Holly Littlefield

A Cross-Century Conversation

During her journey through Wonderland Alice discovers that nothing around her is familiar or predictable. Rabbits talk, cats mysteriously appear and disappear, and her own body magically grows and shrinks in a most disconcerting way. As a result, when she meets up with a caterpillar who asks her who she is, she replies, "I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

Like Alice, the concept of rhetoric has changed, stretched, twisted, and grown so remarkably over the years that currently it is difficult to clearly define just what rhetoric is. In fact, the definition of rhetoric seems to have fascinated scholars for generations. Does it begin and end with persuasion? Is it only spoken or does it encompass a whole host of other forms of communication from writing to body language to technological images and computer languages? For over 2,000 years Western scholars and philosophers have addressed these and other questions about the nature and purposes of rhetoric. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg have compiled together many of these views and philosophies in their extensive overview of Western rhetoric. However, despite the amazing job that they have done of cutting, selecting, and limiting their material, the twelve hundred plus pages of **The Rhetorical Tradition** can be a bit overwhelming, particularly to those new to the field. Like a tiny, shrunken Alice looking up at the impossibly high table that holds the key to the beautiful garden, they may begin to feel lost and bewildered as they try to digest the views of such a wide and diverse range of rhetoricians.

In recent years many scholars have called for us to try to begin to break free from the confines of typical academic writing—to experiment with form and genre. However, despite this, few, if any, of the introductions to rhetorical theory produced so far have been written in anything except the most traditional academese. Perhaps it is time for someone to try something different. No rhetorician or philosopher has ever worked in complete isolation. Each scholar's words and ideas are, at least in part, a response to and a continuation of the views of other thinkers that have come before--creating a kind of cross-century conversation. So, I began to wonder what a real dialogue with and between these thinkers might sound like. What might Foucault and Plato have had to say to one another, for example? Or, how might Christine de Pisan have described her views to a woman from the twentieth century? In some cases I was able to use their own words (these are always noted in italics with a footnoted reference). At other times I attempted to speak as I thought they might have expressed themselves. I hope that in doing this I have not taken too many liberties with the ideas and views of Isocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Quintilian, Christine de Pisan, Ramus, Bahktin, Foucault, Cixous, and, of course, Lewis Carroll.

Terra-Rhetorica,
Or
Through the Rabbit Hole

Setting: A warm day in the groves of academia. A young woman sits beneath a stately oak tree on a grassy mall. Buildings with marble pillars, long windows, and Latin inscriptions over their doors surround the mall. The woman is reading a thick, gray book—**The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present by** Bizzell and Herzberg. There is a baby in a baby carrier next to her. She has a pen in one hand which she uses to make occasional marks in a notebook; she rocks the baby carrier with the other hand. The somewhat muffled sound of a low droning voice can be heard wafting from one of the open windows. Some papers rustle. A few squirrels dig a tree roots, an occasional bird chirps, but otherwise nothing interrupts the intellectual hush that surrounds this place.

Then a few fussing sounds come from the baby carrier, and the woman looks up, sets the book down and leans over to check on the baby.

Woman: There now little one, it's OK. No crying. Be my sweet baby and go back to sleep'? (She starts to read again, but louder crying noises come from the baby carrier). Oh, honey, you want

someone to talk to you don't you? Well, how about if I read to you? OK? (She picks up the book and begins to read out loud in a fairly animated way.) "Rhetoric has a number of overlapping meanings: the practice of oratory; the study of the strategies of effective oratory; the use of language; the study of the relation between language and knowledge; the classification and use of tropes and figures, and of course, the use of empty promises and half-truths as a form of propaganda."[1] OK, I know it's not exactly Dr. Seuss. (She kisses the baby and continues reading
from Bizzell and Herzberg. Gradually, as she reads the baby quiets and her voice becomes less animated and slower. Her head begins to nod slightly as both she and the baby start to drift off to sleep.)" Rhetoric is a complex discipline with a long history: It is less helpful to try to define it once and for all than to look at the many definitions it has accumulated over the years and to attempt to understand how each arose and how each still inhabits and shapes the field. This general introduction offers an overview of the historical development of rhetoric."[2]

(A man in a white toga walks quickly past the woman. His hair is also completely white. He carries a large gold watch on a chain which he repeatedly glances at with a worried expression on his face. He is clearly in a hurry, and he mutters something about being late. ignoring both the woman and the baby as he rushes by. Although he walks quickly, his movements come in jerky, little hop-like steps. That and the constant darting of his eyes from his watch to the path in front of him and back again give the man a remarkable rabbit-like appearance. The woman looks up with a bemused expression on her face.)

