

newsletter of the coalition of  
women scholars in the history  
of rhetoric and composition

# Peitho

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## message from the president

The Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition will hold its annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas, on Wednesday, March 24, 2004, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Please note the change in time; we will begin promptly at 7:00. The theme of our panel discussion for the first hour is "Alternative Histories Matter," featuring Brenda Brueggemann, Haivan Hoang, Gwendolyn Pough, Malea Powell, and Cindy Selfe. Consistent with the theme of the 2004 CCCC meeting, "Making Composition Matter: Students, Citizens, Institutions, Advocacy," these women will present research from their scholarship that helps to shift our current intellectual paradigms, to analyze current circumstances and practices, and to offer strategies for change in our research and pedagogy. As always, the second hour will offer small-group mentoring sessions.

At last year's meeting, I shared an idea with our group: "Each One Bring One." I would like to encourage all Coalition members to embrace this little expression. If each one of us brings one new visitor (and a potential new member) to our meetings, we can broaden scholarship, service, and interest in the exploration of the diversity of women's roles in the history of rhetoric and composition.

Joyce Irene Middleton  
St. John Fisher College



## essay

### **X-Files in the Archive** by Susan Miller, University of Utah

As I read the invitation to join this forum on archival research, I realized that this topic requires scrupulous attention to what the word "research" here implies. Any question about what archivism entails and how it has been experienced may be ambivalent about its view of research, at least insofar as queries about how one does archival research rarely specify what it is that one learns how to do. That is, when we make prior assumptions about what "archival research" is, we may erase many options and experiences that composition scholars haven't yet taken up. So beyond finding an archive and showing up—both of which are non-trivial accomplishments—doing archival research actually signifies little without further specification of its purposes.

For instance, archives can be perceived as at least two sorts of sources, and within those divisions, as many additional subsets of evidence for X, whatever X turns out to be. The two sorts of sources are themselves arbitrary categories, of course. But my experience—as both reader and archive researcher—has been that archives are either "where I will/do/did go to look for evidence *about* X" and "where I will/do/did go to look for evidence *of* X."

This distinction is not just a prepositional quibble. If I begin with a hypothesis, I already have an *about*, a topic about which I hope that an archive will at the least comment. In that case, I choose to use archives related not only to my topic but to my take on it, my explicit and tacit hypotheses. For instance, the copious Harvard University archives of student writing have been used to demonstrate the high workloads of early teachers of composition, one assumes to confirm a hypothesis that composition in the 1890's at Harvard was quite literally "day labor," both for the students who wrote assigned daily themes and for the teachers who read them. But other archives tell other stories of what too easily is seen as THE early teaching of writing in post-secondary settings. Were I attempting to show how early composition teaching was embedded in more general courses in literature and language/s, to provide evidence that teachers rarely wrote anything but kind encouragement and

chiding on student papers, and that girls wrote on topics as intriguing, or not, as the boys at Harvard later took up. I would look elsewhere, for instance in archives that conserve documents from private academies, which abounded in the earlier nineteenth century (Brickley). With equal certainty, I would find evidence for the tenor of this more diverse set of claims. Hypothesis-driven archival research of course also presents the possibility of finding evidence that may or may not confirm the hypothesis driving it. Unexpected finds may render an early interest irrelevant or transform my presupposition into another hypothesis all together. In this case, for instance, I might hypothesize that assumptions about the deficits in girls' schools and in their students' writing are themselves driven by later desires to privilege public mass education in a new, post-Civil War locus of "real" (nationalized) instruction.

I haven't yet undertaken hypothesis-driven archival research, and probably will not undertake it in composition studies, for a number of reasons. First, most of the historically-oriented hypotheses I might form can be verified or rejected outside archives, on the basis of arguments from examples and secondary sources. I might argue for the power of endorsements of public schooling to disable approval of alternative private education (a point I could not have thought of *before* I worked in archives) with information from many other sources: Walt Whitman's "Democratic Vistas" (1855; the prose preface to *Leaves of Grass*), which is a still-resonant call for the single-minded literary education needed to form a monolithic American character and is still a shock to one's pluralist system. Or I might argue on the basis of the implications of the date just after that Civil War (1869) when Massachusetts and Virginia simultaneously diverted sufficient funds to public education to begin mass American secondary schooling. And I might theorize that critiques of the education of upper-class academy and prep school students of either sex have hidden American class differences that have persistently excluded lower-class men from any sort of formal schooling and did so for centuries before mass education was at issue.

