

RECLAIMING RHETORICA

Women in the Rhetorical Tradition



Andrea A. Lunsford, Editor

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Plate from *Die Tarocchi. Zwei italienische Kupferstichfolgen aus dem XV. Jahrhundert* (Cassirer, 1910: Berlin). Ascribed to the painter Mantegna.

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*With deep affection, this book is dedicated to
Bernice Stone Cohen (1929–1987)
and
Joanne Wagner (1960–1991),
friends sorely missed*

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Foreword

This book is not a history of women rhetoricians, or women orators, or women writers. It is instead a glimmer of possibilities, an array of glances—an enthymeme.

The enthymeme presented by this set of essays holds that everywhere you look you find surprises of womanly rhetorical capacity. But it is left to the reader to wonder what else is left uncovered, since even a doughty band of fifteen writers can uncover only a few facets of what—for many who are familiar only with traditional histories of rhetoric and rhetoricians—may appear a surprising womanly capacity.

Aristotle was the first westerner (as far as we know) to recognize the innate desire of all human beings to take pleasure in their own personal intelligence. It is this discovery that underlies his concept of *peripety*, or “Recognition,” in the *Poetics*, and forms the basis for his brilliant observation in the *Rhetoric* that people actually want to reach their own conclusion before a speaker spells it out for them. “Man by nature desires to know,” he points out at the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, and he reinforces this notion in the field of persuasion by noting that people long to find logical structures in the universe: they not only want to know but also want to know how things fit together. So, in the *Rhetoric*, he argues for the use of what he calls “enthymemes”—apparently logical structures that guide a hearer/reader down a path of partial knowledge until that listener makes a personal, pleasurable jump to agreement with the speaker.

So it is with this book. The title, *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, is much more than a simple pun on the traditional femininity of Lady Rhetoric. The reader is asked to follow some guides along a path of partial knowledge—to be surprised, perhaps, at capacities from Aspasia to Sojourner Truth—but always with the enthymeme of discovery close at hand.

A modern writer has described life as a long corridor with many doors visible on each side. Success lies in opening the right doors, failure in leaving them closed. As people move past each closed door they do not know whether to open it or go past it. Sometimes, as they move past one of the doors, hearing gaiety and laughter from the other side, they

feel sad at what they have missed. But still they do not know whether to open the next door. Only with experience does the courage come to open new doors, to explore the possibilities of what is still ahead.

The reader of this book is shown many doors. The remarkable career of Mary Astell—literally a self-made woman—as she wrote her way to success in the 1690s and early 1700s, is microcosmic in that she overcame virtually every hazard of her day. Orphaned, almost penniless, virtually homeless, subject to religious bias, deprived of education after the age of thirteen, Mary nevertheless went on to become a popular author. The phenomenon of the illiterate woman author—the fifteenth-century Margery Kempe dictating her third-person autobiography to a scribe—opens another kind of door. There are many doors after these.

Some patterns do run through these essays, despite their apparent diversity. In many cases the woman in question has to devise her own voice or, like Olive Schreiner, write under a male pseudonym, in a culture that posits womanly silence as a virtue. Virtually all find that their audiences are surprised at their capacity. Some, like Susanne K. Langer, make important theoretical contributions that go unacknowledged for decades, or, indeed, forever. These are seldom explored patterns of history. History is, after all, a gesture towards the future. The doors to future knowledge about the past need still to be opened. This book opens several such doors onto a past extending back more than two thousand years, but even these glimpses present a strong argument that there is much more to be seen.

This book does not present a sustained argument for a radically “revisionist” history or rhetoric: no one can deny that Cicero, Campbell, and Blair dominated rhetorical thought in their own times, in cultures assumed to be male-oriented. But as Jan Swearingen points out in her essay, knowing Socrates or even multiple “Socrateses” does not preclude our knowing Diotima at the same time. Realizing that the former slave and orator Sojourner Truth was a contemporary of both Henry Clay and Abraham Lincoln—and how much we know about them and how little of her—surely leaves room for some exploration. For example, what did she and Lincoln talk about when they met? Did she actually address the United States Senate?

Russell Conway is said to have delivered his “Acres of Diamonds” speech to American audiences more than a thousand times near the end of the last century. His title comes from the story of a man who wandered the world in search of riches, only to find that there were diamonds in his own back yard. He simply did not know where to look. In this same

vein Andrea A. Lunsford and the authors in this collection point to new places to look—the most obvious places, perhaps, where Quintilians and Melanchtons have already been found. Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine have done just that in their recent book, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, where they deliberately devote a chapter to the education of Renaissance women humanists such as Isotta Nogarola and Cassandra Fedele to demonstrate what can be found when different historical questions are asked.

Let the reader of this book be warned, then, that these guides to partial knowledge offer a sort of enthymematic Newton's Third Law—that the reader's mind, once set in motion, may well stay in motion.

James J. Murphy
University of California, Davis

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The authors wish to thank all those who have supported the development and publication of this work. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute provided crucial help in initiating the project through a Paul Beer Trust Mini-Grant Award, 1987–1988, for the Project on Women Rhetoricians. Ohio State University provided much-needed time for preparing and editing the final manuscript. Patrick McSweeney generously undertook to produce a draft of the index and spent many hours compiling and correcting the final manuscript. Beth Ina worked diligently to convert disparate texts to one coherent computer base. Aneil Rallin coordinated a voluminous correspondence among authors, assembled a final draft, and assisted the editor in innumerable kind and insightful ways. Evelyn Ward of the Cleveland Public Library and Jim Bracken and Linda Krikos of the Ohio State Library came to the rescue with last-minute reference research assistance. Claudia Hunter generously agreed to help in preparing a final draft of Joanne Wagner’s essay after Joanne’s untimely death. In this regard, we are most grateful to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute for establishing a scholarship fund in Joanne’s memory to which any proceeds for this volume will be contributed. (Readers wishing to join us in contributing to the Joanne Wagner Memorial Fund should contact the Department of Language, Literature and Communication at Rensselaer.)

We are also grateful to James J. Murphy for his ongoing interest in and support of this project and to our publisher, the University of Pittsburgh Press. David Bartholomae and Jean Ferguson Carr, editors of Pittsburgh’s Series in Literacy, offered astute and generous response to this volume and also solicited most helpful criticism from two anonymous reviewers. In addition, we have been aided throughout by many others who are acknowledged in the individual essays in this volume.

Most of all, however, the contributors wish to acknowledge the collaborative spirit of this volume and the numerous ways in which we have helped one another—by reading and criticizing each other’s essays, by joining in long-distance telephone, E-mail, and snail mail brainstorming sessions, and simply by believing in the importance and power of the work we were doing, individually and as a group. This project has suc-

ceeded, as Arabella Lyon points out in the afterword, because of the long-term commitment of its contributors and a growing feminist community demanding attention. For the atmosphere that allowed this project to find a home and for the ongoing support and encouragement offered by each contributor to this volume and by feminist rhetoricians across the country, we give very special—and continuing—thanks.

Reclaiming Rhetorica

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On Reclaiming Rhetorica

Andrea A. Lunsford

The story of *Reclaiming Rhetorica* is a long one, full of the gaps and silences and erasures that also characterize its subject, the history of women in rhetoric. I entered this story late in 1990, when I received a cryptic request from a university press to review a manuscript they had received. Its title was *Reclaiming Rhetorica*; I did not receive the names of its authors.

Fresh from directing a dissertation on women in the history of rhetoric from classical times to the Renaissance, I read through the manuscript eagerly and soon after wrote to the press, saying, "This volume proves to be the first of its kind" and thus "extremely important." I urged that the authors revise with an eye to more inclusiveness and that the press publish the result as soon as possible. Consequently, I expected to hear that such a volume was forthcoming sometime fairly soon. How surprised I was, then, to receive a letter many months later, from two contributors to the volume saying they had not found a publisher and asking if I would consider joining the project.

I jumped at the chance to work with this exciting material, and I was delighted to find that, indeed, I already knew some of the contributors to the original collection in manuscript. I thus set about augmenting that collection, soliciting additional contributions (on Aspasia, Diotima, Margery Kempe, Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft, Ida B. Wells, and Julia Kristeva) which attempted to reach back to classical and medieval times as well as to add some additional American and contemporary women's voices to the collection. Eventually the new submissions arrived; contributors read one another's essays, the entire volume, and then revised accordingly; and we traded seemingly endless memos and E-mail and

fax messages to compose the afterword to this volume. As a result, some two years later we had a new manuscript ready to submit for publication.

As these remarks suggest, I was a latecomer to *Rhetorica*, for the story of this volume actually began in 1986–1987, when Annette Kolodny, then professor of literature in the Department of Languages, Literature, and Communication at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, was approached by a group of students who wanted to study the history of women as rhetoricians and theorists of rhetoric. Annette writes:

The students' approaches were marked by hesitation and frustration: hesitation because they were uncertain as to whether much material really existed; and frustration because none of their courses in rhetoric had introduced them to women or even hinted at women's contributions. . . . Increasingly, I was coming to share my students' frustration at the absence of women in these materials. And, no less important, I was seeing interesting parallels and coincidences between discussions of contemporary rhetorical theory and the ongoing debates over literary critical theories and methods. (Letter to author)

During the 1987–1988 year, Annette taught a two-semester graduate seminar on “Women Rhetoricians,” a seminar whose members included the original contributors to this volume. (Only one of those seminarians, Colleen O’Toole, has been unable to participate in this project.) They spent the year doing difficult archival research, sharing the results of that research, defining and refining their views on the positioning of particular women in rhetoric, and drafting essays. Annette describes it this way:

Perhaps the most exciting outcomes of our year together were these: a powerful bonding based on friendship and mutual respect, which included everyone. And an excited sense that we had uncovered a rich and unexplored field that would sustain us for years to come. I do not recall any one of us ever getting bored with our projects. On the contrary, we felt we were at the beginning of a much larger enterprise. And we knew that the history of women as rhetors and rhetoricians needed to be written.

By the end of their year together, Annette and her students were convinced that they had the core of a potentially important book. When Annette left Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in the summer of 1988 to become dean of the faculty of humanities at the University of Arizona,

however, the process of editing a final manuscript necessarily slowed. Still, the students persisted, Annette remained in contact with them, and gradually the conception of the book outgrew the confines of the original seminar. It was at this point that I was enlisted as a potential editor and contributor. As Annette remembers it, “The students in the seminar knew better than I did how important this book could be. And they were determined to see the project through to completion.”

Why were the contributors to this volume so impassioned, so persistent in their pursuit of publication? Although the reasons vary widely, one stands out as paramount: if ever woman’s place in the rhetorical tradition were to be reconfigured, if ever a new rhetoric full of such influences were to arise, the work of this volume had to be done.

Of course, many have called for or invoked “new” rhetorics before, most notably George Campbell in his 1776 work, *A Philosophy of Rhetoric*, and Daniel Fogarty in his 1959 volume, *Roots for a New Rhetoric*. In that work, Fogarty identifies what he calls the “old model” of “current-traditional rhetoric,” against which he posits his own version of a “new” rhetoric. To illustrate the roots of this new rhetoric, Fogarty turns to the work of I. A. Richards, Kenneth Burke, and Alfred Korzybski, arguing that their views can form the basis of an art and science of communication that provides an “understanding of the basic presuppositions underlying the functions of discourse, makes use of the findings of literature and science, and teaches the individual how to talk, listen and read” (Fogarty 134).

In spite of its contributions, however, Fogarty’s “new rhetoric” is limited—as was Campbell’s—by both training and tradition to an exclusively masculinist reading of rhetoric, one that in many ways continues to echo Locke’s earlier and decidedly not “new” views on the subject:

’Tis evident how much Men love to deceive, and be deceived, since Rhetoric, that powerful instrument of Error and Deceit, has its established Professors, is publicly taught, and has always been had in great Reputation. And, I doubt not, but it will always be thought great boldness, if not brutality in me, to have said thus much against it. Eloquence, like the fair sex, has too prevailing beauties in it, to suffer it self ever to be spoken against. And ’tis in vain to find fault with those Arts of Deceiving, wherein Men find pleasure to be deceived. (Locke 106)

The essays in *Reclaiming Rhetorica* attempt to move beyond such limited—and limiting—understandings. In doing so, however, they do

not attempt to redefine a “new” rhetoric but rather to interrupt the seamless narrative usually told about the rhetorical tradition and to open up possibilities for multiple rhetorics, rhetorics that would not name and valorize one traditional, competitive, agonistic, and linear mode of rhetorical discourse but would rather incorporate other, often dangerous moves: breaking the silence; naming in personal terms; employing dialogics; recognizing and using the power of conversation; moving centripetally towards connections; and valuing—indeed insisting upon—collaboration. The characteristic tropes for a reclaimed Rhetorica include, therefore, not only definition, division, and synecdoche, but also metonymy, metaphor, and consubstantiality; its characteristic and principal aim is not deception or conquest—as Locke and much of the familiar rhetorical tradition would have it—but understanding, exploration, connection, and conversation. Taken together, the essays in *Reclaiming Rhetorica* suggest that the realm of rhetoric has been almost exclusively male not because women were not practicing rhetoric—the arts of language are after all at the source of human communication—but because the tradition has never recognized the forms, strategies, and goals used by many women as “rhetorical.”

The authors of *Reclaiming Rhetorica* hope, then, to add to recent work—particularly in books by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, Miriam Brody, and Sonja Foss, and in articles by scholars such as Catherine Peadar, Nan Johnson, Anne Ruggles Gere, Susan Miller, Karyn Hollis, Sue Ellen Holbrook, and others, who are currently carrying on the archaeological investigations necessary to the success of this project. More particularly, the essays in this volume aim to contribute to that work first of all by *listening*—and listening hard—to and for the voices of women in the history of rhetoric; by becoming, as Cheryl Glenn suggests, the audience who can at last give voice to women lost to us; by examining in close detail their speech and writing; and by acknowledging and exploring the ways in which they have been too often dismissed and silenced.

For the women whose voices animate the pages of *Reclaiming Rhetorica* are a widely diverse group. Some deliberately learned and used the conventions of scholarly rhetoric to make a place for women among the voices of men. Others, self-taught and working within the context of strong religious and political communities, spoke and wrote with deep conviction shaped through conscious rhetorical technique. Still others created comprehensive theories or approaches to language in the tradition of academic scholarship. Some were recognized as prominent

rhetoricians in their own time and have since been forgotten, while others made contributions to language that are only now being recognized as vitally rhetorical.

Like the women whose work this volume seeks to reclaim, the contributors to this volume hold widely varying views about their subjects and take widely varying approaches to them. Some, comfortable with more traditional definitions of rhetorical aims and taxonomies, work to illuminate the dark corners of the discipline to which women have often been banished. Others, dismissing not only the traditional male canon but also the rhetorical theorists and practitioners of that tradition, develop new definitions that encompass the set of excellences demonstrated by the women they study. The underlying principle of this volume is not unity, therefore, but diversity and inclusivity; we seek most of all to embody here widely varying and contrasting approaches, methodologies, scholarly styles, and individual voices.

But such diversity should not suggest iconoclasm or disengagement from one another. Rather, a rich and intense collaboration—beginning with the original graduate seminar and expanding to include all contributors—has been indispensable as both the technique and the spirit of the writing of this book. Through group critiques and the reading and rereading of all the essays gathered here, the contributors have developed ideas in a far more communal and supportive environment than is usually possible in the academic setting or in a collection of this kind. While each essay in this book is separate, then, it owes much to the common ground so laboriously marked out in years of conversation and correspondence. If this book holds the echoes of the women it studies, its individual pages also echo the voices of all of its authors who, together, persist in reclaiming Rhetorica—in all her shapes, forms, and voices.

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Aspasia: Rhetoric, Gender, and Colonial Ideology

Susan Jarratt and Rory Ong

So very difficult a matter is it to trace and find out the truth of anything but history, when, on the one hand, those who afterwards write it find long periods of time obscuring their view, and on the other hand, the contemporary records of any actions and lives, partly through envy and ill will, partly through favor and flattery, pervert and distort truth.

—Plutarch, Pericles

Even from the relatively close distance of only a few centuries beyond the Golden Age of classical Greece, Plutarch approached the task of history writing with a gingerly respect for its complexities.¹ Finding and authenticating sources present one kind of problem, but diving into layers of representation, with their inevitable colorations of “envy and ill will,” “favor and flattery,” deepens the mystery. As we embark on a much later but related historical enterprise, Plutarch’s historiographical hesitations inform our project. The attempt to reconstruct Aspasia as a rhetorician of fifth-century B.C.E. Greece calls to mind the three propositions that the sophist Gorgias, her contemporary, offers in a speculation *On Nature*, with its playful subtitle, *On the Nonexistent*. Did Aspasia exist? If so, can she be known? And then, is that knowledge communicable?² Our aim here is to address the first two of these questions through an overview of the classical sources and current commentary, and then to concentrate on the third: the interpretive historiographical tasks involved in an encounter with a woman engaged in classical rhetoric.

A visual representation of Aspasia illustrates the multilayered operation of historiography in another way. The first volume of Mary Ellen

Waithe's courageous *History of Women Philosophers* is adorned with a photograph of a fresco entitled "Aspasia's Salon" from the portal of the main building of the University of Athens (fig. 1). Although Waithe points out the temporal fusion of centuries required in seating the fifth-century rhetorician with fourth-century Plato and third-century Archimedes, she neglects to tell us that the university was built only between 1838 and 1888. A "reading" of this representation of "Aspasia" would have to acknowledge at least the Romantic reinterpretation of Greek antiquity, the designs of the German empire under which nineteenth-century Greece was being reconstructed, and the heritage of the Enlightenment "salon" as a site of intellectual activity within a specific epistemic field and sociocultural moment. Our reconstruction of "Aspasia" will no more accurately recapture the "real" woman than do the figure in the fresco or the character in Plutarch's and Plato's texts, but rather will reflect back to us a set of contemporary concerns. That Aspasia existed is of profound importance for the project of recovering women in the history of rhetoric; that she marks the intersection of discourses on gender and colonialism, production and reproduction, rhetoric and philosophy makes her a rich site for interpretive work.

Aspasia the Rhetorician

Aspasia left no written remains. She is known through a handful of references, the most substantial of which are several paragraphs of narrative in Plutarch's life of Pericles and an oration attributed to her in Plato's dialogue *Menexenus*. Allusions to her by four of Socrates's pupils help to confirm Plutarch's assertion that Aspasia was indeed a real person, a teacher of rhetoric who shared her knowledge and political skill with Pericles, perhaps helping him to compose the funeral oration attributed to him by Thucydides.³ The few available details of her past outline an intriguing figure. Aspasia came from Miletus, one of several Greek colonies in Ionia, a narrow strip on the coast of Asia Minor. Her origin in Miletus is significant because of the philosophical tradition there and because of its proximity to Persia. Western philosophical speculation was only a century or so old when Aspasia was born, its very earliest contributors having come from Miletus. Although there is no recorded contact between Aspasia and any Milesian philosopher, it is logical to assume that she came in contact with early philosophical thought in some form. In general, Milesian philosophers such as Thales, Anaximenes, and Anaximander sought to explain the natural world through abstrac-



Photograph of fresco over portal of the main building of the University of Athens, Greece. With the kind permission of Professor Michael P. Stathopoulos, Rector of the University of Athens.

tion and physical law rather than divine agency and anthropomorphic mythical figures, a direction of thinking quite compatible with an assumption of early Greek rhetoric, namely, that human deliberation and action are responsible for human destinies and can be shaped by thought and speech.⁴ The second point about her Eastern origins is more a matter of reputation: Plutarch reports a rumor that Aspasia emulated Thargelia, a courtesan who seduced Greek men of power and won them over to Persian interests. This rumor should be understood in the context of the long-standing animosity between Hellenes and the inhabitants of the Middle Eastern land mass—Persians in the Archaic and Classical eras, but Trojans in the Dark Ages of Homer's epic. That rumor, which associates a bright and articulate woman with a Persian seductress, bespeaks a gendered xenophobia, linking qualities of deception, excess, passion, and decadence clustering around the "Orient" to a dangerous femininity. The auras of both the oriental (or Ionian) and the feminine hovered around rhetoric in the fourth century, thanks to classical philosophy, through an operation of difference we will pursue in more detail later.

