

Harrison, Kimberly. *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women: Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2013. Print.

Molly Wertheimer

In *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women: Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion*, Kimberly Harrison writes with several purposes: to provide more evidence of the growing feminist-inspired literature that rhetoric occurs in more places than merely public occasions; to reinforce that women's nineteenth-century rhetoric includes more than Northern white women speaking and writing in support of causes; to note that rhetoric includes both speech and silence; and to conclude that Southern white women of privilege during the Civil War and its aftermath used diaries to cultivate agency by critiquing past rhetorical encounters and rehearsing future ones. To accomplish her purposes, Harrison deftly reviews different literatures, including rhetoric and women's rhetorical activities, the South during the Civil War era and women's roles in it, and the validity of using diaries as evidence, given their uncertain purposes, uses, and intended audiences. Her work is a treasure trove for anyone working on scholarship in these or related areas.

Harrison bases her study on the diaries of over one hundred Southern white women from upper and middle classes. She recognizes how different these women writers were from each other, ranging in age, location, wealth, number of slaves owned, urban or rural, and so on. Yet despite their differences, they "shared ideological assumptions about societal structure and their place within it" (9). They assumed class and race privilege, as well as gender roles prescribed by patriarchy. Further, they shared something somewhat ephemeral—the expectation that Southerners should act with honor, an expectation difficult to enact during conditions of war. Harrison traces patterns within each author's periodic writings, allowing her to interpret any one woman's single entry within her own context.

Different readers, no doubt, will highlight different insights from Harrison's study. The most interesting insight for me was her observation and discussion of self-rhetorics in her diarists' writings. In her introductory chapter, Harrison explains what she means by self-rhetorics: "...I use the term 'self-rhetorics' to describe women's cultivation of agency and of a rhetorical self, as evidenced

and carried out by self-talk" (15-16). Moreover, she views the self "as a site for rhetorical negotiation of competing ideologies and material conditions" that reckons with "the possibilities and limitations" of one's identity or "self-definition." Importantly, she extends the notion of "self-rhetoric" beyond the self-talk aimed at identity-formation/negotiation and agency-cultivation, to include self-talk that functions as an internal rehearsal of what to say, what to do, how to act with another or others during likely or anticipated encounters requiring rhetoric or persuasion. Self-rhetoric, therefore for Harrison, has at least the two-fold functions of 1) self-persuasion and 2) preparation of persuasion of others.

Harrison organizes her material by categorizing the situations about which Southern white women of privilege wrote. They wrote entries reflecting on past conversations they had or heard about and other entries where they considered what they could or should say (and not say) in future encounters. Recognizing that their roles were changing, with the absence of their men and the vicissitudes of war, these women nudged themselves into agency by talking to themselves in writing. Examples of agency development abound in *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women*. For example, consider a comment written by Eliza Fain, who after describing her interactions with Union soldiers, told herself "Every conversation I have with them tends to strengthen me" (72).

In chapter one: "Dangerous Words/Domestic Spaces: Invading Union Forces and Southern Women's Rhetorical Efforts in Self-Protection," Harrison categorizes some of the situations her diarists faced as encounters with Union officers and soldiers. She describes one type of encounter as causing diarists fear of pillaging soldiers who were looking for food, supplies, and plunder. The Southern world where these women were raised taught them to be genteel, obedient, and to expect their relationships with men to be civil, even chivalrous. Now, they were caught in new and unavoidable encounters that required them to stand their ground, protecting family members at home, their possessions, and their land. Sometimes, the best they could do was simply to exercise self-control and to remain silent, which constrained and frustrated them.

Harrison explores the strategies of resistance her diarists used to protect themselves, their families, and their property in chapter two: "A Ladylike Resistance? Finding the Time, Place, and Means for Voicing Political Allegiances." They knew that one wrong comment, expressing sympathy for the Confederacy openly or too strenuously, for example, could result in disaster such as being thrown in jail or having their homes burned to the ground. Southern elite white women turned to more subtle, indirect forms of resistance. They enacted their resistance in private or unofficial spaces, using tactics such as breaching the rules of etiquette with Union soldiers and

communicating their support of the Confederacy nonverbally by waving handkerchiefs and wearing the colors and emblems of the Confederacy on their clothing. They wrote letters of support to Southern soldiers and, of course, confided how they really felt in their diaries.