Of course these arguments could ultimately be verified, or overturned, by data in archives—the same documents and manuscripts that others like Michael Warner have used not just to refute this claim, but to make it seem unethical. But unless a relevant archive is already electronically available, unless it is close to a researcher's home base, unless it is well-enough catalogued to guide a researcher

directly to examples of assignments and student writing that are proofs for *one* perspective on this hypothesis, an archive is a difficult place to be. We may set aside the story of the Wisconsin Historical Society researcher who slowly developed a bad cough as she transcribed her great-aunt's diary record of her own slow death from tuberculosis. And Winifred Horner has clearly recovered from the asthma worsened by her work in rhetorical archives in an equally chilly setting in Scotland. But my memories of rising early and scooting around an unfamiliar city from various hotel rooms and friends' houses to be on the steps for the daily opening of the Virginia Historical Society and of timing trips to the bathroom and lunches against the numbers of pages I needed to copy or transcribe before a strict 5 p.m. closing each day, like recalling the absolute exhaustion that such intense concentration on spotty texts (really: *spotty*) produced—all these demands for relentless intensity, paid for by expensive travel and chunks of time out of regular routines, make me reluctant to look for archival evidence if other sources are at hand. Like aging, working in a distant archive is not for sissies.

I know that both the availability of alternative proofs and the inconveniences of unfamiliar and distant sites are relatively weak arguments against hypothesis-driven archival research. These circumstances shouldn't deter anyone from exploring this research venue, which is at least in my view the source of the most intense "ah ha's" of an academic sort available after necessarily resolute and isolated dissertation research. Perhaps it is that intensity and a return to childhood present-opening—the joyful moment of happy surprise—that makes me and others who have worked in archives recall this process with a dreamy look. In addition, of course, archives may provide the *only* proofs around already identified hypotheses—let's say a study of women's frontier diaries that hypothesizes that this genre is a sociable and formulaic composing based on many forms of rhetorical schooling, not a spontaneous outpouring of lonely expression. Nonetheless, I read such texts interpretatively, not as "hard data." I usually stay within a research model that relies on interpretative inferences drawn from hermeneutic rather than scientific methods. So if I already knew of a collection of frontier diaries, I wouldn't be thinking of those texts as results of archival delving. Their analysis would require undertaking some transcription, getting permission to cite them, and other processes required when using any extra-canonical primary source to be quoted extensively. That is, I would probably think of myself as using



genre analysis to test frequent historical assumptions, not in another imaginary of the archival researcher.

Again, I don't think of this distinction as a quibble, nor as evidence that I accept rigid, usually exclusionary categories to demarcate interesting texts. I analyzed Virginia commonplace books by accident, without a guiding hypothesis. I found their 350 catalogue cards on the day I was ending my first work in the Virginia Historical Society and begged, and paid, for them to be photocopied and sent to me in Utah. After 10 days of trying to answer the question "What did early Virginians write?" these cards were the only coherent corpus I had found that I thought might turn up plausible answers to that question. Of course I might instead have looked for various already-studied genres: correspondence, legal documents, speeches, sermons and other already-mapped categories in the Virginia Historical Society and elsewhere. I might have focused on women's writing, ignoring family and other interrelationships that produce texts that have been written by one person, but in most senses "composed" otherwise—by social situations, by divisions of labor, dictation, copying, and other methods of writing that moot sexual assignments of authorship ignore. All of these possible choices and many others would have embedded my work in already-established hypotheses and thus would have tacitly rewritten my research question: "What did early Americans write?"