Aspasia appeared in Athens in the mid-440s in association with the great statesman and democrat Pericles. She lived with Pericles in an arrangement that was unusual, perhaps even unique, in Athens at that time. Athenian women who were not slaves (the word *free* simply has no meaning here) were defined in relation to men as wives, concubines, hetaerae, or prostitutes (Cantarella 38–51).⁵ Wives brought dowries to increase family wealth and guaranteed an unquestioned line of inheritance; there was no assumption in Greek culture that a wife would be sexually appealing or personally compatible with the man to whom she was bound contractually by her father or uncle. Concubines served as regular sexual companions for married men, and some may even have taken up dwelling with married couples. Hetaerae held a somewhat higher status; they attended symposia—festive dinner and drinking parties—where they engaged in witty conversation, but they were also expected to engage in sexual play. Aspasia fit properly into none of these categories. Before she arrived in Athens, Pericles had been married to a woman from the aristocratic class who bore him two sons. Years later the couple separated, apparently by common agreement. Six or seven years after his divorce, Pericles met Aspasia and brought her into his home as a beloved and constant companion. Diogenes Laertius reports that Pericles's love was so great that he kissed Aspasia every day, morning and evening, when he left for the agora and when he returned. That

such behavior was worth reporting gives evidence of the customary absence of affection between husbands and wives. Aspasia's unconventional status, as well as her influence with Pericles, was often distorted through the use of labels such as *mistress* and *courtesan*. In Aristophanes's comedy *Acharnians* (425 B.C.E.), for example, the main character, an irritable farmer called Dicaeopolis, attributes the beginning of the Peloponnesian War to the theft by a Spartan ally of "two of Aspasia's hussies" (l. 525). Aspasia bore a child who was later granted status as an Athenian citizen; this anomalous enfranchisement was ironic, given that Pericles himself had initiated a law limiting citizenship to individuals with two Athenian parents, whereas before that time only the father's citizenship was at issue.

Aspasia's interest for a history of rhetoric lies in her accomplishments in political arts. Pericles's passion for her was said to have sprung from her knowledge and skill in politics. She taught the art of rhetoric to many, including Socrates, and may have invented the so-called Socratic method. It would be difficult to overestimate how extraordinary such behavior would have been in Athenian society in the fifth century B.C.E. Although women in earlier periods of Greek history and in other locations in Greece had a larger scope of cultural activity if not political power (see Snyder), one of the ironies of the history of the West lies in the particular suppression of women that went along with its first democracy:

There is, of course, nothing unique in the democracy's exclusion of women from the political sphere, nor did the subordination of women originate with the democracy. Nevertheless, it remains a remarkable feature of Greek history that the position of women seems to have declined as the democracy evolved, and that in non-democratic states—notably Sparta and possibly the Cretan cities . . .—they enjoyed a more privileged status, especially in their rights of property. (Wood 115)

In Athens during the fifth century B.C.E, aristocratic women's activities, movement, education, marriage, and rights as citizens and property holders were extremely circumscribed. Women were confined within the house at all times, except on the occasions of religious festivals. At the same time, opportunities for political participation by male citizens had expanded greatly over the last two centuries. Wood offers an analysis of this development based on the creation of the peasant-citizen through a series of democratic reforms. When the basis for participation in the decision-making assemblies and in the courts was shifted from the

aristocratic “houses” to geographical “demes,” status differences were radically reduced for men as far as political power was concerned. Certainly, the old families with their wealth could afford to buy the training necessary for leadership in the Assembly, Council, and courts, but voting and selection of most public offices by lot guaranteed a broader distribution of power across different backgrounds, occupations, and economic statuses than ever before.

Determining the place for women under this new political system is, on the one hand, extremely straightforward: they were not considered citizens and thus did not participate in any formal public functions. On the other hand, women’s lives in the various economic strata may have been differently affected in complex ways. For the farmers and artisans, it is possible that generally improved status for male heads of households lightened the burden of exploitation for women. But for aristocratic women, Wood and others deduce just the opposite effect. It is possible that

the privileged political status of the male widened the gap between men and women, and perhaps pressures for the cultural devaluation of women were reinforced as the extension of citizenship carried with it a concomitant ideological impulse to harden the remaining principles of exclusion. (Wood 117–18)

The expanded role of public speaking, along with the development of literacy, created more and more venues for the expression of these “principles of exclusion,” weaving them into the very fabric of democratic political theory and practice. The reforms of Ephialtes and Pericles in the middle of the fifth century completed a process of democratization begun by Solon in the early sixth century—a process allowing for, even requiring, Athenian males to develop the ability to listen to, understand, and speak about deliberative and judicial affairs of the city. Given this paradoxical opening up and closing down of discursive fields for men and women, the appearance and persistence of a female teacher of rhetoric in fifth-century Athens is nothing less than astounding.

Information about Aspasia’s expertise is slim but engrossing. Plutarch reports that Socrates visited Aspasia alone and with others, and that at times men even brought their wives along on these visits. We can imagine situations such as those Plato often created in his dialogues about the sophists (*Protagoras*, *Gorgias*)—meetings at the house of a prominent citizen among wise older men and enthusiastic younger fol-

lowers where intense discussions of ethical, political, and philosophical issues ensued. The youthful Cicero records a dialogue called *Aspasia* by Aeschines, a pupil of Socrates, that contained an exchange between Xenophon and his wife (*De inventione* 1.31). The manner of questioning “recalls” the dialectic of Plato’s Socrates: Aspasia takes each interlocutor through a series of analogous questions, leading each to an embarrassed aporia, an admission of dissatisfaction with his or her spouse. Aspasia’s role as “midwife” in this fragmentary report and her reputed origination of the “Socratic method” call to mind another figure associated with Pericles, the sophist Protagoras, and raise a question about the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric. Protagoras is also credited with creating a method of questioning taken up by Socrates; presumably it was derived from his practice of generating contradictory propositions (*dissoi logoi*) on any subject. The point here is not to determine who, in fact, originated the questioning process, but rather to associate all these figures with the sophistic practice of rhetoric.⁶ Although Plato’s representation of Socrates—as the philosopher constantly at odds with the devious rhetoricians—has fixed him in that role within the intellectual tradition, classical materials occasionally open onto a sophistic “Socrates” who shared methods and aims with rhetoricians in the lively intellectual and political atmosphere of the fifth-century polis.

More evidence for Aspasia’s method of teaching appears in the opening of Plato’s *Menexenus*, itself a complex interpretive puzzle. In this dialogue, Menexenus, a young citizen who has recently finished his education, comes from the Council full of news that that administrative group is in the process of choosing a speaker for the ritual state funeral for men who have died in battle. To be chosen to give this speech was a great honor. Socrates responds with ironically exaggerated praise of rhetoricians for their skill in “steal[ing] away our souls with their embellished words” (par. 235), the humor of which does not escape his interlocutor: “You are always making fun of the rhetoricians, Socrates” (par. 235). When Menexenus asks Socrates whether he himself would be able to respond to such a challenge, the philosopher replies, “That I should be able to speak is no great wonder, Menexenus, considering that I have an excellent mistress in the art of rhetoric—she who has made so many good speakers, and one who was the best among all the Hellenes—Pericles, the son of Xanthippus” (par. 235). Acknowledging that Aspasia was indeed his teacher, Socrates reports that he heard her only the previous day composing a funeral oration, and offers an account of the manner of composition of such orations:

I heard Aspasia composing a funeral oration about these very dead. For she had been told, as you were saying, that the Athenians were going to choose a speaker, and she repeated to me the sort of speech which he should deliver, partly improvising and partly from previous thought, putting together fragments of the funeral oration which Pericles spoke, but which, as I believe, she composed. (par. 236)

Plato's Socrates shows Aspasia engaging in a practice common to both training and performance in classical rhetoric. Speeches were generated out of common materials arranged with some spontaneity for the occasion and purpose at hand. To prepare for performance, small seminar-type groups of students working with an accomplished rhetorician would listen to and memorize speeches composed by their teacher and would practice composing and delivering speeches among themselves. The production of whole monologues would go along with closer work with *topoi* (topics or commonplaces); for the sophists, such work would have entailed generating arguments on contradictory propositions, or *dissoi logoi*. The composition involved here was collaborative in the sense that the materials of any speech were common elements of current thinking, a collection of shared opinions on topics of public concern. But the rhetor's task was not merely the recycling or dressing up of well-accepted public opinion. The technique of juxtaposing propositions foregrounded the contradictions found in any complex social order; rhetorical training created a critical climate within which to question, analyze, and imagine differences in group thought and action.

Locating Aspasia within the realm of sophistic rhetoric is a crucial interpretive step in answering Gorgias's second question: how can we "know" Aspasia? Commentators differ in their positions on Aspasia as sophist. Waithe, a philosopher, makes little of the rhetorical connection, probably because she identifies the sophists' project narrowly with the goal of confusing their listeners (Waithe 79). She seems more interested in establishing the authenticity of the speech, assuming it to be a competing version of the famous *epitaphios* attributed to Pericles by Thucydides (2.34–46). We do not agree that deciding on the "real" *epitaphios* is the best interpretive question to ask of Plato's text, and indeed prefer Edmund F. Bloedow's intertextual reading of the two speeches. Bloedow locates parallel stylistic and thematic elements in the two (33–34), but finds the serious distortions of historical data in Aspasia's speech more intriguing. The key lies in placing each author, Thucydides and Plato, at a particular historical juncture in Athenian history and within a particular

perspective on Athens's military exploits. Although Thucydides represents Pericles at a pinnacle of military success in the Peloponnesian War (431 B.C.E.), he himself writes in exile from the nadir of Athenian fortunes—after the defeat by Sparta and the oligarchic coups of the late fifth century.⁷ Thus, Bloedow claims, Thucydides offers an ironic self-portrait of Athens at an earlier, confident moment. Plato is even farther away, both historically and ideologically, from the buoyant, democratic, imperialist Athens at her brightest moment. Creating in Aspasia's speech an outlandishly sugarcoated account of Athens's military blunders up to the time of the King's Peace in 386, Plato draws with a heavy hand the most ironic possible picture of the triumphant warrior state generously burying its dead. This absurdly overdrawn picture of Athens, coming in the form of a funeral oration authored by Aspasia, "co-architect of sophistic rhetoric," would constitute for Plato's audience a very negative view of popular oratory and a sharp attack on its detrimental influence in contemporary political life (Bloedow 47–48). Although he doesn't use the word "ideology," Bloedow uses a method that brilliantly highlights the ideological function of the funeral oration as a form of speech through which the hearts and minds of Athenians were won over or kept loyal and centered on the value of the city, especially in the affirmation of its acts of war.

We turn now to the task of establishing some interpretive measures by which to reconstruct the "Aspasia" Plato creates within this attributed text.

Plato's "Aspasia"

Here we arrive at a version of Gorgias's third question: How can a knowledge of Aspasia be communicated? To translate this question into the terms of contemporary rhetorical theory, we could ask what sort of discursive technologies are operative in Plato's representation?⁸ We might begin to address such a question at the place where Bloedow ends his astute analysis. He asks what Plato signifies in choosing Aspasia as the author of the funeral oration he constructs, focusing his answer on rhetoric and democracy. We want to extend that analysis by asking what other kinds of difference are at work in the dialogue. If "Aspasia" represents for Plato a collection of ideas including not only the fifth-century democracy and rhetoric in general but a sophistic rhetoric practiced almost exclusively by non-Athenians, then "Aspasia" as a proper name—i.e., as a representation—runs slantwise through multiple strata of dif-

ferences. Plato spent much intellectual energy opposing this cluster; in the *Menexenus* he sounds the themes of rhetoric and democracy through the voice of a non-Athenian woman. While Bloedow focuses on Plato's democratic politics, we seek Aspasia at the intersection of the axes of gender and colonialism. Taking Aspasia not only as a key member of the sophistic movement but also as a woman and a foreigner, we ask how gender and colonialism work as discursive technologies to construct layers of meaning in Plato's text.

Gender in Menexenus

Reading the literary text against the social text, we find Plato giving voice to a woman at a time when women were mostly denied public voice, and fixed most effectively in the role of reproduction. A gendered analysis could take Plato's embodiment of his teacher's female teacher as an expansion of possibilities of real women. How does Plato stand on the woman question? We know from Book 5 of the *Republic* that he would have given women an equal share in education and in physical training in the ideal state, placing some of them in the guardian class with men. But we also know from a closer reading of these utopian plans that, insinuated throughout this offer of equality, are assumptions of inequality, implications that women still would gain their status primarily from association with well-born men, and that they would look ludicrous naked on the playing/battle field. This ambiguity in Plato regarding women—an ambiguity Irigaray has catalogued in "On the index of Plato's Works: Woman" (*Speculum* 152–59)—colors our reading of "Aspasia" in *Menexenus*.

Rather than seeing this dialogue as a foreshadowing of the progressive stance Plato takes on women in Book 5 of the *Republic*, we find it more aptly fits both Wood's and Page duBois's views that fourth-century philosophy advanced the task of hardening exclusionary categories (duBois, *Sowing*). Even though he attributed the *epitaphios* to a female author, Plato chose a form that typically referred to women only in terms of their single acceptable contribution to Athenian military pursuits: as reproducers of warriors. Plato fixes woman in that role most forcefully through his handling of the issue of autochthony. Autochthonous birth, the birth of men directly from the soil of Athens, is a fantasy of male autonomy (duBois, *Centaur* 114). The reference to autochthony is standard in funeral orations, but in Aspasia's speech it takes a strangely elaborate form:

For as a woman proves her motherhood by giving milk to her young ones (and she who has no fountain of milk is not a mother), so did this our land prove that she was the mother of men, for in those days she alone and first of all brought forth wheat and barley for human food, which is the best and noblest sustenance for man, whom she regarded as her true offspring. And these are truer proofs of motherhood in a country than in a woman, for the woman in her conception and generation is but the imitation of the earth, and not the earth of the woman. (*Menexenus* pars. 237–38)

This passage aligns Aspasia's oration with other *epitaphioi*, all of which guarantee the inherited excellence (*physis*) of Athenians of the day through the birth of their ancestors directly from the earth of their superior polis. Plato reproduces the typical gesture of the funeral orator, interpellating Athenians as a naturally distinct and superior "race," but he puts the speech in the mouth of a woman named Aspasia, who herself bore a child to Pericles.⁹ While he mimics the funeral oration's typical gesture of hailing women as reproducers of warriors, Plato moves woman out of the central position in matters of conception and generation. Man's autochthonous origin in Athenian citizenship is prior to his origin in the body of the woman. By putting this displacement in the mouth of a woman, "Aspasia," who was more than a reproductive instrument of the polis and was in fact a teacher and speaker despite her gender, Plato makes the subordination of reproduction more powerful. The manipulation of reproduction in *Menexenus* can be read alongside Plato's *Phaedrus*, where Socrates appropriates reproduction for the male philosopher (duBois, *Sowing*). In this key dialogue on rhetoric and pedagogy, Socrates presents the male teacher/philosopher as midwife, thus metaphorically transferring the power of physical reproduction from woman to the actions of the philosopher, who gives birth to (or at least acts as a midwife in the birth of) the *psyche* of the beloved, the student. In *Menexenus*, the woman speaker distances herself from somatic reproduction through metaphor: she insists on the authenticity and priority of the male citizen's birth from the soil of Athens—it is the genus while women's reproduction is merely the species. Thus in both dialogues, though the discursive technique is different, there is a similar effect of diminishing woman's power and creativity. In the one case, it is metaphorized (*Phaedrus*): birth of body becomes birth of soul. In the other case (*Menexenus*), it becomes the metaphorical: birth of body is an analogue of the birth of the citizen. In Plato's appropriative gestures, the

gender of the speaker is crucial—the very point. The male philosopher’s assertion, “Women’s reproductive capacity is merely the physical vehicle for the more important birth of the soul,” performs the same function as the female rhetorician saying, “Women’s reproduction is only a case of the more important ‘birth’ from Athenian earth of the citizen.” Plato’s “Aspasia” is caught in a contradiction: by reputation she exceeds the gendered boundaries of Greek citizenship; but through her, Plato ventriloquizes the very principles of exclusion she challenges.

Colonial Ideology in Menexenus

In *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, and *The Sophist*, Plato consistently ridicules young Athenian men for allowing themselves to be taught (and therefore beguiled) by foreigners who have no natural knowledge of the virtues of Athens or of its citizens. In the *Menexenus*, Plato’s choice to speak through Aspasia, a non-Athenian woman, echoes his ridicule in other dialogues of those naive enough to listen to the words of an outsider. Menexenus’s wonderment that Aspasia, who is only a woman, should be able to compose such a speech (par. 249) ironically emphasizes the Platonic disdain for the foreigner/woman/sophist who would presume to have knowledge about the virtues of Atheno-androcentric citizenship. Through Socrates, Plato refers to foreigners as outsiders who, through the persuasion of the funeral oration, become enchanted with the virtuosity and nobility of the Athenians (par. 235). In this way the *epitaphios* persuades the listeners to better themselves: foreigners would admire and dream of becoming like Athenians, and Athenians would become stronger admirers of themselves. But Socrates, at first transfixed by the oration, gradually comes back to his senses—an indication from Plato that any transformation by rhetoric must necessarily be temporary.

Within the frame of the *epitaphios*, the dream of becoming Athenian can never be fulfilled. The important thing for Plato in the *Menexenus* is that the Athenian relationship to Athens begin with the very soil of Attica:

Their ancestors were not strangers, nor are these their descendants sojourners only, whose fathers have come from another country; but they are the children of the soil, dwelling and living in their own land. And the country which brought them up is not like other countries, a step-mother to her children, but their own true mother. (par. 237)

In other words, being a citizen of Athens could not be achieved by simply becoming entranced by persuasory discourse or by attending

state functions: rather, citizenship could come about only by being related to the very Attic earth out of which the ancestors of Athens came. Further, Plato locates the distinction between true Athenian descent and alien origin in different familial relationships: “true mother” for Athenians and “stepmother” for others. Foreigners had no more than a distant relationship to any country because they were wanderers and travelers who might settle in one area and then another. Athenians, on the other hand, were not wanderers but were situated on the land that had created them.