Woman: How very curious. I don't think that I've ever seen a man in a white toga on campus before, and certainly not one carrying a gold watch on a chain. I wonder where on earth he could be going. (To the baby) Come on little one, let's go see. (The book falls from her lap as she stands. but she doesn't seem to notice it. She picks up the baby carrier and follows after the man in the toga who has by now nearly disappeared from sight.)

Woman: Now where could he have gone? I'm sure that I saw him go this way. (She suddenly gasps as she loses her footing and falls through a hole in the ground—something like a very large rabbit hole in fact—

that she had not noticed before. The hole that she has fallen into is dimly lit and quite deep; she and the baby fall very slowly for a long time. The walls of the hole are lined with book shelves which are filled to overflowing with piles of dusty books, papers, and even a few rolled up scrolls. As they drift downward she picks an occasional book from a shelf and reads the title.)

Woman: *Antidosis,* **Gorgias, Rhetorica Ad Herennium.** How curious, these titles all sound familiar. **Institutes of Oratory, The Treasure of the City of Ladies, The Problem of Speech Genres**...Yes, I'm sure that I've heard of all of these. What a strange rabbit hole this is. In fact, I'm beginning to think that this may not be an ordinary rabbit hole at all. And where did that man in the toga go?

(Their fall ends rather suddenly, though fairly gently. The woman finds herself standing in a well lit garden with trees and paths, not unlike the mall that she has just left. She leans over the baby carrier, checking to be sure that he landed safely.)

Woman: Well, we seem to have made it here in one piece, though I'm not sure exactly where here is, and there doesn't seem to be anyone around to ask. (She stands up, looks around, and sees the man in the toga hurrying off in the distance.) Oh, look. There's the man in the toga; let's see if he can tell us where we are. (She picks up the baby carrier and rushes after him.) Excuse me, excuse me, Sir, Sir, do you have a minute?

(He stops and turns around to look at her as she draws nearer.)

Man: Well, actually no, I really don't.

Woman: But, this will just take a second. (She gets in front of him to block his way.)

Man: Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I shall be too late. I don't have any time to stop and talk with silly, bothersome girls just now. My students are waiting. Can't have them wondering off and getting into trouble now can I? Young men today just aren't what they used to be you know. "Even the most promising of our young men are wasting their youth in drinking bouts, in parties, in soft living and childish folly to the neglect of all efforts to improve themselves; while those of grosser nature are engaged from morning until night in extremes of dissipation. You see some of them chilling their wines at the Nine fountains, others drinking in taverns, tossing dice in

gambling dens; and many, hanging about the training schools of the flute girls. I discourage such
habits in my pupils."[3]

Woman: My goodness, cavorting with flute girls? Is that what your students are doing when you're not around?

Man: I certainly hope not. I'd rather be a miserable logographer again than see that happen. My pupils know the importance of good moral character. They must allow themselves to be shaped by the best of conventional morality. Even if their inner souls are not truly virtuous and they are only emulating moral behavior, that is a good start. Virtue will eventually become a habit and gradually modify the inner man as well. My students know that without the force of virtue and morality behind them, no one will listen to them when they speak. They cannot move an audience, persuade it to think as they think, if the audience does not first respect them.[4]"The stronger a man's desire to persuade his hearers, the more zealously will he strive to be honorable and to have the esteem of his fellow-citizens."[5]

(The man steps around the woman and begins walking again. She follows along just a few steps behind him.)

Woman: I see. (She pauses.) What's a logographer?

Man: There, that's just the kind of question that an ignorant girl would ask.

Woman: Is it worse than cavorting with flute girls?

Man: (gives her an incredulous look over his shoulder) A logographer is a petty speech writer—someone who puts words into the mouths of those who are too ignorant to do it themselves.

Woman: What's wrong with that?

Man: It is not a noble profession.

Woman: Why not?

Man: Because a truly educated man should speak his own words.

Woman: What about women?

Man: Women's speech doesn't matter. Generally, the less of it the better. But a man's words matter. He must in particular make sure that he knows his audience well enough to form an argument that will move them and draw them into action. "Oratory is only really ,good if it has the qualities of fitness for the occasion, propriety of style and originality of treatment. For what has been said by one

speaker is not equally useful for the speaker who comes after him."[6]A man who does not chose his own words can never appreciate this.

Woman: So you're a speech teacher?

Man: That is only a small part of what I do. My students must learn from my example. They must be securely grounded in self-control and good moral habits and fully versed in all the liberal arts.

Woman: All the liberal arts'? So you teach math and science as well as speech?

Man: Certainly. Although they are not a student's most important subject, these other areas have a significant place in one's education. "For while we are occupied with the subtlety and exactness of astronomy and geometry and are forced to apply our minds to difficult problems, and are, in addition, being habituated to speak and apply ourselves to ; what is said and shown to us, and not to let our wits go wool-gathering, we gain the power, after being exercised and sharpened on these disciplines, of grasping and learning more easily and more quickly those subjects which are of more importance and greater value."[7']

Woman: Like rhetoric?