Obviously, the tiny set of "all Virginia Historical Society commonplace books" takes little space in the category of early American writing, my first target. I had planned to take up the writing of aristocrats in Virginia, Lowell Mill workers in Massachusetts, nineteenth-century immigrants in Wisconsin, and Utah pioneers, to map "early America" more fully than the New England biases of writing studies and American histories of schooling do. But at my back, I recognized the cool breath of time. Unlike historians who assume that their original work will require enormous amounts of time in archives of many sorts, I would be thought a lolly-gagger were I to take ten years gathering sources for a book and another two or three to write it. Five years with indigenous writing was enough, in more than one sense. But my point for now is that my choice of a corpus came from a much more generalized curiosity, a space in which I had realized I had no hypotheses. My experiences teaching, in long-term study of basic and first-year writing courses and their history, and in publishing about what I thought was THE history of both

rhetoric and the writer and vernacular English curricula—nothing of my professional past had given me any idea of how to answer a question that none of this assertive work even took up: What did people write before there were college-level writing courses? We all know that early white America can be dated from 1607; we all know that the *Declaration of Independence* was written and signed by people who did not take college composition. But the issues my question about what people wrote raised for me—issues of class, gender, regionalism, and family controls on educational practices—these issues were not the preexisting reasons for my archival work.

Another way to say this is that I learned to avoid hypothesis-driven archival research precisely in the space of difference between received histories based on extant categories and my realizations that many writing practices are outside those histories, even now. It is that "outside" that defines for me what archival research in composition studies should focus on. And I can say this precisely because I learned from those commonplace books that all my prior hypotheses were at the least oblique to the texts I found. Yet I was glad of this dislocation because it affirmed (obviously not entirely by accident) my hope that a fully developed writing studies will emerge from our current, still early work of political model development.

That is, I remain convinced, even after thirty years of saying I am "in composition," that our field is so young as a field that it needs to emphasize descriptive research, even at the expense of excellent results from already-formed evaluative hypotheses. I admit I take this view on an analogy with Anglo-American literary study, which was certified as a field in the nineteenth-century politics of many sorts of colonialism, but then, after this early and political beginning, undertook the retrieval and editing of vernacular literary texts. Neither evaluative criticism nor, certainly, literary theory, could dominate literary study before a corpus of texts was described. As Nina Baym argues so forcefully in "Early Histories of American Literature: A Chapter in the Institution of New England," that canon was made available for teaching not on the basis of "merit" so much as according to the preferences of Houghton-Mifflin and other publishers who distributed literary collections and editions to the new public schools whose promotion was furthered by these texts. I think about our field along the lines of this admittedly determinist parallel to literary study because I have luckily had time and support for mutually

implicated teaching and research. That is, because I teach students to write, I undertake research that asks what writing has meant historically and means now as a theorized social action. And because I am interested in what writing has done and does socially, I teach as directly as I can the elements of "how to write." But the interplay of these preoccupations became clear only as I innocently told research librarian Frances Pollard at the Virginia Historical Society, "I'm interested in writing," and she responded, tellingly, with "We have a lot of that here; could you be a little more precise?" That exchange summarizes all I've shared here: learning to be precise about what I mean by "writing" only emerges after I form unanswered questions about exactly what writing has meant in the specific and purposeful events we still have not catalogued, those that local and other archives allow us to see.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Warner says such education sites are "like tea drinking, part of a symbolic culture of regulated luxury" (27).

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## Dialoguing with *Rhetorica*

by Jane Donawerth and Lisa Zimmerelli  
University of Maryland

When Susan Jarratt and Susan Romano invited Jane Donawerth to contribute her reflections on archival research and mentorship, Jane asked graduate student Lisa Zimmerelli to also contribute. In this essay, we share our perspectives on archival research on women in a spirit of collaborative pedagogy.

Archival research in women's rhetoric, we agreed, involves a commitment to feminist principles asserting that recovering lost voices increases our historical understanding. The feminist transformation of rhetorical history, relatively recent compared to that of literary and historical studies, began in the 1970s. As recently as 1992, Patricia Bizzell urged all scholars in rhetoric to become resisting readers of the classical tradition, to look for work by women similar to the canonical rhetoric of men, and to revise our understanding of rhetoric to include communicative practices that women used and taught. Patricia Sullivan further explained the necessity of "identifying the androcentrism of the academy, . . . uncovering the gendered nature of . . . written discourses, . . . and learning . . . how women organize and express knowledge . . . and . . . make meaning in a world in which they are differentially situated as subjects" (40). Transforming rhetorical history thus involves both our research and how we see ourselves situated in the academy.