These differences—mother vs. stepmother, Athenian vs. Foreigner—can be seen as discursive spaces articulated or mapped by the speech: the mother/Athenian space is whole, unitary, and continuous whereas the stepmother/foreigner space is fractured and discontinuous. Nicole Loraux notes the way these mappings in the *epitaphioi* construct a reality that conceals the fact that there were “others” *within* the city, “strangers” labeled metics or slaves (331).¹⁰ In the *Menexenus* these distinctions are blurred “as if they did not exist or, at least, as if the slaves, those outcasts of the city, constituted a presupposition of the oration [that] the Athenians never met with slaves [but] only met one’s neighbor!” (Loraux 331). The concealment of “others” constitutes for Loraux the presence of an “ideological attitude” in the *epitaphios*, a blindness to the economic realities of the polis:

In fact their silence [on the existence of slavery] brings us back to a much more general omission: the oration ignores whatever does not belong to the sphere of war or politics, that is, everything related to the physical subsistence of the city, from the work of the slaves to the commercial role of the metics, from the artisans to the importation of wheat. (Loraux 334)

The discursive opposition Athenian/foreigner masks the multiple power relations involved in production and accepted as a way of life within the Athenian polis. Defining the norm through a polar opposition wipes out differences within each pole, differences that, in this case, expose the relations of production in an imperialist economy.

We might consider extending Loraux’s discussion of ideology to Plato’s representation of Aspasia’s speech specifically in terms of a colonial ideology. For not only does ideology disguise difference in terms of modes of production, it also masks other social and cultural relations of power. Thus the funeral oration conceals what Edward W. Said has called

“the possessing of possession . . . that is the power of culture by virtue of its elevated or superior position to authorize, to dominate, to legitimate, denote, interdict, and validate: in short, the power of culture to be an agent of, and perhaps the main agency for, powerful differentiation within its domain and beyond it too” (9). If we think of the Athenian attempt to dominate Hellenic culture, those discursive spaces of “stranger,” “sojourner,” and “woman”—spaces occupied simultaneously by Plato’s “Aspasia”—can be seen as sites generated by, and thus possessed by, the “virtuous and noble” in order to define, privilege, and legitimate their own view of the world.

Aspasia, perhaps the first female orator in the Western tradition, attracted not only the admiration of Pericles and the fascination of Socrates but also the critical attention of a Plato intent on rereading the rhetorical world to which she gave voice. If we cannot recover the lost voice of Aspasia, we can set the echoes of her speech reverberating again for an age with its own concerns about democracy and political participation, production and reproduction, gender and citizenship.

NOTES

1. Plutarch, a Greek who lived during the Golden Age of the Roman Empire (46–120 C.E., produced “lives” of Greek and Roman leaders that established biography as a distinctive—and problematic—historical genre.

2. For an outline of Gorgias’s treatise, see Sprague.

3. For a complete list of sources on Aspasia see Hill 367. Pupils of Socrates who refer to Aspasia are Aeschines, Xenophon, Antisthenes, and Plato. The narrative in the text is based on Plutarch’s *Pericles* 24, except where another source is indicated.

4. See Kirk, Raven, and Schofield for a fuller discussion of pre-Socratic philosophy.

5. The title of Sara Pomeroy’s early study succinctly categorizes, in a slightly different way, the “options” for women in classical Greece: *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*. Women held as slaves were expected to be available for sexual use by their owners without remuneration, while prostitution was practiced by both slave and nonslave women with limited resources. But Ellen Meiskins Wood reminds contemporary readers that class considerations complicate this brutally clear picture of women’s limited scope of activity: indeed, “poor women . . . in practice had considerable freedom of movement, to go about their necessary business, perhaps sometimes to labour as artisans and shopkeepers” (116).

6. For more on Protagoras and sophistic rhetoric, see Jarratt.

7. Thucydides’s *History* was probably composed in 404 B.C.E.

8. See Scott on the function of gender as an analytic category in history and de Lauretis for a feminist elaboration of Foucault’s theory of discourse.

9. See Althusser on "interpellation," the process by which people are "hailed" or "recruited" as subjects within ideologies, sustaining specific social relations.

10. A metic was a free foreigner who took up residence in Athens. Metics could work and own land but paid a special tax and could not participate in the running of the polis.

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3

A Lover's Discourse: Diotima, Logos, and Desire

C. Jan Swearingen

*Wonder, awe, fear, astonishment
Petrify the eternal myriads
At the first female form now separate
They call'd her Pity, and fled.*

—William Blake, *The First Book of Urizen*

Diotima may seem an unlikely candidate for inclusion in any rhetorical tradition. However, her claims to rhetorical presence can be solidly grounded in the public presence of women as teachers, religious celebrants, and orators in classical antiquity. I propose that we examine Plato's representations of Aspasia and Diotima as accomplished speakers and teachers as reflections of these traditions and as extensions of the rebukes directed at women—especially at strong, speaking women—in the literature of the sixth and fifth centuries. The presence of women in public and learned roles in classical antiquity continues to be questioned, dubbed fictional, and charged with wishful thinking. The quickness of such dismissals, I suggest, functions as a different kind of rebuke, for it serves to perpetuate the misogynist belief system that, particularly in Greek antiquity, led to the suppression of women's public presence and of records that represented it as anything but “merely literary” or as jokes (duBois; Waithe). Traces of women's presence and speech are preserved not only in Plato's representations but also in the work of numerous sophists, dramatists, historians, and writers of legal codes. Democritus, for example, asserts that women should not be allowed to

practice argument because men detest being ruled by women. In asserting this, he describes a detestable—and not fictional—practice. An edict “On Pleading” from the sixth century A.D. repeats the terms of Democritus’s proscription: “It is prohibited to women to plead on behalf of others. And indeed there is reason for the prohibition: lest women mix themselves up in other people’s cases, going against the chastity that befits their gender.” The origin of this rule is said to be one Carfania, “a most shameless women, who by immodestly bringing cases and bothering the magistrate provided the cause for the edict” (Richlin, “Roman Oratory” 1323). Other examples abound. In a number of anecdotes and illustrations, Aristotle alludes without apparent irony to priestesses and women speakers, among them Cleobulina of Rhodes who, according to his report, was renowned as a public speaker and counselor to her father the king. Diotima, then, merits close study as a figure, as the trace of women teachers, speakers, and religious celebrants. According to Socrates’s report, Diotima was called in to avert a plague during the Peloponnesian War and at that time taught him many matters concerning love, discourse, and rhetoric. He likens her speech to a sophist’s (208c). On these grounds even a fictional Diotima would seem to warrant a modest note of attention in a project reclaiming women and refiguring representations of women’s speech within rhetorical traditions.

A few words on methodology and historicity: I have already described the common practice of dealing with the matter of Diotima’s historicity, like that of Aspasia and other women represented in classical literature, by means of one or another erasure. Hence, she is considered merely a literary character, or histories in antiquity are seen to be unreliable and distorted, or there is supposedly no solid material evidence for women in public places, in rhetoric, as teachers, or as leaders. Even the project of writing women into the history of rhetoric has been questioned (see Biesecker). Despite their value in advancing a view of how and where appropriation has taken place, feminist and gender studies have created somewhat reductive victim narratives in their stories of appropriation and in their laments that women figures, if they existed at all, are unrecuperable (e.g., Halperin). These modern erasures, however well intended, have the effect of prolonging the suppression of women’s presence and voices that began in Western traditions during the fifth century. For this reason, it is encouraging to see revisionist histories supplementing our received notions of Athens as the paradigm for all of Greece. Even within Athens, as the case of Aspasia so intriguingly suggests, the conventions governing women in public and private spaces, and the divisions between

those spaces, were far from uniform. A number of cautious and responsible scholarly accounts conclude that, in one of the changes in religious and political forms before and during the rise of the Athenian empire under Pericles, gender was given a major overhaul in Greek religious iconography beginning with the Bronze Age (Fornara and Samons). "Matriarchal influences were relegated to prehistory. Male priests took over from female ones; the temple at Delphi was originally the temple of a matriarchal cult of priestesses, who participated in hymns and chants, but, by the time of the Bronze Age, Delphi was Apollo's; the Olympian deities replaced the matriarchal ones" (Kintz 29–30; also see duBois; Fontenrose; Frymer-Kensky; McAlister; Wider; Zeitlin). Recent scholarship on gender and culture in Greek antiquity has established that there were substantial differences between Athenian and other ancient Greek communities (Frymer-Kensky 203–12; Kintz; Zeitlin).

To say that classical evidence is literary, fragmentary, or unreliable is to say nothing very new. It has long been the case that evidence from Greek antiquity is sporadic, the result of accidental archaeological discoveries, fragmentary papyrological remains, tortuous manuscript transmissions, layers of beliefs imported from later centuries into the interpretation of classical materials and texts, and, finally, silence. "We are not even aware of what it is that we do not yet know. This fact is somewhat intimidating, for it is dangerous to argue from silence, and we are constantly aware that carefully worked-out conclusions might be invalidated" (Frymer-Kensky 4). In the midst of tortured theoretical self-examinings, can we not venture a small quiet step forward to gaze upon a few venerable figures? After all,

part of the scholarly ferment in recent years has been the realization that the reader is always present in the reading of texts, and that the present is always part of the interpretation of the past. There is no such thing as the totally objective recovery of history, for something informs our choice of questions to ask and our selection of data that seems significant to us. (Frymer-Kensky ix)

If Socrates's Diotima, as written by Plato, is "merely literary," then what of Socrates, Protagoras, or Gorgias? In each of these cases the portrait drawn has long been recognized as a representation crafted by Plato's mighty literary and rhetorical hand to create a certain picture and to address specific issues. Since there are not just one but many Socrates characters across the dialogues, does it follow that Socrates is merely

literary, just a fiction? That there is no evidence of any such person? The nineteenth century grappled with the parallel case for and against a historical Jesus. To so quickly respond that “there is no evidence” of Diotima or Aspasia bespeaks a highly selective theoretical correctness (see Poulakos and Jarratt). If we can have multiple Socrateses, Jesuses, and Moseses, may we not be allowed just one Diotima? And while we are at it, may we perhaps reflect upon the attitudes that lead us, first, to so quickly question the historicity of women, but not of men; and second, to so quickly denounce the men of antiquity as uniformly evil appropriators of women? Inasmuch as we guide the theory that guides our interpretations, can we perhaps harness that theory, however momentarily, to suppress our disbelief? Diotima’s theory of love, discourse, and birth has much to say about these matters of method and purpose, motive and passion, desire and language.

A venerable accumulation of readings of the *Symposium* has emphasized polarities in the series of speeches, including Diotima’s, which examine myriad representations of Love: Love as one of a number of gods, as a social practice, and as part of mythical accounts of human creation. Many interpreters have posited that in the *Symposium* and elsewhere Plato favors the “higher” forms of love and discourse, such as spiritual and philosophical procreation, the engendering of knowledge, and the bringing of ideas into being. Plato’s representations of mental, discursive, and conceptual activities are often interpreted to mean that he fosters the domain proper to “lovers of wisdom,” in contrast to “mere” physical eroticism and procreation. Such a hierarchy, once distilled, has been criticized as an appropriation and denigration of both bodily and feminine metaphors and activities (e.g., duBois). Drawing on this set of assumptions, critics have depicted Plato as a progenitor of a series of asymmetrical binaries that render emotion, the physical, and the female as the inferior term in a series of dualisms that have been prominent in Western thinking about intellect, gender, thought, and language (e.g., duBois). According to many nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpretations, the *Symposium* joins other Platonic discussions honoring mental *rather than* physical love and procreation. As a philosophy of love, it has been widely interpreted as favoring male-to-male ascetic love over heterosexual physical love as a vehicle for birth; and as valorizing the birth of knowledge of ideas, not of persons, as the proper goals of love, philosophy, and discourse alike (e.g., Halperin). Yet because Plato’s exposition is both ambiguous in genre and difficult to pin down to modern, and especially post-Freudian, terms (duBois), his representation of Diotima and of her

speech on love and discourse should be especially inviting to historians of rhetoric. Several subtexts in Plato's depiction of Diotima's teachings on love address the nature of the relationship among discourse, desire, and rhetoric. Her speech as well as its representation touch on matters rhetorical in far more detail than has been discerned by many ancient and modern eyes, and, I will emphasize, with far less finality than Plato is commonly given credit for.

In contemporary postmodern theory, women are enjoined to write their bodies—as opposed to their minds? They are invited to escape the imprisonment of their voices, which has been created by masculine appropriators, and by the restriction of truth to prose and philosophy. Dionysian abandon is promoted as a vehicle for liberating the voice through “writing the body.” In the theoretical setting provided by this particular application of postmodern theory to feminism, it seems especially fitting to retrieve an ancient woman's teaching on the intricate complementarity of body and mind, desire and language, love and discourse. Diotima's discourse, and her views of discourse, define her place within a rhetorical pantheon that has long included equally fictional characters of Plato's creation, among them Protagoras, Gorgias, Phaedrus, and Callicles. As represented in the *Symposium*, Diotima's teachings define love as a cognate of desire, and as a vehicle for the transmission of qualities from divine to human as well as within and between individuals. Diotima teaches that Love is a spirit (*daimon*); as a being between the divine and the human, it is necessarily discursive, a messenger and mediator traveling between the divine and the human, between dream and waking reality, the ideal and the lived. In the *Symposium*, a series of speeches provide Love, in the guises of Aphrodite and Eros, with many different genealogies; each speech depicts several of the negative and positive powers of Love: to impel lust, to harness desire, and to drive discourse as one among the many forms of human interactions. After a sequence of speeches, Diotima's oration is presented by Socrates, who concludes just before Alcibiades's drunken entrance is heralded by a flute girl—the accompanist for a performing poet.

Diotima's speech on Love, as recounted by Socrates, explores numerous parallels between physiological, intellectual, and spiritual creation and procreation. Her teaching warns against possession in love, and indeed posits its impossibility, whether one is a lover of persons who yearns for physical procreation, or a lover of wisdom who desires the production of knowledge and the acquisition of wisdom. To understand love as the possession of a desired object, she teaches, is to consign

oneself to a life of unfulfilled yearning, even though the ordinary experience of love is that “Love is in love with what he lacks and does not possess” (Hamilton 78, 201b). In a Socrates-like cross-questioning Diotima leads Socrates to the conclusion that because Love is lack, it lacks beauty and goodness and therefore cannot be a God. “Very well then, you see that you are one of the people who believe that Love is not a god” (Hamilton 81, 202d).

Chiding Socrates for his well-known flair for sophistical argumentation while showing that she herself is rather good at it, Diotima’s discourse with and to Socrates—represented by Plato, we must constantly remember—develops several points. Socrates has wrongly avoided the physical experiences of desire and love and this avoidance has hampered his pursuit of wisdom. Socrates has been far less reluctant to use his dazzling powers of speech to attract lovers—of wisdom—and indeed this is his life’s purpose. Insofar as he beguiles young men with the unfamiliar attraction of intangible, hidden truth and wisdom, he must reflect on psyche, logos, and eros. The fact that he eschews physical intercourse with his lovers does not release him from his responsibility to understand the lesser and greater mysteries. Rather, Diotima suggests, he is obligated to extend the insights imparted by the mysteries to discourse and to the love of wisdom. Finally, and in direct contrast to the views on reincarnation and recollection that Plato’s interlocutors defend in other dialogues, Diotima teaches that neither persons and their identities nor knowledge as a static whole or as a body can be transmitted, that neither persons nor knowledge are immortal. Thus, the substance of the interactions between individuals during their lifetimes with those they love, through love-inspired discourse, is of paramount importance.

Each individual piece of knowledge is subject to the same process as we are ourselves. When we use the word recollection we imply that knowledge departs from us; forgetting is the departure of knowledge, and recollection, by implanting a new impression in the place of that which is lost, preserves it, and gives it a spurious appearance of uninterrupted identity. It is in this way that everything mortal is preserved; not by remaining forever the same, which is the prerogative of divinity, but by undergoing a process in which the losses caused by age are repaired by new acquisitions of a similar kind. It is in order to secure immortality that each individual is haunted by this eager desire and love. (*Symposium* 208a–b)

This segment of Diotima’s speech contrasts sharply with the ladder of love she describes in her conclusion, an ascent from dependence upon

the physical beauty of one beloved to the capacity to seek and be satisfied by the quality of beauty—that is, the capacity to love—and to give birth to beauty in others.

Within Plato's text representing Diotima's speech, and Socrates's judging it spoken like a sophist, there is manifold ambiguity and ample room for alternative readings. Diotima means "god-honoring." Like Socrates and his daimon, and perhaps as the spokeswoman for both, Diotima honors the divine, the immortal, and thereby, presumably, the incorporeal. We might, however, be led to question this interpretation. Diotima repeatedly asserts the half-human, half-divine nature of all daimons, including Love and, presumably, Socrates's mysterious daimon as well. She goes to great lengths to define irreducible interdependencies among human and divine identity, discourse, love, and wisdom. Close attention to the detailed diversity of the god—Love—that Diotima honors and to her notion of immortality, reveals several features that are inconsonant with dualist interpretations of Plato (see Halperin; Nussbaum 20).

The negative import of Socrates's comment that Diotima's speech is "spoken like a sophist" may be taken to be an extension of ribald jokes linking Gorgias, Aspasia, the sophists, and tricky rhetorical seductions (see Jarratt). This context might direct our attention more pointedly to the speech of Alcibiades that follows Diotima's discourse—a palinode in which Alcibiades, after a characteristically drunken, bawdy entrance, praises Socrates's spare speech as possessing an inner gold covered by outer dross. It would seem that Alcibiades implicitly renounces his own famed outer beauties—of both body and speech—for the far more beautiful, alluring, and elusive inner soul that he has glimpsed through conversation with Socrates. Has Socrates at last been successful in leading him up Diotima's ladder of love? More important with regard to Diotima's twofold teaching, should he be so led or is it he who needs to teach Socrates?

Alcibiades's well-known unconsummated love affair with Socrates over many years is one of the comic elements in his speech and in the dialogue as a whole. In his topsy-turvy, praise-by-blame (or is it blame-by-praise?) palinode, Alcibiades depicts Socrates as a mesmerizer and a tease. He reports that for frightening, unfathomable, mysterious reasons any speech, or even any indifferent report of a speech by Socrates, "stirs us to the depths and casts a spell over us, men and women and young lads alike. . . . Whenever I listen to him my heart beats faster than if I were in a religious frenzy. Nothing of this kind ever used to happen to me when I listened to Pericles and other good speakers" (Hamilton 101,

215d–e). Further, Alcibiades claims, Socrates has insulted him and numerous other lovers: “He has pretended to be in love with them, when in fact he is himself the beloved rather than the lover” (Hamilton 111, 222b). By virtue of his speech—his *logos*, his *rhetorike*—and the veiled beauties he discloses only through the intangible vehicle of talk, Socrates is here charged with being a professional beloved, seeking to stimulate desires that he himself will not and cannot satisfy (see Wender). For this reason Alcibiades warns Agathon to withdraw his love of Socrates’s wisdom before it is too late (222b).

Complicating any understanding of the comedy—and tragedy—contained in the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades is the ambiguous “spin” of Plato’s bawdy rendering of Alcibiades, Diotima’s depicted role as Socrates’s teacher of love, and the unstated backdrop of Pericles’s relationship to both Alcibiades and Aspasia. While he was still the ward of Pericles, Alcibiades met Socrates in Aspasia’s salon (see Davis). Alcibiades had a mistress named Timandra, or “man honoring” (Nussbaum 177)—a name that provides a neat counterpoint to Diotima, “god-honoring.” Within the complex metaphorical algebra of the *Symposium*, Alcibiades is represented as sustaining his bawdy courtship of Socrates, asking Socrates once again to love and honor Alcibiades the man rather than his elusive, invisible daimon lover. Aspasia’s name means “welcome” or, less charitably, “gladhander” (Keuls); she is represented in Plato’s *Menexenos* as the teacher of both Socrates and Pericles, with the suggestion that she composed Pericles’s famous oration. Xenophon depicts Socrates saying to Critobulus, “I will refer you to my wife, Aspasia, who will inform you better than I can myself” (Xenophon I).