Man: Of course.

Woman: What about Truth and Wisdom and those things. Don't you want your students to gain that?

Man: Oh no. Leave those things to the philosophers. How can anyone really determine truth? Is there only one truth? Isn't one man's wisdom another man's folly? You could sit and think about these things all day, every day, for years and never have any more answers than you did when you started. Oh, no. I'm much more practical. My students will become ethical and effective political leaders. That's what really matters, and you'd be wise to see that that baby of yours gets that kind of education. After all look at what sitting around, reflecting on truth got Socrates.

Woman: I see.

Man: Well, as I said earlier, I must get back to my students. (He looks again at his
watch) Oh, and I'm late for my croquet appointment. Do be a good girl and run along now and fetch me my white sandals. (He starts to

walk away.)
Woman: Oh, wait, Mr. ...uh...Mr. ...
Man: Isocrates, just Isocrates, no Mr.
Woman: OK, Isocrates. Could you just please tell me how I can get out of here?
Isocrates: (He gives her a scathing look) I am not a cartographer, nor am I in charge of traffic control, and as I've said before I do not have time to waste on silly, prattling girls who should be fetching sandals instead of wandering around where they don't belong and asking questions. (He walks off, leaving the woman standing alone on the path with the baby carrier.)
Woman: Well. What an unpleasant man. I'll bet he doesn't even know the way out either. We'll just have to find it on our own. Come on little boy. (She picks up the baby carrier and begins to walk.) (Presently she comes to a fork in the path. At this intersection stands a large tree. Another man in a toga appears on one of the lowest branches of the tree. He grins widely at the woman as she approaches.)
Woman: (to the baby) Oh dear, I would swear that man wasn't there just a minute ago. How curious; I wonder where he could have come from. (to the man) Excuse me sir, I don't mean to bother you, but would you tell me please which way I ought to go from here?
Man: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.
Woman: Well, I'm trying to get home. But I really have no idea where that is.
Man: If you don't know where you're going then you probably won't arrive there.
Woman: That's why I'm asking you if you know which way I should go.
Man: Why would you expect that I would know the location of your home when you don't even know it?
Woman: Of course I know the location of my home. It's just that I don't know where it is in relation to this place. In fact, I don't even know what this place is, let alone where it is or how to get out of it. I decided to try following this path, but it splits here, and I don't know which path to take or even if either path leads to anything at all.
Man: Consider the use of logic, woman. All paths must lead to some destination. These are both paths; therefore, either one will take you

somewhere.
Woman: But, I don't just want to go anywhere. I want to go home. What do I have to do to persuade you to tell me where exactly each of these paths will take me?
Man: Ah, in order to persuade one must be "able to reason logically, to understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and to understand the emotions."[8] You must understand your audience if you wish to move them to action. Appeal to their minds, their emotions, their sense of justice.
Woman: (getting angry) Look, I don't think that I'm asking for all that much. Either you know where these paths go or you don't. It really isn't fair for you to sit there and play games with me just because you know where you are and I don't. It's a silly waste of time to stand here arguing semantics with me when you know perfectly well that all I want to know is which direction to take. Can't you perform the simple kindness of just telling me which path goes where?
Man: (looking pleased) Well done. Logos, ethos, and pathos all at once. Though I might point out that you are a little weak on the logic end of the argument. Of course that is to be expected from a woman.
Woman: What?
Man: However, you've very nicely appealed to the emotions. Your reference to kindness is particularly well put. Since kindness can be "defined as helpfulness towards some one in need, not in return for anything, nor for the advantage of the helper himself; but for that of the person helped.:[9] Consequently, now if I do not answer your question, I shall appear to be unkind, since helping you clearly will not hinder me in any way. Therefore, there is no reason not to grant your request.
Woman: (through gritted teeth) Thank you Mr.. ...?
Man: Aristotle.
Woman: Of course, I should have known. (A confused expression crosses her face.) But aren't you dead?
Aristotle: Now think logically woman. How could I be sitting here talking to you if I were dead?
Woman: Well, nothing else in this place seems to be operating logically. One generally, logically, doesn't expect to fall down a rabbit hole and into some strange place where the people are insulting and