Feminist archival research demands that we not only find lost women of the past but also become conscious of our positionality in relation to their positionality. Such goals consequently involve a problem of definition. We accept Linda Nicholson's argument that feminists must forsake a foundationalism assuming women are united by biological identity underneath gender. Urging scholars to situate sex/gender in a cultural and historical context, Nicholson suggests that sex is just as socially constructed as gender. Thus, when we address "women" rhetors, "women" is a loaded signifier that we must continually deconstruct. Similarly, because we are not a single researcher, we must consider our intentions in exploring women's rhetorical practices. As Gesa Kirsch reminds us, we must be motivated by concerns for women, not just interest in women as research objects, asking ourselves whose interests are served by a research project (x, 1, 3).

This essay is such an exercise in self-reflexivity—an exploration of mental preparation



for conducting archival research. We wrote the following sections on our personal experiences separately but interweave them because similar principles undergird our experiences.

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**Jane:** To begin research on women and rhetoric, we need to trust that what we are told is *not* there, *is* there. I began research in this field in 1984 by asking graduate students to find the first female rhetorical theorist before 1900, thinking that they would find none until the twentieth century—Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca or Louise Rosenblatt. But my students found Aspasia and Pan Chao and the next year discovered Mary Astell and Margaret Fell. Asking my students to share research benefited both students and teacher: Students would rather do the real work of discovery than the make-work of assignments.

**Lisa:** Two years ago, when Jane Donawerth asked my seminar to “do” archival research, I had an image of searching among rows of dusty books in a library basement for that one text waiting to be discovered. I have encountered this scenario only once; the more difficult task is developing the stamina and confidence to continue on a project despite roadblocks. The graduate student’s schedule is not exactly conducive to archival research. We are conditioned to conceptualize projects in semester blocks of time: identify topic, conduct research, write, turn-in. A “final” product receives a “final” grade. The real process of archival research is nothing like this. For Jane’s class, I discovered tracts defending women’s preaching by Catherine Booth, co-founder of the Salvation Army. That semester, I could make only a scant comparison; thankfully, the following semester I was able to continue research, return to my previous paper, and revise. Archival research is thus a multi-layered process: One continually returns to original texts, finds other texts, supports conclusions with secondary research, critiques these secondary texts, and sometimes starts anew.

**Jane:** I have discovered that you need to accept the gift that *Rhetorica* hands you, even if it is not what you expected. While researching women’s utopian fiction, I reasoned that Margaret Cavendish, author of *Blazing World*, might have written another as yet undiscovered utopia. At the Folger Shakespeare Library I opened the leather-bound folio of *The Worlds Olio*, hoping to find it. Instead, I found an idiosyncratic, philosophical encyclopedia with sections on eloquence, wit, and conversation.

**Lisa:** Recently, I have found that what you do with the gift that *Rhetorica* hands you can also be a surprise. After working on Catherine Booth’s defenses of women’s preaching for two years, I shifted focus while writing a seminar paper. Re-reading Fell, Palmer, and Willard—Protestant female speakers—I was trying to insert Booth into a tradition of women’s preaching. I kept coming back to Willard; in light of the similarities between Palmer and Booth, Willard’s rhetoric seemed more radical to me, and I rewrote my paper to investigate the raced, gendered, and classed political agenda behind Willard’s rhetoric.

**Jane:** Our society makes it difficult for women to do archival research. Because our roles often include the bulk of child care and housework, you must seize opportunities. When my toddler-aged children and I visited my parents in Ohio, I always scheduled one day for my parents to enjoy grandchildren so that I might drive two hours to Wilberforce to read the privately-printed books and diary manuscripts of Hallie Quinn Brown at Central State University. I used the material immediately in courses, but it was ten years before it saw print in *Rhetorical Theory by Women before 1900: An Anthology*. I’m still working on an essay on Brown’s diaries; it wasn’t until I found the right theoretical frame—Deborah Brandt’s work on migrating literacy—that I realized what the diaries were telling me. Similarly, when Carole Levin and Joy Ritchie invited me to lecture at the University of Nebraska, I photocopied sections from the University of Nebraska’s volume, Mrs. Louisa Tuthill’s *The Young Lady’s Reader; Arranged for Examples in Rhetoric for . . . Seminaries* (1844).