Although widely scorned in Athens as a “dog eyed harlot” in her own time, Aspasia nonetheless enjoyed renown in antiquity as a teacher. Along with Plutarch’s *Lives*, Athenaeus’s *Deipnosophistae*, an account of ancient love affairs, records that Socrates and Aspasia enjoyed a “strong friendship.” Athenaeus says that Socrates’s “soul was deep, yet he laboured with lighter pains when he visited the house of Aspasia” (599b). “Clever Aspasia” is identified not only as Socrates’s teacher of rhetoric but also as his preceptress in his love for Alcibiades. “Restrain thyself, filling thy soul with the conquering Muse; and with her aid thou shalt win him; pour her into the ears of his desire. For she is the true beginning of love in both; through her thou shalt master him, by offering to his ear gifts for the unveiling of his soul.” Later, Aspasia comforts the unsuccessful Socrates: “Why art thou all tears, dear Socrates? Can it be that the thunderbolt of desire, rankling in thy breast, stirs thee up—the

bolt which crashed from the eyes of the lad invincible, whom I promised to make tame for thee?" (Athenaeus 219b–e). In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades claims to have been smitten by Socrates's discourses in a manner that torments him. Socrates avoids sitting near Alcibiades for fear of his force. "Agathon, do your best to protect me, for I have found my love for this fellow no trifling affair. . . . The fellow flies into a spiteful jealousy which makes him treat me in a monstrous fashion, girding at me and hardly keeping his hands to himself" (213c–d). Socrates's unreciprocated desire for Alcibiades, and Alcibiades's unsatisfied, burning desire for the wisdom Socrates keeps so well hidden; the renowned skill for speaking held by Alcibiades and Pericles, and in a different register by Aspasia, Diotima, and Socrates; the skill for irresistible, siren-like speech attributed by Alcibiades to Socrates; all these linger in suspended animation throughout the *Symposium*, a reminder of how fluid the practice and understanding of speechmaking and rhetoric remained in Plato's time.

On several counts, the direct and indirect depictions of Diotima and Aspasia—the women who taught the men of Athens everything they knew about love and about rhetoric—form a complex puzzle. From one perspective, Diotima's and Aspasia's representation can be seen as implementing an erasure of women's teachings and characters, and of feminine metaphors, through Plato's appropriation (e.g., duBois; Halperin). Furthermore, the representation of Diotima, like the representation of Plato's characters in general, is of ambiguous reliability by modern standards of historical representation. It is more likely that Plato's characterizations were composed as comic—and perhaps also tragic—distortions of a kind that would have amused the listeners and readers of his dialogues. Plato's versions of Diotima and Aspasia are the only surviving remnants of teachings of this kind—by women, on love—in a form that even remotely resembles a full text. However, in support of the view that Plato's depiction preserves Aspasia and her speech as much as it distorts or appropriates them, we should note that in the histories of antiquity there is no recorded suspicion of the speech's or Aspasia's authenticity. Aspasia's speech as rendered in the *Menexenos* was performed yearly in Athens for centuries after her death (Cicero, *De oratore* 13). Her status as both a rhetor and teacher of Socrates and of others—even if this was considered a joke—parallels Diotima's role in the *Symposium*, a resemblance that has led some interpreters to conjecture that they are stand-ins for one another, and that the joke is on Socrates (Fornara and Samons).

Several other themes link Aspasia to Diotima in the representations of antiquity (Athenaeus; Plutarch; Xenophon). Alcibiades was reportedly Aspasia's student along with Socrates. The powers of speech of both Alcibiades and Socrates are given prominent attention in the *Symposium*, an emphasis that should alert us to Diotima's dual roles of speaking "like a sophist" and teaching an art and philosophy of love. Alcibiades was renowned both for his physical beauty and for his powerfully persuasive speeches. Alcibiades's powers of persuasion were remembered as instrumental in bringing about many alliances—not all of them popular, particularly as the war wore on and its costs mounted. One such alliance among the Athenians, Argives, Eleans, and Mantineans occurred near the time that Alcibiades was charged with defacing herms (household patronymics of the newer democratic gods of the state cult of Olympian religion) and with demonstrating impiety by mocking the mysteries. He is recorded as having persuaded the rival Lacedaemonians not to claim publicly their plenary power, giving them his word that power would be honored, and then "accusing them before the people as men that had no true meaning nor ever spake one and the same thing" (Thucydides 5.3445). In this way he brought about the alliance. When charged with mocking the mysteries in private houses and with defacing the herms, he was sent to a purgation rather than being arrested, since his absence might alienate "the Mantineans and the Argives, who they thought followed the war by his persuasion" (6.61).

In his palinode in praise of Socrates, Alcibiades makes much of their comradeship during the war, of their mutual valor and heroism, and of the bravery they displayed in action and speech alike. If we consider Diotima's role as the persuasive priestess from Mantinea who averted a plague for Athens, it is intriguing that Alcibiades persuaded the Mantineans to sustain their league with the Athenians, and to come under Athenian protection militarily and then governmentally. Plato's delicate weaving together of distant and recent history is evident in the timing of the *Symposium* as well. Around the time of the *Symposium's* composition, 385–75 B.C. (Nussbaum 169), Mantinea was dispersed into villages (*Symposium* 145 n.1); its status as an independent city-state was at an end. Aristophanes's speech deems such dispersions analogous to punishment for lack of fidelity to one true Love, and contends that desire comes from previous human form as one, as entire, before splitting. "The craving and pursuit of that entirety is called Love. Formerly, we were one; but now for our sins we are all dispersed by God, as the Arcadians were by the Lacedaemonians" (*Symposium* 193a).

Once the persuader of the Mantineans, is Alcibiades now to be persuaded by a Mantinean, a priestess, a teacher of love? Where Socrates failed, shall Diotima succeed? And what has Socrates learned from her teaching? Martha Nussbaum proposes that it is wrongheaded to regard the *Symposium* as a work that "ignores the pre-philosophical understanding of *eros*." Instead, she suggests, it is "all about that understanding and also about why it must be purged and transcended, why Diotima has to come once again to save Athens from a plague." Are we, "like Socrates, ready to be 'persuaded' by the revisionary speech of Diotima"? (Nussbaum 167).

To address that question, and to establish grounds for the substantial ties between love and discourse, desire and rhetoric, that are developed in Diotima's speech, I turn to traces of Pythagorean teachings that are preserved among pre-Socratic fragments, particularly Empedocles's renderings of love and discourse as unifying principles of the psyche and of the universe. Like the Mantineans, the Pythagoreans were dispersed during and after the time of the Peloponnesian wars. Pythagorean communities were scattered throughout Magna Graeca; many of their teachers were forced into hiding (Waithe 1:11, 59–74; Davidson 98–107). At the center of Pythagorean teaching was the notion of Harmony, a whole in nature, society, and the psyche that could be brought about by teaching new principles of natural and social union. Many elements in Pythagorean teaching, and parallel themes in Empedocles, can be aligned without great difficulty with the notions of divine-human complementarity, of ever-changing qualities and elements that are developed in Diotima's teaching, and of the unity of discourse, lovers, and wisdom that is sustained throughout the *Symposium* and elsewhere in Plato's dialogues (Waithe 1:69–71; Harrison, *Themis* 249 n.4, 513–14).

I have provided the interlude that follows to illustrate more directly than any exposition could the mingling of old and new terms drawn upon in the metaphorical chemistry, or alchemy, of the *Symposium*. Earlier Greek cosmologies, and the language in which they are expressed, are adapted in manifold ways in Plato's depictions of discourse, rhetoric, philosophy, and love.

She [Aphrodite] it is who is believed to be implanted in mortal limbs also; through her they think friendly thoughts and perform harmonious actions, calling her Joy and Aphrodite. No mortal man has perceived her as she moves in and out among them. But you must listen to the un deceitful progress of my argument. . . . The elements alone exist, and run-

ning through one another they become different things at different times, and are ever continuously the same. This process is clearly to be seen through the mass or mortal limbs: sometimes through Love all the limbs which the body has as its lot come together into One, in the prime of flourishing life; at another time again, sundered by evil feuds, they wander severally by the breakers of the shore of life.

(Empedocles, fragments 17, 20, in Freeman 1983)

When intimacy is established and the loved one has grown used to being near his friend and touching him in the gymnasium and elsewhere, the current of the stream which Zeus when he was in love with Ganymede called the "stream of longing" sets in full flood towards the lover. Part of it enters into him, but when his heart is full the rest brims over, and as a wind or an echo rebounds from a smooth and solid surface and is carried back to its point of origin, so the stream of beauty returns once more to its source in the beauty of the beloved.

(Plato, *Phaedrus* 255)

Agathon: Here, Socrates, come sit by me, so that by contact with you I may have some benefit from that piece of wisdom that occurred to you there in the porch. Clearly you have made the discovery and got hold of it; for you would not have come away before.

Socrates: How fine it would be, Agathon . . . if wisdom were a sort of thing that could flow out of the one of us who is fuller into him who is emptier, by our mere contact with one another, as water will flow through wool from the fuller cup into the emptier.

(*Symposium* 175c-d)

Socrates: Any speech ought to have its own organic shape, like a living being; it must not be without either head or feet; it must have a middle and extremities so composed as to fit one another and the work as a whole.

The same is true of the art of rhetoric as of the art of medicine. . . . In both cases a nature needs to be analysed, in one the nature of the human body and in the other the nature of the soul.

(Plato, *Phaedrus* 264, 270)

For there do not start two branches from his back; [he has] no feet, no swift knees, no organs of reproduction; he was a Sphere, and in all directions equal to himself.

(Empedocles, fragment 29)

For man-woman was then a unity in form no less than a name, composed of both sexes and sharing equally in male and female. The form of each person was round all over, with back and sides encom-

passing it every way; two faces perfectly alike on a cylindrical neck. . . . That which partook of both sexes was born of the moon, for the moon partakes of both. They were globular in their shape as in their progress, since they took after their parents.

(*Symposium* 190a–b)

Dike [Justice] is the way of life of each natural thing, of each plant, each animal, each man, the regular course of that great animal the Universe, the way that is made manifest in the Seasons. Dike is manifest in the changes of the rising and setting of constellations, in the waxing and waning of the Moon and in the daily and yearly courses of the Sun. Dike seems sometimes to take on the semblance of the Moon, sometimes of the Sun.

(*Themis* 517, in Harrison 1966)

Beaming Sun and Earth and Heaven and Sea—reconnected in harmony with their own parts: all those [parts] which have been sundered from them and exist in mortal limbs. Similarly all those things which are more suitable for mixture are made like one another and united in affection by Aphrodite.

(Empedocles, fragment 22)

I will go back to the path of song which I formerly laid down, drawing one argument from another, that [path which shows how] when Hate has reached to bottommost abyss of the eddy, and when Love reaches the middle of the whirl, then in it, [the whirl] all these things come together so as to be one—not all at once, but voluntarily uniting, some from one quarter, others from another.

(Empedocles, fragment 35)

Anyone whom Love touches becomes a poet,
“Though a stranger to the Muse before.”

(*Symposium* 196d)

[The heart], nourished in the seas of blood which courses in two opposite directions: this is the place where is found for the most part what men call Thought; for the blood round the heart is Thought in mankind.

(Empedocles, fragment 105)

Heat and cold, drought and moisture, when brought together by the orderly Love, and taking on a temperate harmony as they mingle, become bearers of ripe fertility and health to men and animals and plants, and are guilty of no wrong. But when the wanton-spirited Love gains the ascendant in the seasons of the year, great destruction and

wrong does he wreak. . . . So further all sacrifices and ceremonies controlled by divination, namely, all means of communion between gods and men, are only concerned with either the preservation or the cure of Love. . . . Love conceived as a single whole, exerts a complete power, but that which is consummated for a good purpose, temperately and justly, both here on earth and in heaven above, wields the mightiest power of all and provides us with a perfect bliss; so that we are able to consort with one another and have friendship also with the gods who are above us.

(*Symposium* 188b–d)

[A female divinity] clothing *the soul* in the unfamiliar tunic of flesh.

(Empedocles, fragment 125)

It is not possible to bring God near within reach of our eyes, nor to grasp him with our hands, by which route the broadest road of Persuasion runs into the human mind.

(Empedocles, fragment 133)

For he is not equipped with a human head on his body, nor from his back do two branches start; [he has] no feet, no weft knees, no hairy genital organs; but he is Mind, holy and ineffable, and only Mind, which darts through the whole universe with its swift thoughts.

(Empedocles, fragment 134)

God does not deal directly with man; it is by means of spirits that all the intercourse and communication of gods with men, both in waking life and in sleep, is carried on. A man who possesses skill in such matters is a spiritual man, whereas a man whose skill is confined to some trade or handicraft is an earthly creature. Spirits are many in number and of many kinds, and one of them is Love.

(*Symposium* 203a)

What earlier practices of mystery religions, chthonic ritual, or Pythagorean teachings are assembled in Diotima's discourse? (see, e.g., Frymer-Kensky vii–xi, 1–6). Is her speech a forbidden revelation, or even mockery, of the mysteries of the kind that Alcibiades was charged with conducting in private homes? What god does Diotima honor? What is its relationship to Socrates's mysterious daimon? Is it simply as a joke that Plato imports a woman as the ascetic Socrates's teacher of love? What distinguished the priest and priestess from the sophist, poet, and skilled

speaker in the era spanned by Socrates and Plato? Diotima's appearance in the *Symposium* addresses all of these questions (Halperin; Nussbaum), and suggests new understandings of the range of discourses we approach as rhetoric.

In *Themis*, her study of early Greek religion, Jane Ellen Harrison comments on the shift that occurred in the meaning of the term "honor" after the Olympian gods supplanted the older Themis, Dike, and Demeter cults. "In place of his old function, his *time* [honor] his *geras*, [the Olympian god] demands a new honour, a service done to him, himself as a personality. Instead of being himself a sacrament he demands a sacrifice. This shift of meaning in *time* [honor] from function that must be performed to honour claimed marks the whole degradation of the Olympian" (467). Each speaker in the *Symposium* addresses the question of *which* god of love is to be honored: the higher or the lower, Aphrodite or Eros, Aphrodite the daughter of heaven or Aphrodite *pandemos*, the "common" Aphrodite (180d). In counterpoint to these binaries stands Diotima's integrative view of love as "begetting on a beautiful thing by means of both the body and the soul" (206b). Embodied in Diotima's name and developed in her teaching are compound questions concerning the nature of Love, the extent to which it is a divinity, and how it is to be honored. Many of her points hearken back to pre-Olympian teachings concerning the *physis* or nature of the soul, of eros, and of logos as forever intertwined and intertwining, of discourse as love, and of lovers of discourse.

Diotima begins with the assertion that Love is a spirit (*daimon*) that moves between divine and human traits and beings, linking them through discourse and desire. Her approach is apt enough, for in several senses Love (*Philotes*, *Aphrodite*, *Eros*) was in the process of being reconceptualized in Plato's era: as a god or gods, as a group of social practices, and as an animating force in discourse. The Olympian gods, whether or not the Athenians took them seriously as divinities (Rosenmeyer; Veyne), were supplanting and diversifying qualities embodied in earlier divinities in the Greek religion of the mysteries: Themis, Dike, Gaia, and Demeter. Hera, reduced in the Olympian pantheon to a jealous wife, had earlier been an aspect of Demeter, Earth, Erde (Harrison 491; Wolf 280–83). Dike—an as yet unblinded Justice—guarded the gate leading to the underground path of insight undertaken by initiates into the mysteries; though unnamed, it is "the goddess" Themis, not Apollo, who teaches Parmenides.

Another trace of the earlier religion's conception of love, identity, and gender can be observed in *The Suppliants*. Simultaneously refusing marriage and rejecting patrimony, the Danaids claim "our Great Mother" alone as progenitrix (Aeschylus 141), a self-designation that their father accepts.

In this theological context Plato's emphasis on the accusation that Alcibiades mocked the mysteries and defaced the herms—a running allusion throughout the *Symposium*—may be viewed as more than a story of ribald roughhousing widely used to defame not only Alcibiades but Socrates as well. The herms retained meanings they had in earlier cults, where they represented epiphanic births and resurrections of "the god," usually a son of the Mother depicted emerging from beneath the earth, surrounded by an escort of attendants—the youthful *kouroi* and *kourai*. Both Herakles and Dionysus first appear in this manner and are only in later accounts of their genesis provided with fathers (see Harrison 364–415).

In explaining why we must go back to before the Olympians to understand the vestigial Greek religion drawn on in Plato's dialogues, Jane Ellen Harrison questions the vague notions of "a sense of the supernatural," or the "instinct for mystery," or the apprehension of an "unknown infinite, beyond the visible world" (488). She asserts, "The mystery, the thing greater than man, is potent, not only or chiefly because it is unintelligible and calls for explanation, not because it stimulates a baffled understanding, but because it is *felt* as an obligation. The thing greater than man [*sic*], the 'power not himself that makes righteousness,' is, in the main, not the mystery of the universe to which as yet he is not awake, but the pressure of that unknown, ever incumbent force, herd instinct, the social conscience. The mysterious dominant feature is not Physis, but Themis" (490).

Questioning the late nineteenth-century notion of Dionysian and bacchic rites as ecstatic abandon and even sanctioned violence, Harrison emphasizes the deliberation and control the mysteries exercised over different modes of consciousness and discourse. "To consult an oracle, a veritable, almost physical, *rite de passage* is indispensable" (512). The oracle's head is veiled; men put on women's clothing at puberty and during initiation rites; Socrates dons the veil to hide his head and removes it after his first speech in the *Phaedrus* (243b). Often demeaned in modern times as trivial jokes about effeminacy or transvestism, such veiling had a nontrivial and well-known function in antiquity. Harrison regards Plato's depiction of both education and philosophizing as a "ra-

tionalization of the primitive mysticism of initiation, and most of all of that profound and perennial mysticism of the central *rite de passage*, the death and the new birth, social, moral, intellectual." She notes that with no intent to conceal his borrowings, Plato slightly alters a number of terms that would be familiar to everyone from the mysteries as then practiced; Mnemosyne becomes anamnesis, *andreia* the "reborn," becomes *andros*, "manliness"; and so on for *catharsis*, *eklexis*, *anankalypsis*, and *meletan apothneskein* (513).

Another record of how the transition from chthonic Demeter cults to Olympian religion was effected resides in the many narratives relocating the old gods in terms of the new. During the spread of the Zeus cult that supplanted the older deities, the city of Aegina, for example, proudly asserted that it worshipped its native "Saviour Themis who sitteth by Zeus, God of Strangers (*Zeus Xenion*)" (519). Themis, the tacit immanence prior to all religious formulations, becomes a consort; she sits on a throne, on high, whereas in her earlier representations she had been an evocation and emanation of deeply embedded beliefs and values.