Harrison also categorizes Southern elite white women's interactions with family members and their communities, sometimes to conduct business and to communicate with freed slaves, detailed in chapter three: "Guarded Tongues/Secure Communities: Rhetorical Responsibilities and 'Everyday' Audiences." The war disrupted living arrangements and forced changes in location, driving relatives to live in more secure locations with family or in rented rooms. The diaries Harrison studied reveal a deep concern to keep the peace by moderating what they said and by their opting to remain silent during challenging situations. Business obligations fell to some of the women as they negotiated prices for crops and managed their slave labor. As the war progressed and slaves began to understand their new freedom, negotiating new relationships often became difficult.

Harrison categorizes the coping mechanism of prayer that her diarists used, which is detailed in chapter 4: "Public Voices/Divine Audiences: Confederate Women's Prayers during the Civil War." Many turned to God in church, at home, and in their diaries, pleading for their own safety, the safety of loved ones, and for Confederate victory. Prayers filled both spiritual and political functions. Women were asked to pray by religious leaders; popular literature also encouraged them to pray. One of the most interesting parts of this chapter is Harrison's discussion of how the diarists seemed to assume a causal connection between the earnestness of their prayers and the outcomes of the war.

When the Civil War ended, upper and middle class Southern white women had new rhetorical challenges: to accept defeat and to determine how best to talk with disillusioned family members returning from war, victorious Union soldiers still living among them, and newly freed slaves who threatened to leave their service. Those who lost their slaves often had to perform duties for which they were never trained such as cooking, cleaning, and even milking cows. Amid the changed circumstances and confusion of early Southern reconstruction, the diarists expressed their thoughts and feelings as they struggled to reclaim their old gender roles.

With each of the audiences and circumstances described in her five chapters, Harrison provides ample and nuanced examples drawn from the diaries. She provides rich details that help the reader understand the extraordinary and threatening circumstances these women faced and allows them to speak in their own voices—at once, halting, scared, defiant, determined—by quoting

passages from what they put down on paper. Harrison does this in a masterful way.

On a personal note, I wrote my Master's thesis on the question of whether rhetorical invention could include imaginings or fantasized alternative scenarios as preparation for persuasion. At the time, I believed that internal narratives depicted in novels could reveal elements of rhetorical invention, but it never occurred to me that a better source would have been diaries, wherein writers set down internal conversations and self-deliberations regarding different means to persuasion. Instead, I examined psychological theories ranging from psychoanalysis to pragmatism, but never really could find a way to write about the functions of internal talk—in words or pictures—as part of rhetorical problem-solving. I want to offer my sincerest thank you to Kimberly Harrison for pinning down the concept of self-rhetoric to include two meanings—agency construction and rhetorical rehearsal. Especially useful is the way she provides excerpts from her diarists' writings as evidence of internal rhetorical processes and activities and ties her insights to scholars such as Vicki Tolar Collins, Jean Nienkamp, and Kenneth Burke.

In her concluding chapter, Harrison suggests lines of research that are available to scholars who have an interest in filling the gaps in women's rhetorical histories to include non-traditional approaches—"strategic silences, choice of clothing, purposeful conversation, careful listening, and pointed gestures" (172)—as proposed by rhetorical scholars such as Cheryl Glenn, Carol Mattingly, Linda Buchanan, and Jane Donawerth. Harrison's book is well-conceived, meticulously researched, carefully contextualized, thoughtfully argued, deeply informative, and gracefully written. It is a must-read.

About the Author

Dr. Molly Wertheimer teaches courses in public speaking, rhetorical criticism, mass media and society, organizational communication, communication and conflict resolution, and women, the arts, and the humanities at Pennsylvania State University-Hazleton. She has edited and authored books and articles on women's rhetoric including *Inventing a Voice: The Rhetoric of American First Ladies of the 20th Century* (2004); *Listening to Their Voices: The Rhetorical Activities of Historical Women* (1997); and *Elizabeth Hanford Dole: Speaking from the Heart* (2004). She has guest edited a special issue of *Philosophy and Rhetoric on feminizing the philosophy of rhetoric* (2000). Presently, she is writing a book on the rhetoric of first lady autobiographies.