**Lisa:** The constraints I currently experience have to do less with childcare and housework and more with professional and financial support. As graduate students, many of us are simultaneously teaching, taking classes, studying, and writing. Often, graduate students take on part-time or temporary work to supplement a stipend that does not cover cost of living. Travel funds are meager and barely cover conferences, let alone research travel. And unfortunately, conducting archival research in women’s rhetorical practices is not consistently valued by English Departments. Luckily, the University of Maryland is near Washington DC and the National Archives, the Library of Congress, and other rare book collections. Like Jane, I have also used personal vacations to visit libraries and their collections. My father-in-law is director of the Nantucket Antheneum, and at least three times a year, I enjoy a day in this beautiful

library. Last fall I found an anecdote from Mary A. Livermore's 1897 *The Story of My Life*, in which she describes playing preacher as a child. Livermore and Willard came to be close confidantes and co-editors, so this was an exciting find for me.

**Jane:** In his admirably thorough essay on the "play" of archival research, "where storage meets dreams," Robert Connors lists the places to look as "the written word, the printed word, the picture, the table, the diagram, the voice on the tape" (17). Today we would add "online or virtual texts." In an e-resource workshop, University of Maryland librarians Pat Herron and Susanna Van Sant helped me find *Seven Rational Sermons* by Miss R. Roberts (1770), a text I'd been unable to find in book form. But I would also add to Connor's list, "networking": the shortest route to discovery is lunch with an expert and telephone conversations with everyone you know in the field. Whenever I meet a feminist scholar, I ask her whether she has come across any pre-1900 women's writing on communication. Eleanor Kerkham remembered Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book*, and there I found sections on letter-writing, conversation, and preaching.

**Lisa:** Because of the constraints of time and finances on the graduate student, online research and networking are invaluable. I first found Booth's tracts on Indiana University's Library Electronic Text Resource Service. I often first go to the Internet to get a feel for what's out there. For example, I discovered on line that nineteenth-century women preachers were popularized in early twentieth-century celebratory anthologies; this find gave me insights into these women's rhetorical effects. I am still learning how to network; it is difficult for me to develop a notion of a friendly audience—one that is genuinely interested in my material. However, I have found conference experiences to be similar to my classroom experiences: My colleagues want to know and contribute to my research.

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Such discoveries are what make us do archival research. They ratify our place in academia by helping us find our own lineage. While writing is work, research—especially archival research—is joy, offering the pure fun of problem solving and discovery.

Furthermore, archival research is not a solitary act. Kay Halasek argued at the 2003 Penn State Rhetorics conference that research on women and rhetoric is a dialogic process in the Bakhtinian sense. She was speaking of the ways we speak to

research and allow research to speak to us. In other words, we must not allow our particular agenda—however noble—to build still more walls around women's experiences. As you have seen from our stories, archival research is dialogic in another sense. When we attempt to write women back into the history of rhetoric, we initiate a process that also engages other feminist researchers. The stories we tell do not operate on parallel planes, but intersect at different levels. We must be aware of our colleagues' studies, for in archival research we are entering a conversation with all those who do this work.

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## Announcing

The Rhetoric Society of America's 11th Biennial  
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Rhetorical Agendas: Political, Ethical, Spiritual

Keynote Speaker:  
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Plenary Speakers:  
Lester Faigley, University of Texas at Austin  
Peter Mack, University of Warwick  
Jacqueline Jones Royster, Ohio State University

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papers, conference announcements, or any other news  
of possible interest to Coalition members.

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[www.unm.edu/~cwsshr](http://www.unm.edu/~cwsshr)

## membership application

Officially founded in 1993, The Coalition of Women  
Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composi-  
tion is a learned society devoted to supporting  
women scholars committed to research in the history  
of rhetoric and composition.

Additionally, we work to build and sustain a network  
of scholars interested in the role of women in rhetoric  
and composition. The network serves both as a forum  
for discussion of related issues and as a vehicle for  
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If you would like join us, please fill out the fol-  
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After completing the application above, please for-  
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