According to Alcibiades's palinode in the *Symposium*, Socrates's "music" is prose, not poetry. Socrates's teacherly rhetoric, he asserts, implants desire through an *ekstasis* parallel to that inspired by music. *Ekstasis* was the altered state undertaken by initiates under the guidance of Mnemosyne. Eleusinian initiates entered this state led by a guide, a point that Harrison emphasizes again and again by way of dispelling the denigrating portrait of bacchic rites so common in late fifth-century Greek literature, and later resuscitated in the modern Romantic period. Harrison's reading of material and textual evidence of the mysteries allows us to see the extent to which the wild bacchic Dionysian freedoms and excesses so celebrated at the turn of the century are much more a modern, postromantic, and anti-Victorian invention than a historical rediscovery. Nineteenth-century valorizations of Apollonian genius and reason quickly came to be opposed to Dionysian values and thought, culminating in the Dionysian *fin-de-siècle* revival. Although her work appeared in the 1920s, Harrison's appraisal of the then-new Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy strikingly anticipates recent feminist appraisals of the consequences of reductive binaries, and of an oppositional sensibility more generally.

It is because religion has been regarded as a tissue of false hypotheses that it has commanded . . . the animosity of the rational thinker. When the religious man, instead of being in ecstasy and sacramental commun-

ion one with the Bacchos, descends to the chill levels of intellectualism and asserts that there is an objective reality external to himself called Bacchos, then comes a parting of the ways. Still wider is the breach if he asserts that this objective reality is one with the mystery of life and also with man's last projection, his ideal of the good. (487)

In the last act of *Faust* we read, "If, Nature, I stood before you a man alone." This poses the question of projection and oppositionalism in a slightly different way; Christa Wolf asks of this ultimate separation, "Was it necessary that man should come to stand 'alone' before Nature—opposite Nature, not in it?" (Wolf 283).

Harrison's analysis of the fragmentation of earlier Greek religion and social beliefs into Olympian religion defines relationships among custom, religion, and art that further illuminate the discussions of poetry, speech, and love in the *Symposium*. Harrison postulates that the earlier religion had

in it then two elements, social custom [*nomos*], the collective conscience, and the emphasis and representation of that collective conscience. . . . Two factors indissolubly linked: ritual, that is custom, collective action, and myth or theology, the representation of the collective emotion, the collective conscience. And—a point of supreme importance—both are incumbent, binding, and interdependent. Morality is the social conscience made imperative upon our actions, but morality unlike religion save on questions involving conduct, leaves our thoughts free. (486)

Compare Harrison's appraisal to Diotima's comments on Love and society. "Through [Love] are conveyed all divination and priestcraft concerning sacrifice and ritual and incantations, and all soothsaying and sorcery. God with man [*anthropos*] does not mingle: but the spiritual is the means of all society and converse of men with gods and of gods with men, whether waking or asleep. Whoever has skill in these affairs is a spiritual man" (*Symposium* 202d–203a). Harrison glosses, "Art, which is also, like religion, a representation of the social conscience, has no incumbencies. She imposes no obligation on either action or thought. Her goddess is Peitho, not Themis." And it is Peitho, we rhetoricians recall, Aphrodite's daughter according to Sappho, who beguiles mortal hearts with her arts of persuasion. To Harrison's analysis the rhetorical reader might add that, although "art" may have no social incumbencies, and imposes no obligation on religious or ethical grounds, the arts of per-

suasion and the arts of love have a multitude of affinities, a point that Diotima's speech teases out with delicacy.

Diotima's speech presents the figure of the daimon—Love—among other gods, as an intermediate spirit that moves through discourse between the divine and the human. Harrison's work allows us to observe multiple parallels between Diotima's and slightly earlier understandings of Daimon in Greek religion, because its comparative methodology integrates phenomena seldom considered in relation to one another: magic, mana, tabu, Olympic games, the drama, sacramentalism, carnivals, hero-worship, initiation, ceremonies, and the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis (544). Her assessment allows us to see the transformation of gender being effected through the replacement of the mysteries by the state Olympian cult. The death cult represented by the Olympic games in commemoration of the war dead celebrates blood not as life-giving, but as giving up life, as sacrifice. The symbolic algebra of this sacrifice is strikingly different from that of the cult in which Herakles, for example, must spend time beneath the earth with Omphale, dressed as a woman, in order to reemerge stronger into the world of men (Kintz 116–18; Wolf 269).

Harrison's student Frances Cornford opines that it is not until the late fifth century—the time of Socrates, Protagoras, and Antiphon—that the contrast between the law of Nature (*Physis*) and human law (*Nomos*) appears, marking one of the earliest explicit recognitions in Greek tradition that social laws are not divine institutions (42; see also Fornara and Samons; Romilly). Reflecting the high premium placed on individuality and intellectual and moral autonomy that developed in late nineteenth-century scholarship (though Harrison did not adhere to it), Cornford asserts as an axiom: "In the last resort, every individual must see and judge for himself what it is good for him to do. The individual, if he is to be a complete man, must become morally autonomous, and take his own life into his own control" (46).

Contesting the view that Dionysus is the ideal mascot for individualist ethics, Harrison emphasizes that Dionysus first emerged as a symbol of collectivity, supplanting the muses and the ineffable Themis. His *thiasos*, or attending congregation, was translated into Greek drama as the chorus. Dionysus became the patron god of the arts, which had formerly been overseen by the muses, and of the wine associated with anything but self-control and moral autonomy. Harrison's reading of these representations emphasizes that, although Dionysus carries with him vestiges of older collective social and cosmological beliefs, his appearance signals

the relegation of those practices to vestigial status, similar to Heraclitus's and Aristotle's denunciations of wild orgiastic bacchic women's rites. Dionysus entered Olympus as an other, as the bad boy of the bacchic cults supplanting the muses as god of poetry, which was now being firmly distinguished from both serious thought and everyday discourse—that is, from the prose rhetoric of the demos. Poetry, then, is the discourse counterpart to the lesser kinds of love that are the subject of the *Symposium* and exemplified by Alcibiades and the flute girl. Martha Nussbaum directly links Dionysus's entry into the Athenian city-state to Alcibiades: "This tough old democrat who fought at Marathon, not the refined comrade of allegedly anti-democratic intellectuals, proves . . . that he is the poet that the soul of Dionysus, god of tragic and comic poetry, desires. He will be brought back from the dead, and, together, tragedy, comedy, and Alcibiades will save Athens from the death of her freedom; also . . . from Socrates" (Nussbaum 170).

What is Diotima's relationship to Dionysus and his cult? Of what cult is she the priestess? She is "god-honoring"; he, the "god of Nyssa"—Nyssa, the legendary field in which Persephone was abducted, or, in earlier versions of the same myth, a field where Dionysus as divine son was escorted from beneath the earth (Burkert 1–21, 44; Harrison 315, 420). Socrates tells us that in his youth, Diotima was called from Mantinea to perform oracles, which for ten years kept the plague out of Athens (*Symposium* 201d). He identifies her as a "teacher of love (201d)." Yet she says to Socrates at the end of their initial dialectic, "So you see . . . you are a person who does not consider Love to be a God" (202d) and reminds Socrates that because he has not yet undergone the mysteries he is not qualified to teach. He refused to accept the earlier or "lesser" mysteries which introduced initiates into the ways of physical sexuality. This, the running joke goes, he has always declined (210ff). If to get to the higher mysteries one must pass through the lower, Socrates is doomed to failure.

The allusions to the mysteries provided in Diotima's speech have been interpreted as appropriations or transformations of earlier ritual traditions (duBois; Harrison) and seen primarily as asceticizing physical love, as affirming the ladder of ascent out of "brute" physical desire, passion, and heterosexual reproduction, transcending them (Halperin). I suggest that if the first and second portions of Diotima's speech are held in dialectical suspension, if they are taken to inform each other, her teaching may also be seen as doubling the narrative of ritual death, descent beneath the earth, and rebirth employed in the mysteries; of phi-

losophizing that narrative so that it serves as a metaphor for both discourse and love. Love and discourse are seen as mutually intersubjective, as consubstantial; Diotima's ladder takes Socrates toward and not away from participation, substance, and the production of discourse as a medium of love, birth, and life. Within the sequence of the dialogue as a whole, the Dionysus who lurks behind the mysteries, and who in the late fifth and early fourth centuries was beginning to be widely rebuked as bacchic, is made manifest in Alcibiades, who appears drunk just after Diotima's speech (see Rosen 296–97; Nussbaum 170). The negative aspects of the Dionysian bacchic rites—Alcibiades's renowned beauty, rhetorical powers, and drunken nights, including his reputed participation in the smashing of the herms and the paradox of his drunken encomium of Socrates's teaching—all of these converge, as if to insult and perhaps even condemn Diotima's lovely and decorous teaching for being altogether too much spoken like a sophist (208) of the methodical, didactic sort, of Socrates's sort.

The placement of Diotima's speech puts it in competition with Alcibiades's discourse, both as teaching and as crafted speech. Diotima's Love is a middle state or condition and a "spirit" moving between, mediating, communicating between the divine and the human. Positing that there can be no direct human knowledge of divine love, wisdom, or beauty, Diotima defines eros—desire—as evidence of that knowledge and simultaneously as the vehicle for its communication. Inasmuch as they desire beauty and goodness, human beings should become progenitors of these qualities. In that way alone they can become the beloved of heaven (212a). Those human beings especially gifted at discourse—including none other than Socrates—are characterized as being in a middle state as well: "It is by means of spirits that all the intercourse between gods and men . . . is carried on. A man who possesses skill in such matters is a spiritual man, whereas a man whose skill is confined to some trade or handicraft is an earthly creature" (203a). The passion stirred by discourse and by speakers, a related and frequent topic throughout the *Symposium*, is recapitulated in Alcibiades's tale of Socrates's astounding self-control in erotic as well as other matters, and in the praise of Socrates's speech, which is dull and homely on the surface, but, for those who listen, bears witness to the fact that a god (*daimon*) is speaking.

Madness, love, and desire permeate these distinctions, and are taken up by Diotima in her teaching on love and in her implicit rebuke of Socrates's (lover's) discourse. Diotima's speech asks: is it Love as unifying force or love as possessive desire that impels Socrates's itinerant

discussions with young men and with his daimon? What god of love drives his soul toward beauty and knowledge? We are asked to consider such questions within a larger discussion in the dialogue, which scrutinizes poetic versus prose discourse, apparent versus true knowledge in rhetorical and other discourse, and surface, or apparent, beauty and goodness versus intangible beauty and goodness. Alcibiades makes a drunken appearance after Diotima's speech and then proceeds to deliver a palinode rich in praise for Socrates's thought and deceptively homely discourse. His appearance—a virtual satyr play—calls into question the literalness of Diotima's/Socrates's/Plato's allegories of ascent.

If Plato is fundamentally an ascetic idealist, he nevertheless gives the other side its due. Diotima the priestess from Mantinea enjoins Socrates to give up his treasures in heaven, his daimon lover, and to beget excellence through his talent for interlocution, an interlocution unafraid of love. If at the end of Diotima's speech, as rendered by Socrates, as rendered by Plato, we are left in a state of transcendent contemplativeness or contemplative transcendence, the beatific vision is nonetheless short-lived, brought to earth by the flute girl's song announcing Alcibiades's entrance. Diotima's lofty teaching seems reviled by Alcibiades's bawdy appearance (*Symposium* 212d–e). Diotima's ladder of ascent is knocked rudely to earth by Alcibiades's entrance—a sly reference again, perhaps, to his infamous mockery of the mysteries, and a reprise of the earlier discussions of music, poetry, love, and desire. In the portraiture of the *Symposium* Socrates and Alcibiades excel at the arts of rhetoric, and at literary and philosophical discourse as well. After Alcibiades praises the allure of Socrates's rough exterior—his prose speech—Socrates concludes the dialogue with a persistent contention that a single writer can excel at both comic and tragic poetry. Is his concluding assertion a palinode to Plato's art—a self-definition?

Considered as drama, poetry, and dialectic rather than as a competition where one view of love emerges the winner, the *Symposium* represents alternative beliefs concerning love, discourse, and procreation. The rhetoric of Plato's fiction employs the surface beauty of poetry—myth, dramatic dialogue, story, allegory—as a means for depicting how even a superficial beauty like Alcibiades was weaned by Socrates, through the arts of love and wisdom combined, to prefer the bare surfaces of the “prose” discourse that promises the unveiling of hidden truth. But what have these aspects of Plato's poetics and dramaturgics to do with Diotima and with rhetoric? Diotima chides Socrates for his

abstemious or austere prose, his plain speech that promises—as a flirtation—a glimpse of hidden truth and beauty.

Diotima's discourse in the *Symposium* remains a cipher. It may be interpreted as a preservation, as an appropriation, or as a distortion of earlier Greek religion and of the discourse of women within that religion. It stands as evidence that women were remembered as teachers, and as speaking sophists. Such remembrances provide an instructive counterpoint to the attempt to denigrate the sophists for being like women (see Jarratt). Plato's representations of Diotima and Aspasia help illuminate the meaning of this double-edged sword. Diotima is indeed a teacher who speaks "like one of our best sophists" (208c): she develops views and positions in a speech; she questions traditional views; and she dissents from those who have preceded her in the dialogue. She is like a sophist in other ways as well. Her emphasis on nonpossessive love and on sustaining and practicing the visible and physical vehicles of human intercourse serve as a corrective to many readings of Plato's thought that characterize it as hyperidealist and anti-body: readings which paradoxically, and dialectically, are supported by the last half of her speech. She chides Socrates with his own tricks. Or is the joke perhaps that she, or Aspasia, was reputed to have taught him the tricks in an *ad feminam* debunking of all sophists, including Socrates? (Jarratt and Ong, this volume; Jarratt 1991). Socrates remains awake and sober at the end of the *Symposium*, still discussing literary genres. Is this a way of rejecting Diotima's teaching in order to engage in the physical realm of love, or in sleep? Or is it a fulfillment of her enjoinder to bring to birth by whatever means virtue, beauty, and truth? As in all of Plato's dialogues, the conclusion is teasingly inconclusive.

In commenting on the religion whose terms and traces linger in Diotima's teaching, Jane Ellen Harrison repeatedly urges that, if we are to look at the intellectual complexities that religion embodies and sustains, we must view it as something other than a tissue of lies. Ritual and belief, she proposes, should be examined as acts of social choice and volition and not simply as reflexes shaped by blind faith. Harrison's ghost is sighted in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, where "Fernham" represents Newnham, Harrison's college at Cambridge. "And then on the terrace, as if popping out to breathe the air, to glance at the garden, came a bent figure, formidable yet humble, with her great forehead and her shabby dress—could it be the famous scholar, could it be J—— H—— herself?" (17). Contested in her own time, and repudiated along with other "Cambridge ritualists" by later generations of classical scholars, Harrison is

experiencing a deserved revival. She converses comfortably with current thought concerning discourse, religion, and, to borrow Kristeva's title, desire in language (Caffrey; Kintz 118–19). Compare, for example, Harrison's notion of social collectivity and Diotima's teaching on Love as a discursive daimon to an ethics based in language that Kristeva calls "herethics", based not on death but on undeath, or love, itself based on the inevitable intersubjectivity of discourse" (Kintz 118). What if feeling, desire, trust, love, and pity are viewed not as mute beasts but as the very animating essence of discourse, and of discourse as the essence of truth (see Kinneavy)? This is the sophist Diotima's insight into discourse, love, and intersubjectivity. In stark contrast, much Western thought since Plato has emphasized the individual over the collective, the separated autonomous agent and speaker over the common voice, the rebel without a clue.

Virginia Woolf characterizes the irreducibly collective consciousness that is given voice in art in her assertion that "masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of a people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice" (69). Using a similar paradigm, she enjoins her listeners to write in order to resurrect Shakespeare's sister, Woolf's fictional (or is it?) representation of all the women who died mute in the theater of a common culture that permitted only male voices to speak in and for—or against—the group. "She lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh. . . . For my belief is that if we live another century or so—I am talking of the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals—. . . then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down" (Woolf 118). Ruth Benedict articulated similar challenges to Western notions of individualism, to received views of the natural and proper relationship between individual and society, and to Durkheim's (and later Maslow's) notion of the autonomous or "self-actualizing" individual (Benedict 1–56). Like Harrison and Woolf, Benedict remained resolutely interested in the social construction of individualism, and in the concept of the individual as a social construct.

The lines of thinking and inquiry shared by Harrison, Benedict, and Woolf in the 1920s have been revived in the recent emphasis given to collective and collaborative thinking and writing, to women's ways of knowing, and to the diversity of voices that come to the clearinghouses

of the classroom and the political arena. As was true in Plato's time, and expressing views first voiced (in writing) by him, our discussions of gender and culture and canon linger on the notion that dialogue and discourse, rhetoric and intersubjectivity, desire and language, are and yet are not the same for the one and the many. New modes evolve and emerge; some are imposed, others suppressed. The fictional and nonfictional Jane Ellen Harrison, glimpsed by the fictional and nonfictional Virginia Woolf now joins her in returning to save Athens—not from the plague as Diotima did, but from the fictionalization of women like Diotima—and to call for her return. Let us summon many Diotimas, joined perhaps by Shakespeare's sister and a Black Athena or two, to chasten the cults of heroic violence, to sustain and reclaim the common life within which any meaning and identity is formed, embodied by the discourses that have been emboldened by love.

NOTE

Early readings by Lisa Ede and Cheryl Glenn were helpful in initial revisions. For all remaining circuitousness I assume full responsibility. At many points my readings of Diotima have been informed by Martha Nussbaum's reading of the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* in *The Fragility of Goodness*. My discussions of early Greek religion lean heavily on Jane Ellen Harrison's *Themis* and have been checked against Walter Burkert's *Ancient Mystery Cults*. I thank Pamlyn Casto for pointing out the Athenaeus passages, and credit her substantial dissertation research on reports of Aspasia in antiquity as an important source in my discussion of Aspasia. Marjorie Curry Woods referred me to the passage from Xenophon.

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Reexamining *The Book of Margery Kempe:* A Rhetoric of Autobiography

Cheryl Glenn

Chaucer's Wife of Bath tells us,

Experience though noon auctoritee
Were in this world is right ynough for me
To speke of wo that is in mariage.

Because she was not a churchman, she had no authority to speak of marriage or of womanhood; because she was not a flesh-and-blood woman, she could tap only fictional experience. Powerful and compelling though they may be, the Wife of Bath and her tale reflect the interest of a man, Chaucer the artist. Neither Wife nor tale is the creation of a woman, and the Wife herself wishes "By God, [that] wommen hadde writen stories" (693).

Nearly fifty years later (1432–1436), a woman wrote a story of marriage and womanhood and religion. Margery Brunham Kempe (1373–ca. 1439) of Lynn, a cosmopolitan English town then called King's Lynn, created her self and her life story with her spiritual autobiography, *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Daughter of a prominent family, wife of a less prestigious burgess, and mother of fourteen children, Margery left her relatively comfortable life to answer God's call to weep (her "gift of tears") and to pray for the souls of her fellow Christians—not in a cell or convent, but throughout England, Europe, and the Holy Land. In old age, she dictated to scribes (to one in about 1431 and to the other in

1436) an autobiography that recounted the trials and triumphs of her pilgrimage in the world and of the spirit.

In *Writing a Woman's Life*, Carolyn Heilbrun tells us that “power is the ability to take one’s place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s part matter” (18). In this essay, I will argue that despite her lack of formal training, Margery Kempe was a skillful and powerful rhetorician, locating herself within the particular discourse of Franciscan affective piety.¹ Within that discourse, she self-consciously created and owned the story of her life, authored her *self*, recorded her spiritual development, and, most important, validated her life and her visions to her authorial audience (the hypothetical audience for whom she designed her text).

