sphere; Emily Post demonstrated how “understanding rhetorical situations in the home can help a woman’s self-reliance extend to more public situations” (Myers 191). American women have done significant oratorical work in the public sphere and hybrid spaces, and *Rhetoric, History, and Women’s Oratorical Education* chronicles the ways that women constructed and participated in these spaces.

About the Author

Kristine Johnson is assistant professor of English at Xavier University, where she directs the writing program and teaches courses in first-year writing, peer tutoring, professional writing, and composition theory. She studied Rhetoric and Composition at Purdue University, and her work has also appeared in *Rhetoric Review*, *Pedagogy*, *Writing Program Administration*, and *College Composition and Communication*. Her work on Dorothy Day as a public rhetor has been published in *The Journal of Communication and Religion*. In September 2014, she will join the English department at Calvin College.