Margery did just what the great Cistercian and Franciscan writers had directed the devout to do: she loved Jesus in his humanity, attended the Virgin, and participated with all her emotions in the joy and grief of the Christian story. Her story, then, her autobiography, needed only to be transcribed by an amanuensis. As David Aers tells us in “The Making of Margery Kempe”: “She dictated what she considered the most significant experiences of her life in a work from which she hoped readers would derive ‘gret solas and comfort,’ witnessing the divine mercy and revelation she felt her life exemplified” (73).

A mystic² who communicates with God and who demonstrates typical late-medieval longing for the Passion—women mystics rallied around an all-important figure of Jesus the lover, the spouse, the teacher, the mother, but women mystics were especially attached to Jesus the sufferer—the lively and gregarious Margery opens her *Book* with the scene of her first visions, the life-threatening experience of her first childbed, the afterlife-threatening dealings with her confessor, and the appearance of Jesus:

When this creature was twenty years of age, . . . she was married to a worshipful burgess (of Lynne) and was with child within a short time, as nature would. And after she had conceived, she was belaboured with great accesses till the child was born and then, what with the labour she had in childing, and the sickness going before, she despaired of her life, weening she might not live. And then she sent for her ghostly father, for she had a thing on her conscience which she had never shewn before that time in all her life. . . .

And when she came to the point for to say that thing which she had so long concealed, her confessor was a little too hasty and began sharply to reprove her, before she had fully said her intent, and so she would no

more say for aught he might do. Anon, for the dread she had of damnation on the one side, and his sharp reproving of her on the other side, this creature went out of her mind and was wondrously vexed and laboured with spirits for half a year, eight weeks and odd days.

And in this time she saw, as she thought, devils opening their mouths all inflamed with burning waves of fire. . . . Also the devils cried upon her with great threatenings, and bade her that she should forsake Christendom, her faith, and deny her God. . . . And so she did. . . .

And when she had long been laboured in these and many other temptations, . . . Our Merciful Lord Jesus Christ, ever to be trusted, worshipped be His Name, never forsaking His servant in time of need, appeared to His creature who had forsaken Him, in the likeness of a man, most seemly, most beauteous and most amiable that ever might be seen with man's eye, clad in a mantle of purple silk, sitting upon her bedside, looking upon her with so blessed a face that she was strengthened in all her spirit, and said to her these words:—

“Daughter, why hast thou forsaken Me, and I forsook never thee?” . . . And anon this creature became calmed in her wits and reason, as well as ever she was before, . . . [and she] knew her friends and her household and all others that came to see how Our Lord Jesus Christ had wrought His grace in her. (Butler-Bowdon 1–3)

Her *Book* would lie neglected (but preserved) until 1934, when Hope Emily Allen identified and helped Sanford Brown Meech edit the unique manuscript, long the possession of the Butler-Bowdon estate (which modernized her text). And since the 1940 publication of Margery's *Book* by the Early English Text Society, this historical pilgrim has often been compared to Chaucer's Wife of Bath, her literary antecedent. It is true that both mobile, bourgeois women “hadde passed many a straunge strem” (*GenProl* 464); both travel without their spouses; both are outspoken, opinionated, and strong willed; and both speak frankly about their lives.

Margery Kempe, however, speaks to us on her own, not through a character created by Chaucer. She is the first woman to compose her life story in English, and that story is the earliest extant autobiography in English.³ Her female literary contemporaries were mostly erudite women, writing in Latin or French under the aegis of religious orders. Her male contemporaries (Chaucer, the Gawain poet, the mystery playwrights, Malory) immediately found the support of a public audience. But Margery gave voice to a largely silent and unsung force, the voice of the uneducated woman. In what is often a moving narration, she re-

veals herself to be a woman who could neither read nor write, dependent upon amanuenses to record her story. In fact, the manuscript begins with the priest's incipit, recounting his tribulations in attempting to revise the previous priest's transcription of Margery's text:

Then there was a priest for which this creature had great affection, and so she . . . brought him the [first transcription of the] book to read. The book was so "evil" written that he could discriminate little of it, for it was neither good English nor German, nor were the letters shaped nor formed as other letters were. Therefore, the priest truly believed that no man would ever read it, except by special blessing. . . . [But eventually] he read every word to this creature, she sometimes helping where there was any difficulty. (Meech and Allen 4–5; all modernizations from this edition are my own)

Naturally, any document from the Middle Ages is of historical interest, but *The Book of Margery Kempe* strikes interest above and beyond its place in that early vernacular prose and evangelical literature. Had it originally found a broad contemporary audience, the *Book* would have contributed to the widespread resumption of English as a written medium in the fifteenth century⁴ and might have played some small part in the drama of the English Reformation. But for us now, the book merits our attention not only because it may be the earliest extant, large-scale narrative written in English prose (verse was, of course, another matter) but also because it introduces artistic and rhetorical techniques unprecedented in its genre. Margery Kempe's self-disclosing, candid, direct view of contemporary life gives her text a verisimilitude rarely found in devotional or soul-saving literature. No English writer up to that time had committed to writing such an intimate, revealing, and human account of life and thoughts. In *The English Mystical Tradition*, David Knowles writes that Margery "would seem to be an early, if not the first, example in English prose literature of the skilful use of dramatically appropriate dialogue based on the substantial memory of what had taken place" (144). Perhaps only a woman (untrained in and unconscious of academic rhetorical and literary practices) would assert her *self* in this way. Perhaps only a woman would have and could have "written" this earliest extant English autobiography.

Like any autobiographer, Margery was convinced that her life was special, her life story valuable to readers distant in time and space. In service of that significance, then, she had to shape the raw material of

her inner and outer experience—spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and interpersonal—into a memorable narrative. And memorable it is, though it is neither predictably coherent nor conventionally chronological.

In the introduction to the modernized Butler-Bowdon edition of 1944, R. W. Chambers writes that *The Book of Margery Kempe* “may disappoint or even shock the reader” and warns us that we “must come to her not expecting too much” (xviii). He was the first of many scholars to discount her spirituality and consider her *Book* an anecdotal curiosity. One deterrent to taking her narrative seriously may have been that she begins her holy revelations postpartum, inviting many scholars to assume she was in the midst of a full-out postpartum depression. Such “hysteria” serves to remind scholars that childbirth had its origin in God’s curse against Eve (Knowles 146; Chambers xv–xxvi; Meech and Allen liv, lxx; Stone 35). And scholars continue to view Margery’s spirituality as hysterical. For instance, in the 1982 “Margery Kempe in Jerusalem: *Hysterica Compassio* in the Late Middle Ages,” Hope Phyllis Weissman, who takes Margery seriously, nonetheless tells us that “to diagnose Margery’s case as ‘hysteria’ need not be to trivialize her significance or reduce her *Book*’s value as cultural testimony” (202). Indeed, the *Book* provides valuable testimony to religious, cultural, commercial, and literary practices.

Like many of Margery’s contemporaries, then, her future scholarly audience has often judged her and her book to be incoherent, exaggerated piety, disregarding her circumstances, motivation, and intention. But Margery’s mysticism derives its impact from experience of feeling; she offers testimony, not logical proof. Her visions are in accord with the tenor of her personal faith: Jesus had singled her out among women to suffer, to preach (saving souls and improving morals), to receive his steadfast love, and to be saved.

The absence of chronology in Margery’s narrative seems to render it logically incoherent, a problem that not even her second scribe could rectify, as explained in this disclaimer:

This book is not written in order, every thing after the other as it is usually done, but like the matter came to the creature in mind when it should be written, for it was so long before it was written that she had forgotten the time and the order that things happened. And therefore she wrote nothing except what she knew for sure. (Meech and Allen 4–5)

Instead of being linear, *The Book of Margery Kempe* is cyclical and associational, but it is still a record of her spiritual development, the

stages exemplified by sickness, conversion, travel, evangelism, persecution, and divine intervention. By associating her own development with incidents in Christ's life, Margery blurs the distinction between her theology and her autobiography. Her narrative is loosely organized—is akin to the homily in structure but to the sermon in theme—yet she effectively marshals the information within each true-to-life, self-contained vignette, like the best of fiction writers. She mingles homely, even commonplace events with rather self-satisfied descriptions of her great devotion, her intimacy with Jesus, and the gradual routing of those who oppose or mock her (opposition, mocking, and routing are practices consistent not only with Jesus' life but with saints' lives as well).

After Jesus's initial appearance to her, which restored her health, Margery returns to her vain, proud, and superficially religious ways. Only after two business failures is she humbled enough to turn wholly to God. The circumstances of her conversion serve as a morality tale for what Peter Rabinowitz would call her "authorial audience,"⁵ for her visions led eventually to self-understanding, and to a move from fearful sinner to favorite child of God:

When this creature had thus graciously come again to her mind, she thought that she was bound to God and that she would be His servant. Nevertheless, she would not leave her pride or her pompous array. . . . Yet she knew full well that men said of her full much villainy. . . . She had full great envy of her neighbours. . . . All her desire was to be worshipped by the people. She would not take heed of any chastisement, nor be content with the goods that God had sent her, as her husband was, but ever desired more. . . .

Then for pure covetousness, and to maintain her pride, she began to brew, and was one of the greatest brewers . . . for three years or four, till she lost much money. . . . Then this creature thought how God had punished her aforetime—and she could not take heed—and now again, by the loss of her goods. Then she left and brewed no more. . . .

Yet she left not the world altogether, for she now bethought herself a new housewifery. She had a horse-mill. . . . [But the hired man simply could not make either of his horses pull, so he left her service.] Anon, it was noised about the town . . . that neither man nor beast would serve the said creature. . . .

Then this creature, seeing all these adversities coming on every side, thought they were the scourges of Our Lord that would chastise her for her sin. Then she asked God's mercy, and forsook her pride, her covetousness, and the desire that she had for the worship of the world, and

did great bodily penance, and began to enter the way of everlasting life as shall be told hereafter. (3–5)

“This creature,” as Margery consistently styles herself,⁶ projects a sense of radical dependency on God for her ongoing creation, a projection grounded in the topos of humility. Yet this devout/arrogant, humble/forceful, feverish/submissive complex Christian actually creates herself, a complicated and sometimes contradictory—“real”—self. Hence, female spirituality, selfhood, and authorship converge in her work, in a sequential narrative form that sanctions her words and actions. It is this convergence, the projected ethos that subsumes her vernacular evangelical prose, that marks Margery’s contribution to rhetorical theory.

In Wayne Booth’s term, Margery’s “implied author,” her implied version of herself, shapes the narration and selects the events to be used to present a carefully wrought ethos.⁷ From the outset, the ethos Margery introduces is her only means of self-preservation, both within the written text and within the text of her life. Margery-the-actual-(flesh-and-blood)-author creates Margery-the-implied-author (a persona that dictates to the scribe), who creates Margery-the-character (this “creature”). Hence, Margery Kempe is preserved.

The historical Margery, the actual composer of the text, employs what has come to be known in theoretical circles as “dialogism,” a conversation among conflicting intentions, values, claims, opinions—a conversation among her selves. Margery Kempe creates a heteroglossic self,⁸ stratified by the voices of the implied author, the third-person narrator, and the character—three Margerys in all. Thus, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, presented as nonfiction, implements highly sophisticated fictional techniques: an implied author, a narrator, and the author-as-character.

What is most impressive—amazing, in fact—about this medieval fictionalized nonfiction is the double effect. Margery’s use of “instabilities” and “tensions”⁹ among the situations and voices in her *Book* leads to two results. First, the implied author evokes a sympathetic response in the authorial audience (those whom the author wants to read and understand her text)¹⁰ for the historical Margery, who longs for confirmation of her mystic status. Second, the narrator (who was created by the implied author) reveals neither sympathy nor admiration for Margery-the-character, “this creature.” Hence, the response to Margery by the narrative audience (readers who agree to believe the narrator and text as real) duplicates that of the characters in the story: both her narrative

audience and the characters within her story (the narrative audience) find Margery's single-minded moralizing and constant interference annoying, if not harassing. Such a negative response seems perfectly reasonable given the narrative line. And the implied author, the Margery who dictates her memoirs, ultimately engineers both responses, positive and negative, to a version of her self.

The following scene between Margery and her husband exemplifies the implied author's rhetorical technique; the scene strikes a sympathetic chord in the authorial audience and dissonance in the narrative and immediate audiences. This scene also typifies the narrator's purposeful use of gossipy anecdotes and fresh dialogue, a striking effect strengthened by her natural and homely figurative language. Margery spends many years of her marriage trying to dissuade her husband from their sexual relationship, and her account of her ultimate success is engaging and homespun:

It befell on a Friday on Midsummer Eve in right hot weather, as this creature was coming from York-ward carrying a bottle with beer in her hand, and her husband a cake in his bosom, that he asked his wife this question:—

“Margery, if there came a man with a sword, who would strike off my head, unless I should commune naturally with you as I have done before, tell me on your conscience—for ye say ye will not lie—whether ye would suffer my head to be smitten off, or whether ye would suffer me to meddle with you again, as I did at one time?”

“Alas, sir,” said she, “why raise this matter, when we have been chaste these eight weeks?”

“For I will know the truth of your heart.”

And then she said with great sorrow:—“Forsooth, I would rather see you being slain, than that we should turn again to our uncleanness.”

And he replied:—“Ye are no good wife.” (Butler-Bowdon 16)

The implied author commands Margery-the-character's native tongue for use in her own self-definition and self-defense. Although the implied author is doing the commanding, ensuring that the narrator give Margery-the-character a believable “voice,” the narrator is telling the story and the character is doing her own speaking. Yet all this commanding belongs to the flesh-and-blood author, the historical Margery, the artist. The rhetorical style (including tone and voice) is perfectly matched to the implied author's aim: to impress upon her readers (the authorial and narrative audiences) her chastity, a form of spiritual ex-

pression that offers psychic freedom. After all, Margery-the-character's witness to God's love (her contrition and compassion) earned her spiritual graces designed to recover and publicly validate her virginal purity, the most valuable of all God's gifts. The implied author is taking full advantage of the opportunity to justify "this creature's" behavior, re-making, re-memorizing, and re-creating her life to her readers, her authorial audience.¹¹

Yet this created Margery seems to have no good sense of immediate audience (the other characters within her story), for her accounts are replete with her offensive behavior at home and abroad. Not having taken a vow of silence, Margery-the-character reproves even the highest church officials for what she considers moral lapses (want of moral courage or shirking responsibility).¹² She also preaches to people wherever she finds them. Her absolute certainty of her own moral and spiritual superiority, her dizzying intimacy with Jesus, her inconceivable apprenticeship as a saint, characteristics that fuse into a formidable and flamboyant self-glorification, annoy her immediate and narrative audiences. In fact, her fellow Christians taunt, harass, molest, and abandon her; she is an especially easy target for their derision for traveling without the protection of her husband.

Her incessant religious harangues, her moralizing, and her sobbing fits infuriate nearly everyone she meets, especially those on pilgrimage:

They were most displeased because she wept so much and spoke always of the love and goodness of Our Lord, as much at the table as in other places. And therefore shamefully they reproved her, and severely chid her, and said they would not put up with her as her husband did when she was at home and in England.

And she answered meekly to them:—"Our Lord, Almighty God, is as great a Lord here as in England, and as good cause have I to love Him here as there, blessed may He be."

At these words, her fellowship was angrier than before, and their wrath and unkindness to this creature was a matter of great grief, for they were help right good men and she desired greatly their love, if she might have it to the pleasure of God.

And then she said to one of them specially:—"Ye cause me much shame and great grievance."

He answered her anon:—"I pray God that the devil's death may overcome thee soon and quickly," and many more cruel words he said to her than she could repeat. . . . They did her much shame and much reproof. . . . They cut her gown so short that it came but little beneath her

knee, and made her put on a white canvas, in the manner of a sacken apron, so that she should be held a fool and the people should not make much of her or hold her in repute. They made her sit at the table's end, below all the others, so that she ill durst speak a word.

And, notwithstanding all their malice, she was held in more worship than they were, wherever they went. (Butler-Bowdon 51–52)

In her witness to God's love, Margery-the-character's retrospective narrative answers her critics and explains apparent mistakes and inconsistencies, but in no way does her account, especially of her degrading attire, mitigate the response of the other characters.

R. W. Chambers's observation can be seen to illustrate Margery's rhetorical purposefulness as she creates herself as a character:

Things might have been easier for Margery, if she had been a recluse [an anchorite or nun]. At large in the world, people found her a nuisance. In a cell, where people could come and speak to her when they wished, and depart when they liked, Margery would have fitted better into medieval life. But that she should wander about, rehearsing tales of scripture, was felt to be irregular. (xix)

For instance, when her visions transport her to the scene of Jesus's interment,¹³ Margery treats the mournful Blessed Mother as though she were just another Christian to be helped, giving Mary unsolicited care and advice:

Then the creature thought, when Our Lady was come home and was laid down on a bed, that she made for Our Lady a good caudle [a warm, medicinal beverage], and brought it her to comfort her, and then Our Lady said unto her:—

“Take it away, daughter. Give me no food, but mine own Child.” The creature answered:—

“Ah! Blessed Lady, ye must needs comfort yourself and cease of your sorrowing.” (Butler-Bowdon 178)

But such behavior—appreciated or not—establishes Margery-the-character's ethos; she wants to present herself and be recognized as a religious woman, one singled out above all other humans, to be saved at once (without the pains of Purgatory). J. H. Leuba explains her attitude:

Certain aspects of the behavior of the great mystics, especially their profession of humility and obedience and their apparent readiness to suffer anything, however offensive, has led to an altogether wrong interpretation of their character. They have been assimilated with the humble and purposeless. This is a misunderstanding; they are, on the contrary, determined not only to be worthwhile but also to be recognized as such; they will not tolerate the “inferiority complex.” Their light shall not shine under a bushel. They show the firmest purpose and accept no influence that does not lead where they want to go. (120–21)

Far from being an incoherent hysteric, Margery-the-*implied-author* is, instead, a careful artist, fashioning a character who behaves consistently within a well-established social and spiritual context.

In addition to her good works and witnessing, Margery-the-*character* is also intensely concerned with her weeping fits and her clothes (an interest that makes the sacken apron episode even more humiliating). All these concerns emerge as a feature of female authorial consciousness. The implied author determines what best reflects Margery-the-*character's* ethos¹⁴ in terms of her successful evangelizing. In the Holy Land, Margery receives her “gift of tears”—a gift of the spirit that is not always comfortable or convenient. Margery copiously manifests her gift of tears every day for ten years and at less frequent intervals over an additional fifteen, whenever reminded of Jesus or the Passion. The implied author skillfully creates a devout weeping spell in such a way that the authorial audience sympathizes with Margery, delights in her eccentricity, all the while understanding why Margery-the-*character* vexes the characters within the immediate audience:

On the Purification Day, or otherwise Candlemas Day, when the said creature beheld the people with their candles in church, her mind was ravished into beholding Our Lady offering her Blissful Son to the priest. . . . She was then so comforted by the contemplation in her soul, that she . . . might full evil bear up her own candle to the priest, . . . but went wavering on each side like a drunken woman, weeping and sobbing so sore, that scarcely could she stand on her feet, for the fervour of love and devotion that God put into her soul through high contemplation.

And sometimes she could not stand, but fell down among the people and cried full loud, so that many men wondered and marvelled what ailed her; for the fervour of the spirit was so great that the body failed, and might not endure it. (Butler-Bowdon 181–82)

Margery's "gift of tears" was a physical token of her special sanctity, akin to Saint Francis's gift of the stigmata. Thus, Franciscan ethos and pathos color her dramatic piety, her love of God, in an unqualified, unconditional, and fearless manner.

Although Margery-the-flesh-and-blood-author, Margery-the-implicit-author, and Margery-the-character all wanted to live chastely with her husband, Margery was, indeed, a married woman. Her decision to dress as the bride of Christ, completely in white wool, and to wear a gold ring engraved *Iesu est amor meus* was an effrontery to the townspeople, her immediate audience. White clothes could indicate either chaste living or salvation without time in Purgatory,¹⁵ and Margery wore them for both reasons. The townspeople, however, were offended by her attire, and instead of accepting her sainthood, they often accused her of being a hypocrite. In Lambeth, for instance, a townswoman came forward to curse Margery: "I would bring a faggot to burn thee with. It is a pity thou art alive" (Butler-Bowdon 28). Since Margery had a newborn son and a living husband, her behavior was considered anomalous, if not scandalous.

Several passages underscore Margery's recurring concern for her attire as a reflection of her spiritual status. In the following passage, she has just been abandoned by her irritated fellow pilgrims, who refuse to travel with this overbearing evangelist; providentially, Jesus appears to the frightened Margery with advice:

"Dread thee not, daughter, for I will provide for thee right well, and bring thee in safety to Rome and home again into England without any villainy to thy body, if thou wilt be clad in white clothes, and wear them as I said to thee whilst thou were in England."

Then this creature, being in great grief and distress, answered Him in her mind:—"If Thou be the spirit of God that speaketh in my soul, and I may prove Thee for a true spirit with the counsel of the Church, I shall obey Thy will; and if Thou bringest me to Rome in safety, I shall wear white clothes, though all the world should wonder at me, for Thy love." (Butler-Bowdon 64)

Although the authorial audience can be amused or even impressed by Margery's willingness to bargain with Jesus with regard to her costume, rarely does her narrative support her spiritual confidence, her self-proclaimed holiness, or her costumes, nor does her immediate audience appreciate them. In the opening chapters, the young, proud, attention-seeking Margery dresses in the gayest new fashion for the sole purpose of outshining the other merchants' wives.

And she knows full well that men said of her much villainy, for she wore gold pipes on her head, and her hoods, with the tippets, were slashed. Her cloaks were also slashed and laid with divers colours between the slashes, so that they should be the more staring to men's sight, and herself the more worshipped. (Butler-Bowdon 3)

Throughout her life, Margery-the-character offends many people with her choice of dress, a physical expression of her ethos: before her conversion, she is garishly stylish; after her conversion, she wears the powerfully symbolic white; and finally, when her white attire becomes too controversial, she resorts to the safer black. When a German priest commands her to wear black, she feels "that she pleased God with her obedience" (Butler-Bowdon 73). Margery-the-character's costume changes thus reflect her spiritual condition.

The immediate audience's reaction to Margery-the-character is most often perplexity and exasperation, depending on her behavior (leaving her husband and children for pilgrimage, insisting the pilgrimage conversation be limited to her pontification). Occasionally, this audience appreciates her "good works," her nursing and serving the poor and the sick, or her counseling the bereaved and insane. At the same time, the authorial audience, in response to the author's artistic design and intentions, consistently delights in the antics of Margery presented by the narrator and told by the implied author, and applauds her decisions. The authorial audience fully understands the negative reactions of the characters in the text, yet remains sympathetic to Margery-the-implied-author. This rhetorical technique of using a double ethos, one for the implied author and another for the character, is a major contribution to rhetorical theory—Margery Kempe's unique contribution.

Margery Kempe is one of the most important Englishwomen to participate in the medieval rhetorical tradition, although the rhetorical (male) tradition necessarily inscribes her *out*. She is not so much practicing rhetoric in its traditional sense as inscribing it in a *different* way. Although never before recognized by rhetorical scholars for their contributions to rhetoric, Margery's fifteenth-century writings have rightfully enjoyed special attention from scholars of other stripes who have been attracted to her ability to elaborate with considerable sophistication her theological convictions and practices. Margery Kempe represents a unique strain in the most important literary activity by women in the Middle Ages: the flowering of religious writing into the writing and dictation of mystical treatises. Our medieval literary foremothers, such as

Julian of Norwich, Hildegard von Bingen, and Margery, participated in the Continental mystic tradition, beginning with after-illness visions. This tradition of dramatic piety was able to provide women a socially acceptable and respected medium of religious expression and personal assertion, especially if they were attached to religious orders and thus educated in the intellectual tradition. Julian and Hildegard are regarded as valid mystics because they belong to this world of confined, virginal, and intellectual religious experience. A bourgeois laywoman, wife, and mother like Margery simply could not meet the traditional requirements of mysticism.

Mystics in any period, however, are vulnerable to charges of heresy and disobedience, because their direct communication with God bypasses the services and sacraments of the Church. Margery was especially vulnerable, not only because she was an outspoken woman and layperson without formal education, but also because she lived at a time of serious disruption in the Church at home and on the Continent. As Despres tells us:

Her spiritual independence in seeking the difficult balance between the active and contemplative lives . . . baffled her contemporaries and caused many to question her orthodoxy. . . . Both men and women remarked with hostility on the impropriety of Margery's wandering, as well as the presumptuousness of her teaching. A frustrated intolerance surfaced most frequently in the attitudes of her tormentors. Unable to "define" Margery's behavior by placing her in those roles appropriate for either religious women or laywomen, her contemporaries felt threatened by her. (87)

But we must understand that Margery's teaching, her blending of personal and scriptural history, was Franciscan in spirit and orthodox in its origins, and that her visions gave her a *public* language and a visible office in the world, despite her position as a woman.

The works of the female mystics¹⁶ spoke to religious communities and struck a chord in the developing popular piety, a piety seeking emotional and rational stimulation. Moreover, these works were accessible to the populace: works such as Margery's were generally written in the vernacular, and these writings were akin to the sermon, the central dramatic participatory event in Christian corporate life. The themes, structure, and didactic purpose of sermons would have been readily familiar to Margery, for the Church was her primary source of lifelong teaching

and comfort, a basic constituent of her worldly as well as “ghostly” (i.e., spiritual) life, and an essential framework for her calling. But most important, the Church provided Margery with the language and with the opportunity to use it.

The fragmented nature of her autobiography may, indeed, demonstrate her ambiguous role as an effective Christian and layperson—especially in a society where her gender deprived her of the authority to teach or preach. But this fragmented story anticipates the conclusion of recent scholars: women’s autobiographies tend to be less linear, unified, and chronological than men’s autobiographies.¹⁷ Women’s autobiographies are often novelistic, women’s novels autobiographical. And because of the continual crossing of self and other, the continual conversation among the voices, women’s writings often blur the line between public and private—just as Margery’s writing does. Margery’s autobiography, her rhetoric, inscribes feminine conversation rather than masculine dialectic.

Although presented as nonfiction, Margery’s account implements highly sophisticated fictional techniques, in addition to dialogism. Hers is the timeless, quintessential woman’s story of irreducible and irreconcilable gendered-language limitations. Yet, in other ways, her story is a morality tale about asserting those language differences and seeking appropriate—though nontraditional and, hence, “feminine”—forms of fulfillment. Psychologist Carol Gilligan tells us that women often speak “in a different voice,” one concerned with creating and sustaining human connections (167–68). The conversational quality of Margery’s discourse depends on such connections: her discourse relies on others to come into existence, whether those *others* are scribes or those to whom she testifies.

Margery Kempe insisted on being recognized—and heard. Although she lacked the necessary language skills for writing her own story and had no guarantee that her story would ever reach an audience, this religious mystic was, nonetheless, determined to tell that story. She used her “inner voice” for knowing and then turned to so-called correct or public voices for composing and speaking. And in Margery’s case, as in the case of so many other women, the same mind can live in several voices.

This first English autobiographer provides us with a powerful example of successful double-voiced discourse, articulating her private, disenfranchised experience through the public discourse of religion. It is an inherently interesting text that is also a resounding response to reli-

gious instruction. Yet most remarkable of all is Margery Kempe's ability to introduce and balance a double ethos: she faithfully presents the annoying Margery character, but at the same time, she writes the life of the implied author with a disarming and utterly convincing sincerity. *The Book of Margery Kempe* not only redefines the rhetorical tradition to include such female works but also constitutes an innovative example of purposeful and persuasive feminine inscription.

NOTES

1. In "Franciscan Spirituality: Vision and the Authority of the Scripture," Denise Louise Despres writes, "The Franciscans encouraged the laity to meditate freely on the Gospels and to use their imaginations. They instructed penitents to mesh individual history with the sacred history of the Scripture, for only by experiencing life with Christ could the sinful fully understand the sympathy Christ had for the human condition, and the nature of the supreme sacrifice he willingly chose with love" (3).

Franciscan affective piety, then, emphasized fellowship with Jesus and individual participation, the distinctive elements being penitence, participation, and responsibility for the welfare of one's own soul. Despite twentieth-century suspicion with regard to Margery's spirituality, she was practicing within an established and respected fifteenth-century tradition of affective piety.

2. Mysticism is, among other things, an intellectual tradition that seeks to demonstrate the mind's kinship with spiritual realities; therefore the mystic's path did not exist separate and apart from the rest of life in the Middle Ages. In "Medieval Women Visionaries: Seven Stages to Power," Elizabeth Petroff writes that the medieval woman mystic

was representative of a sizeable group of medieval women [e.g., St. Brigid of Sweden (d. 1373), St. Catherine of Siena (d. 1380), St. Katherine of Sweden (d. 1391), Bl. Dorothea of Prussia (d. 1394), St. Frances of Rome (d. 1440)] with religious vocations, for whom their fantasies—their visions—were the signal to others that they were women of power. Visions were the necessary credentials for a medieval woman whose abilities and strengths demanded that she take an active role in the larger world. . . . Her power was used to improve the human condition and to encourage others in their paths of selfhood and union with the divine. (n.p., quoted in Lagorio 162)

Mysticism was not separate from medieval society and culture, but rather functioned effectively within them.

3. The first woman to write about herself (though she did not write her own life story) seems to have been anchoress and mystic Julian of Norwich (1343–1415), who also dictated to a scribe her *Revelations to Divine Love*, sometimes referred to as her *Book of Showings*. Dame Julian was a spectacular exception to the truth that Englishwomen in general did not write books.

4. According to Paul Szarmach, the writings of the women mystics play their part in the late medieval process commonly called “the triumph of the vernacular,” the growing use of the vernacular as a medium not only to “translate” the ideas of thinkers and scholars for the people but also to compose original works (14). Dame Julian and Margery were both from the Norfolk area, a region that seems to have led the way in the civic revival of English, having abandoned the official use of Latin and French.

5. In “Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences,” Rabinowitz deftly categorizes three kinds of audiences: (1) the *actual audience* or flesh-and-blood people who read the text; (2) the *authorial audience* or the hypothetical audience for whom the author designs the text; and (3) the *narrative audience* or the person each flesh-and-blood reader must pretend to be in order to believe the text is real and to respond appropriately to the narrator. The author has no guaranteed control over the *actual audience*.

6. Margery’s consistent reference to herself as “this creature” is probably in deference to her Creator—a fairly common medieval usage. However, “this creature” also serves to remind us that the illiterate Margery didn’t actually write the book herself, that she was in constant collaboration with her scribes: she told her story to men who then wrote about her. By conflating autobiography with biography, she moves easily from author to character.

7. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth explains the “implied author” in these terms (this was before he adopted nonsexist language):

As he writes, [the author] creates not only an ideal, impersonal “man in general,” but an implied version of “himself” that is different than the implied authors we meet in other men’s works. To some . . . it has seemed, indeed, that they were discovering or creating themselves as they wrote. . . . [And] it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author’s more important effects. . . . Our reactions to his various commitments, secret or overt, will help determine our response to the work. . . .

The “implied author” chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices. (71, 74–75)

8. The *heteroglossic self* is Bakhtin’s term for one who has incorporated another’s speech in another language. Heteroglossia serves to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way, usually through an author’s character.

9. In *Reading People, Reading Plots*, James Phelan explains the dynamics of narrative progression in terms of “instabilities” and “tensions,” terms with Burkean resonances. Kenneth Burke tells us that form in literature is “an arousing and fulfillment of desires” (124) and that form is “‘correct’ in so far as it gratifies the needs it creates” (138). Phelan builds on that notion, explaining that narrative movement is shaped by “instabilities between characters (which are) created by situations, and complicated and resolved through actions” and by “tensions” among values, beliefs, opinions, knowledge, and expectations within the discourse itself (15). Phelan uses “instabilities” to designate unstable relations within the story and “tensions” to designate those in discourse. The *Book of Margery Kempe* manifests both.

10. The authorial audience is, of course, made up of flesh-and-blood readers, the actual audience; however, not every reader will want to be able to join the author's hypothetical audience.

11. In his introduction to the Butler-Bowdon edition, R. W. Chambers tells us that the novelty of Margery's book lies in the fact that we are not dealing with the revelations of a recluse, but rather with the life of a religious enthusiast remaining in the world. Thus, the interest of her book is twofold—Margery herself, and her relations to her contemporaries (xix).

12. It is important to note that although these same Church officials may have questioned her behavior, none of them refuted her doctrine or denied her persistent petitions. She was eventually granted clerical permission to live apart from her husband, wear white clothes, go on pilgrimage, and receive weekly communion; in other words, to live the life God commanded and that she wanted for herself.

13. Franciscan participatory meditation requires the penitent to envision or re-create scriptural events. These consciously embellished scenes, then, are a source of solace and affirmation.

14. And always in the balance is the relationship of the implied author's ethos to the ethos of Margery-the-character.

15. As Margery "lay in contemplation for weeping," Jesus came to her and said: "I have promised thee that thou shouldst have no other Purgatory than the slander and speech of the world" (Butler-Bowden 41).

16. Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love* and Hildegard's *Know the Ways* and *Book of Divine Works* were some of the best-known works of this kind.

17. Consider the autobiographical works of Adrienne Rich, Mary McCarthy, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Carolyn Heilbrun.

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Christine de Pisan and *The Treasure of the City of Ladies:* A Medieval Rhetorician and Her Rhetoric

Jenny R. Redfern

May all the feminine college and their devout community be apprised of the sermons and lessons of wisdom. First of all to the queens, princesses and great ladies, and then on down the social scale we will chant our doctrine to the other ladies and maidens and all classes of women, so that the syllabus of our school may be valued.

—Prologue to *The Treasure of The City of Ladies* (1405)

Almost five hundred years ago, Christine de Pisan addressed the “community” of women in medieval society on matters of honor and persuasive discourse. Her stated objective was to instruct them in the means of achieving virtue. Her lessons and vignettes, she believed, would demonstrate the humility, diligence, and moral rectitude of which all women were capable. Duly educated, Christine’s “feminine college” would become worthy residents of the glorious City of Ladies, her allegorical refuge for women whose good lives refuted stereotypes of weakness and immorality (*Book*). The vehicle for her address is *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (hereafter referred to as *The Treasure*), a syllabus that derived its power from her own experience. Christine’s life was a model for the strategy and mother-wit that women needed to navigate the perils of a society often hostile to their gender.

A rhetoric for women and a literary artifact of early fifteenth-century France, *The Treasure* reflects both the late medieval and early Renais-

sance characteristics of that transitional period. For example, in the first portion of *The Treasure*, Christine draws on Augustine and various other saints for advice on how the noble lady may achieve a love of God; this strategy echoes the style and concern of medieval scholastics. Yet she also refers to Seneca's advice to speak kindly to one's subjects, an indication that she and her audience were reawakening to classical humanist ideas (*Treasure* 48–49). On one level, *The Treasure* belongs to the genre of didactic works, which advised the medieval woman on her obligations as daughter and wife. On another, however, it encourages the development of individual women's minds. It thus breaks with medieval scholasticism by promoting the Renaissance acquisition of secular knowledge as well as divine grace and also by promoting such activity for women.

The Treasure of the City of Ladies merits inspection by anyone looking for evidence of women's lost rhetoric. Within carefully ordered chapters, Christine instructs the "feminine college" in the lessons they must follow to achieve both the good life and the good afterlife. She speaks through the allegorical figures of God's daughters—Reason, Rectitude, and Justice—who represent the Three Virtues most important to women's success. Through the secular examples of these Virtues, Christine directs all women to discover meaning and achieve worthy acts in their lives. Invested with the Virtues' divine authority, Christine continues the work she began in *The Book of the City of Ladies*, in which she and the Virtues constructed an imaginary city from the biographies of virtuous women. Her objective was to counteract the slander of the female sex so prominent in texts of the time. *The Treasure* prepares women of the age for residence in this sanctuary. By legitimizing women's words, Christine's advice affirms women's worthiness in an androcentric world. Although she neither calls herself a rhetorician nor calls *The Treasure* a rhetoric, her instruction has the potential to empower women's speech acts in both public and private matters. Her most important lesson is that women's success depends on their ability to manage and mediate by speaking and writing effectively.

I

Christine de Pisan's prolific poetry and prose, forty-one known pieces written over a career of at least thirty years (1399–1429), earned her fame as Europe's first professional woman writer. During her lifetime, Christine achieved such credibility as an author that royalty commissioned her prose and intellectual contemporaries copied her manuscripts

into their libraries. After her death (ca. 1430) and during the bloom of the Renaissance, many authors acknowledged her intellectual influence and borrowed from her work (Yenal). Her writings remained popular, and eighteen manuscript editions of *The Book of the Three Virtues*, or *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, still exist (Willard, "Three Virtues").¹ Portuguese and Dutch editions of *The Treasure* date from the fifteenth century, and French copies were still being printed in 1536. Its precursor, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, was translated into English in 1520 and published in English by H. Pepwell in 1521 (Willard, "Three Virtues").

On the whole, Christine's work struck a responsive chord in a culture beginning to rediscover the value of classical philosophy and humanistic ideals. Her outspoken defense of women, however, was an anomaly in its time. Although it fascinates modern feminists, Christine was not an advocate of change in the social and gender hierarchies. Rather, Christine's vindication of womanhood derived from her personal struggle to avoid the penury of widowhood. Her activism resulted from her literary self-education, part of her effort to prepare for a legitimate trade. In that pursuit, her encounters with popular misogynist texts—Ovid's *Art of Love*, Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose*, and particularly Matheolus's *Lamentations*—drove her first to despair of both womankind and her own femininity:

All philosophers and poets and . . . orators . . . concur in one conclusion: that the behavior of women is inclined to and full of every vice. . . . I could hardly find a book on morals where, even before I had read it in its entirety, I did not find . . . certain sections attacking women, no matter who the author was. . . . And I finally decided that God formed a vile creature when He made woman. . . . Great unhappiness and sadness welled up in my heart, for I detested myself and the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities in nature. (*Book 4–5*)

As long as she accepted the "authorities'" perverted sense of the feminine, she was unable to help herself.

Soon, though, her "great love of investigating the truth through long and continual study" impelled her to speak out about "those outrageous villains who have assailed [women] with various weapons" (*Book 10*). Her readings of ancient history and her commonsense grasp of women's worth informed her arguments; in fact, Christine had earlier entered the debate on courtly love as a female rhetor on behalf of women (Ward). Some popular works (such as Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*) sketched

the lives of both mythical and historical heroines, and her family's association with the French nobility had acquainted her with several strong female figures. These resources gave her the materials with which to publicly refute woman-hating stories. As a result of her enculturation, Christine did not argue for equality with men, but rather for increased respect for the image of womanhood and for individual women within the existing social order.

As she explains in part of *The Vision of Christine* (1405), the profession of public didact and rhetor did not occur naturally to this woman, who had been taught to be only an obedient wife and mother. Born in Venice in 1364, Christine was the daughter of Tommaso di Benvenuto da Pizzano (Thomas de Pisan), a physician, professor of astrology, and Councillor of the Republic of Venice. Her mother, whose own name is never mentioned, was the daughter of Tommaso Mondini of Forli, and married Pizzano after he had studied with her father at the University of Bologna. Not long after Christine's birth, Thomas de Pisan accepted an appointment to the court of Charles V of France, as the king's astrologer, alchemist, and physician, disciplines commonly allied during the Middle Ages.

Christine benefited from her father's extensive education and intellectual connections. Although she would later complain in *The Changes of Fortune* (1400–1403) that her education was limited by custom, the autobiographical passages in *The Vision of Christine* indicate that she enjoyed leisurely reading and wished she had more time to read and write. Indeed, literacy had become more common in the Middle Ages than is generally recognized (Stock). Letters and autobiographies from as early as the eleventh century document that wives carried on extensive correspondence with Crusader husbands, while tradeswomen kept records of both business and private matters (Beard 248–54). Christine lived among the intellectual elite, and the open atmosphere of Charles V's court acquainted her with the rediscovered classics and humanism of the early Renaissance. She would fulfill her intellectual curiosity and claim her authority as a writer, however, only after she had been widowed as a young woman.

When she was fifteen, Christine's parents married her to Etienne du Castel, a royal secretary to the court. At that time court clerks and secretaries were exposed to the forefront of knowledge, educated in rhetoric and philosophy, exposed to the newest ideas, and entrusted with state and diplomatic correspondence. Christine was already literate in French and Italian, and it is likely that she learned Latin and some skills

in copying texts during her husband's tenure. Later, these abilities, augmented by the new intellectual climate, would literally save her from poverty.

Christine's marriage turned out to be affectionate and secure. With both her husband and her father well employed in the King's service, her family faced a prosperous future. Soon after the de Pisan-du Castel alliance, however, Charles V died and with the change in monarchy de Pisan's and du Castel's positions and salaries were reduced. Within a few years, both men died, leaving Christine as a grieving twenty-five-year-old woman, with three children, a niece, and her mother to support. She had no means of income and faced complicated lawsuits to recover salary due her husband.

In the autobiographical portion of her ballad *The Changes of Fortune* (1400–1403), Christine regarded this period as the turning point in her life, saying that her happiness and good fortune ended with her husband's death. In retrospect, she warned other widows of the unfair treatment awaiting them as socially disadvantaged women. Her *Vision of Christine* (1405) reveals that she, who had been "nurtured on the finer things of life," was completely unprepared to work to support her household (Petroff 338). She turned to a scholarly life of study and writing, partly because no other means of livelihood seemed open to her, partly because studying the classics consoled her grief, and partly because she had always wanted to be a scholar like her father and husband, but had not had the opportunity. As she explained it, "I had been naturally since birth inclined to study, [but] family affairs common to married folk took me away from such pursuits, and also the frequent bearing and care of children" (Petroff 338). Christine's connections to the French court probably gave her access to the royal library, to which Charles V had added vernacular translations of classical Greek and Latin texts on rhetoric and philosophy. Her self-education thus included history, science, and poetry from Greek and Roman authors as well as from contemporaries such as Dante and Boccaccio.

By 1393, five years after her husband's death, Christine was writing love ballads, which caught the attention of wealthy patrons. She was encouraged to write more and sell her work:

I made [the French nobility] a present of my new volumes; . . . they saw willingly and accepted with great pleasure. And the more I held to my unaccustomed image of a woman of letters, the more esteem came and

with it, dignity, so that, within a short time, my said books were discussed and circulated in various parts and countries. (Petroff 339)

By the end of the century, she was a popular author. By 1405, she had written “fifteen principal volumes, not counting other small ditties, which together fill about fifty quires of large format” (*Treasure* 19).

II

Christine’s growth as a rhetorician may have begun with the realization that her gender would cause her authority as a writer of serious prose to be called into question. Certainly she struggled to develop a style and ethos that would support a strong female perspective. Christine broke with the tradition of presenting learned texts in Latin, a language that for hundreds of years had been taught solely to men and that only unusually privileged women could read (Ong 113). Although her often prolix syntax mimics the multiple subordinate clauses of clerical Latin, most of her work is in the vernacular of the French court (Curnow 254).

Moreover, her lengthy allegorical poem, *Road of Long Study* (1402–1403), shows her stylistic debt to Dante. In his *Inferno*, Dante had credited his “long study” of Virgil for his decision to use the vernacular (*Book* xliii). Christine followed this lead, combining periodic Latinate syntax with French words and neologisms. By selecting the stylistic features she admired most from both classical and early Renaissance humanist authors, she created a unique vehicle for her lessons in morality and persuasion.

By the time Christine began to work on *The Book of the City of Ladies* and *The Treasure*, her self-perception and projected ethos had changed. Looking back on her early bereavement as the beginning of a new life, Christine asserted that at first she succeeded only because allegorical Fortune turned her into a man at the time of her loss, so that she would have the strength to fend for herself:

Then my mistress (Fortune) came toward me,
 Who takes joy from many.
 And touched me all over my body.
 I felt changed all over.
 My limbs were much stronger than before,
 Which felt strange,
 And the crying had stopped.
 I felt most astonished.

And my appearance was changed and strengthened,
 And my voice become deeper,
 And my body, harder and more agile.
 But the ring that Hymen had given me
 Fell from my finger,

Which troubled me, as indeed it should
 For I loved it dearly.

Now I will prove that
 I became a real man.

(*Le livre*, in Bornstein 12–13)

Such a visionary narrative represented the deliberate creation of a self that could cope with unanticipated crises, something that the real Christine had not been taught to do (Petroff 22). Her imagined transformation is both sexual and emotional, suggesting the uncommon strength required of her for survival. Viewed in retrospect, this imputed gender transformation was a major step toward developing her authority as a teacher and rhetorician.

Christine's portrayal of herself with stereotypical masculine traits also had a cultural, and somewhat prophetic, grounding. In the early fifth century, for example, Martianus Cappella's *Book of Rhetoric*, contained within *The Marriage of Mercury and Philology*, personified rhetoric as a powerful woman, carrying weapons and clothed in armor, "the very image of Jupiter, able herself to hurl his thunderbolts" (in Miller, Prosser, and Benson 3). This image of Rhetorica as a strong, armed woman was a familiar motif in medieval illustrations (Vickers 11).² In contrast, conventional medieval attitudes about women usually attributed the expected feminine qualities of tenderness, mercy, and compassion only to the Virgin Mary. Contemporary women were considered weak and less resilient than men, a characterization that Christine de Pisan used to an extent in her own early love ballads. By comparison, writers who praised a woman's strength usually credited her with some male qualities while ignoring the stereotyped feminine traits of frailty, lack of resolve, and inconsistency (Shahar 169). When she claimed that Fortune had made her a man, Christine used such characterizations to her advantage. Her "change" allowed her to move toward a womanliness that would be acceptable to both female and male audiences. Then, when she felt comfortable enough to claim that women could speak authoritatively for their own gender, she gave allegorical woman-figures the same strengths as

men. In each case, Christine claimed a privileged vantage point in her analysis of women's roles in their own society.

Christine's skillful use of persuasion and style derived both from her study of the classical philosophers, rhetoricians, and poets, and from her familiarity with medieval rules for eloquence. In her own writing, she occasionally referred to rhetoricians and to rhetorical eloquence as a goal of the accomplished speaker and writer. Sometimes these references allowed her to present herself as a legitimate participant in literary discourse. At other times, she mentioned rhetoric in artful apologies, denying her own eloquence while preparing to verbally demolish her opponent. In 1401, for example, de Pisan responds to Jean de Montreuil, who had written her a treatise defending the misogynist sentiments expressed in *The Romance of the Rose*. She begins by referring to her correspondent as an "expert in rhetoric" as compared to herself, "a woman ignorant of subtle understanding and agile sentiment" (Petroff 340). She goes on to thank him for his "small treatise composed in fine rhetoric and convincing arguments," a distinction that suggests she saw rhetoric as ornamentation and as separate from persuasive argument (Petroff 341). She continues her apology, belittling her own style as not having a pleasing arrangement and ornamentation, the marks of good rhetoric:

And however much I do not possess great knowledge nor am I schooled in the use of subtle styles of language (from which I might know how to arrange words pleasingly and in polished style and order to make my ideas shine forth), I will not allow to be said in any way whatsoever a vulgar opinion of my understanding, merely because I do not know how to express it in ornate well-ordered words. (Petroff 345)

Obviously, the elaborate apology is itself an example of the rhetorical strategy she claims not to possess. By writing against the grain of her meaning, Christine uses the rhetorical figure of antiphrasis, a term she defines later through the voice of the Virtue Reason in the opening chapter of *The Book of The City of Ladies* (7).

Christine demonstrated that she was an accomplished rhetorician, and was determined to capture her audience's attention and exercise the art of persuasion she had taught herself. In both *The Book of the City of Ladies* and *The Treasure*, her presentation of three allegorical women is similar to Boethius's rhetorical use of Lady Philosophy in his *Consolation*. The three Virtues allow Christine to display her facility with reasoned argument and her familiarity with both the classics and scriptural teach-

ings. Through Reason, she displays her knowledge of Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine and her facility with logical persuasion (*Book 7*). Through Rectitude, Christine exhorts honorable women “to say and uphold the truth” (*Book 12*). When she wants to rebut a common proverb that women should not speak or preach in public, Christine is reassured by Reason that “God endowed women with the faculty of speech” in complete good faith, so that even the news of Christ’s resurrection could be carried by a woman (*Book 28*). When she wants to demonstrate the bias against women in classical literature, she cites Virgil as “more praiseworthy” than Ovid or Cato, who attack the character of all women (*Book 24–25*). In *The Treasure*, she refers to Seneca (49), and to Solomon’s proverb on the persistent effect of good rhetoric, quoting “Proverbs in the twenty-fifth chapter: ‘By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone’ ” (*Treasure 51*).

More important than Christine’s familiarity with classic lessons on rhetoric, however, is her use of the allegorical Virtues to establish an authoritative feminine ethos. Her synthesis of experience and study had brought her to the conclusion that common stereotypes would not permit perception of women as credible sources of philosophy or social commentary. Her arguments on behalf of women might be discredited because of her sex. She had already risked such dismissal with her open attack on a popular ballad, *The Romance of the Rose*. Christine was the only woman who publicly and formally argued against the immorality popularized by *The Romance*. Her fame grew as she energetically defended women’s integrity, which she believed was maligned by this allegory of courtly love. *The Romance*, begun around 1230 by Guillaume de Lorris and finished by Jean de Meun around 1280, had great appeal in the Middle Ages. Its theme was the seduction of a lady—represented as a jealously guarded prize rose—by her lover. The poem defends three principles of courtly love much admired in medieval literature, even if they were not practical forces in people’s lives: that love is a wonderful kind of suffering; that the lover’s virtue increases through his devotion to the woman; and that love cannot exist between husband and wife because of the forceful nature of the marriage contract. Theologians and intellectuals debated *The Romance*’s promotion of questionable attitudes on love, morals, and women. In 1401, Christine argued that the allegory subverted public morality, extolled carnal acts, and incited licentious conduct, all the while purveying false notions of the true feminine character (Kelly 12).

She was supported by Jean Gerson, the chancellor of the University of Paris, against her main adversaries, Jean de Montreuil and the brothers Gontier and Pierre Col.³ Although *The Romance* remained popular, the public nature of the dispute yielded positive results for her career as a writer. First, it motivated her to refute other abusive, male-dominated literary treatments of women. Second, it established Christine's reputation as a female intellectual, a well-educated, outspoken woman who could argue effectively and defend her positions. And finally, it pointed to her character and credibility as a rhetor, important progress in the development of her ethos.

Participation in the debate developed Christine's self-confidence as an authoritative rhetor, to the point that she could argue with aplomb from a woman's perspective. Thus, she drew on Lady Reason as the source of logical argument in both of her influential treatises, *The City* and *The Treasure*. In *The City*, her description of Lady Reason reveals the persona of a woman who commands respect:

The famous lady spoke these words to me, in whose presence I do not know which one of my senses was more overwhelmed: my hearing from having listened to such worthy words or my sight from having seen her radiant beauty, her attire, her reverent comportment, and her most honored countenance. . . . She had so fierce a visage that whoever, no matter how daring, looked in her eyes would be afraid to commit a crime, for it seemed that she threatened criminals unceasingly. (8)

Here Christine was ready to rebut the "outrageous villains," and she no longer needed to rely on adopted male strength to do so. Instead, her feminine alter egos, the Ladies Reason, Rectitude, and Justice, would carry the arguments for their own gender.

These Ladies first appear to Christine as champions of womanly virtue. They lift her from despair over the misogyny of her times and set her to work on behalf of all women. As previously mentioned, Christine's rhetorical motivation for *The Book of the City of Ladies* and *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* derived in part from a chance reading of *The Lamentations of Matheolus* (ca. 1300). In his *Lamentations*, Matheolus describes in unsavory detail the wrongs that he believes women are guilty of perpetrating on men. In *The City*, Christine remembers that she had no desire to finish reading the harangue, but its subject matter continued to haunt her: here was yet another author who could write nothing but wicked and slanderous things about the general character and virtue of

women. Was it possible that woman had been created as a creature of less worth than man?

In response to Christine's despair, three crowned women appear before her and announce themselves as God's daughters. This constitutes the first chapter of *The City* (6–14). Their holy parentage and calm reasonableness present a feminine ethos of unquestionable authority. Through their voices, Christine can present what she sees as theological confirmation of women's virtue as well as affirmation of her own literary authority. Together, she and the Virtues create a forum to speak on issues of consequence to all women.

In *The City's* catalog of biographies, Christine affirms women's worth and selfhood within the rhetorical framework of the Three Virtues' answers to her questions. The epideictic effect of praising notable women imitates other medieval treatises written for women's edification, such as Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* (1355–1359) and Jean Le Fevre de Resson's 1371 *Livre de Leesce* (Curnow 126–27). Christine's text differs from these in that its movement between question and answer is presented from a completely female perspective. Only female voices, examples, and opinions provide evidence. Logical progression from one example to the next permits Christine to establish truths about women that contradict the negative stereotypes, or "stones," which she has identified in literature and popular myth. Each didactic story also represents a building block. The Virtues direct Christine's construction of a walled city of words into which they will invite all honorable women, to protect them from unjust verbal attack. Every stone she digs up and discards undermines another slander against women; every block of granite that she places on the walls reconstructs a story of virtuous feminine behavior.

In *The Treasure*, Christine de Pisan turns her attention from the persuasiveness of *The City's* role models to the persuasive effect of women's speech and action in contemporary life. In each chapter of *The Treasure*, Christine's advice reflects her concern about the inseparability of women's private and public lives. The medieval lifestyle of family-centered politics and commerce took precedence over notions of personal and family privacy. Particularly for women of the nobility and the upper social strata, the actions and speech of private life were never far removed from public discourse and intercourse. Castles and manors were both homes and public meeting places. The "princesses, empresses, queens, duchesses, and high-born ladies" to whom Christine dedicated Book 1 of *The Treasure* were constantly in the public eye. Their marriages, childbirths, and deaths were as interwoven with politics as were their fathers' and

husbands' declarations of war and peace (Beard 240–41). Given this reality, *The Treasure's* lessons in self-discipline and chastity were indeed prudent rather than priggish, as a modern audience might think. A princess's governance of her own behavior had more than personal consequences. If she did not defend her chastity before marriage and her honor afterward, her family could suffer politically, socially, and financially.

Christine de Pisan's dedication of *The Treasure* to Marguerite of Burgundy, then, evidences precisely such a concern for a young woman's vulnerable sexuality and potential influence. In 1404, the child's marriage to the Dauphin, Louis of Guyenne, was a political coup arranged by her father, John the Fearless (Willard, "Feminine" 99). It is not clear whether the father commissioned *The Treasure* to guide his daughter through the moral and political perils of the French court or whether Christine wrote it to educate Marguerite in particular and socially active women in general. Either way, the book's preoccupation with chastity and honor, spotless behavior and reasoned speech, reflects very real concern for women forced to live their private lives in public.

The Treasure's lecturing of women on such matters is not an extraordinary feature of the text, since other authors, including Boccaccio and the author of *Le Livre*, had also written treatises on the proper moral education of women. Instead, the most noteworthy feature of *The Treasure's* rhetoric is its authoritative female voice. The first nine chapters of Book 1 of *The Treasure* acknowledge the Church's power by speaking through daughters of a male deity, but these Virtues are informed by women's experience in medieval life and theology. When they warn the unnamed princess of the consequences of sloth, pride, avarice, and anger, they address her as "a simple little woman who has no strength, power or authority unless it is conferred on [her] by someone else" (43). This is not said as an insult, but rather as a profeminist warning for the princess to understand the social infrastructure of her own life before attempting to influence it.

The Three Virtues—Reason, Rectitude, and Justice—focus the Platonic concern for the otherworldly in the first nine chapters in Book 1 of *The Treasure*. The princess is admonished to avoid the deadly sins, in part because it is a reasonable, right, and just way to live in the here and now, but especially because a woman's first concern must be to "account to God, for her life in comparison to the life everlasting is only a short time" (47). This preparation for the path to heaven was probably a genuine reflection of Christine's training and faith, and a reflection of the

fact that medieval life could be brutally short. Threatened by war, plague, and septic childbirth, even a noblewoman had to be prepared to face death at any time.

The Virtues divide *The Treasure* into three major sections of advice, according with Christine's perceptions of three major divisions in the social hierarchy. Book 1 is addressed to princesses and other women of the nobility; Book 2 advises the women who serve those in Book 1; and Book 3 addresses every other sort of woman—wives of merchants, artisans, and laborers; widows, who are advised to remain single if they wish to regain control over their lives; young and old women; servants; virgins; prostitutes; peasants; and the poorest beggar. Book 1 is the longest of the three, not only because Christine believes that noblewomen have the most complex positions and responsibilities, but also because much of the same advice will apply to women in the other books (145).

In Book 1, Christine's directions for accomplishing good works in the active life include models of effective speech with which the good woman can achieve humility and charity, which are steps to the pious life:

The princess will . . . speak softly . . . greeting everyone with lowered eyes. She will greet people in words so humane and so sweet that they may be agreeable both to God and to the world; . . . charity . . . is not to be understood as helping another person only with money from your purse, but also with help and comfort by your speech and advice wherever the need arises. (47)

Her directions for sweet reasonableness may seem excessive to modern audiences, but they were subtle exercises in achieving control over potentially volatile social situations. Once Christine has "sufficiently described the teachings that the love and fear of God" give her noble audience in Book 1, her rhetoric turns to practical matters (55). She instructs all women in the means of determining the best course of action in the medieval mix of private and political life. At this point the worldly subordinates the eternal, and Reason, Rectitude, and Justice surrender the podium to a more earthly apparition, Worldly Prudence. Here Christine anthropomorphizes other virtues to teach feminine morality, and has Worldly Prudence introduce Sobriety and Chastity, the restraints a woman must exercise to achieve honor. Prudence, Sobriety, and Chastity form a solemn triumvirate, complementing the other trio of virtues. Christine's choice of earnest, temperate representatives is characteristic