unhelpful and none of the paths are labeled.
Man: There you go again. Excellent ethos, but very weak logos.
Woman: (Through gritted teeth) Would you please just tell me where the paths go?
Aristotle: The path on the right leads to a French man's house and the path on the left leads to the home of one of my fellow Greeks.
Woman: And beyond that where does each one go?
Aristotle: They rejoin, once again forming just one path.
Woman: So essentially you're telling me that it doesn't matter which path I take since they both end up at the same place anyway?
Aristotle: It does if you wish to go to the French man's house.
Woman: But, I don't want to go to the French man's house. I want to go to my house. I can't believe that you've keep me standing here arguing with you for the last half an hour over...
Aristotle: (interrupts her) "The use of persuasive speech is to lead to decisions. When we know a thing and have decided about it, there is no further use in speaking about it."[10]
(Aristotle then vanishes before the woman can say anything in response. His body disappears first, then his disembodied grin hovers in the air for a few seconds before also fading. The woman looks surprised and then shrugs her shoulders and starts down the left path.)
Woman: This place just becomes curiouser and curiouser by the minute.
(Before long she comes upon a long table sitting in the middle of the path. Although the table is elaborately set to accommodate tea for ten or fifteen people, only two men are presently sitting there. They huddle together at one end, deep in animated conversation. The first man appears to be slightly older than the other and, like Isocrates and Aristotle, is wearing a toga. The second man therefore seems oddly out of place in his suit and tie. He is also almost entirely bald and has wire–rimmed glasses on. Upon arriving at the table the woman gratefully collapses into one of the chairs and begins to rub her feet. The two men ignore her completely until she sits down.)
Second Man: No room; there's no room here.
First Man: Move on, we've no room here.
Woman: Don't be ridiculous. Of course there's room. There must be at least ten empty chairs here.

First Man: What my esteemed colleague meant of course was that we don't want to be bothered by some silly prattling girl. We are having an intellectual conversation—a dialogue between educated men.
Woman: (very irritated) Don't worry. I promise; no prattling. Just let me sit and rest a minute.
Second Man: Would you like some tea?
Woman: That would be very nice thank you.
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Second Man: Would you like some tea?
Woman: That would be very nice thank you.
(He hands her a cabbage. The woman looks at it, confused.)
Woman: I thought you asked if I wanted some tea?
Second Man: I did.
Woman: Then it wasn't very civil of you to give me a cabbage was it?
Second Man: It wasn't very civil of you to sit down without being

invited.

First Man: He's playing with your mind. He does it to everyone.

Woman: By giving them cabbages?

Second Man: No, no, no. I am demonstrating a point. "I would like to show that discourses, in the form in which they can be heard or read, are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, colored chain of words, I would like to show that discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language, the intrication of a lexicon and an experience, I would like to show with precise examples that in analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, not the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. "[11]

Woman: (dryly to First Man) He must be Foucault, right?...

First Man: (To the woman) You see what I mean? **The Archaeology of Knowledge, Madness and Civilization, The History of Sexuality**—*it's* all just mind games.

Foucault: Now, pay attention. The word "tea" does not reflect some unalterable inalienable truth. It merely signifies to certain people in a certain place and time a certain substance. It is a social construct, not a conveyer of preexisting meaning. You must consider who is speaking. "What role, legal status, social privilege, or other certification determines who may claim the right to speak? "[12] What are the discursive practices of our society that led you to believe that I should hand you a cup of flavored liquid rather than a green leafy object?

First Man: Now listen my friend. You certainly are just wasting your time confusing this silly girl who cannot possibly begin to comprehend your convoluted ideas. However, "let me assure you that if ever there was a man who debated with another from a desire of knowing the truth of the subject discussed, I am such a man; and so, I trust, are you. "[13]

Foucault: Oh, no, sir. We must question the very concepts of truth, reality, language, representation, authority, and subjectivity that have shaped our world. We must instead begin to see that our truths and

realities are determined by the "relations between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioral patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterizations. This is not to deny the existence of an object or a phenomenon, but to acknowledge that everything we know of them is a function of the needs or desires of society and institutions and of available methods of coming to know something."[14] We must understand that there are no universal truths, no external positions of certainty, and no universal understandings that are beyond history and society.[15] We are in a sense trying to deconstruct a ship in the ocean while we are still on it and then reconstruct it again.

First Man: How can you say such things? Do you align yourself with the miserable Sophists? Of course there are universal truths set down by the gods before we were ever born. Transcendent truth exists and is accessible to human beings. "We can recognize it because we knew it before our birth when our souls were with the Divine Finding truth now is difficult because we must work to remember what has been covered over in our minds by the experience of carnality. We must clear away the worldly debris that obscures the truth."[16]

Woman: (to Foucault) Is he perhaps Plato?

Foucault: (with a droll expression on his face) How did you guess?

Woman: (wryly) The toga must have given him away.

Plato: It is man's job, his mission in life to determine what these truths are and to recognize them. Without truth, what do we have to base morality on?

Foucault: Morality is merely a social construction.

Plato: No, morality comes from the truth which is linked to the Divine. We are obligated to let our words be shaped and informed by truth. Otherwise you are nothing more than a Sophist, a moral relativist who has no reason not to be manipulative, deceitful, or downright corrupt in the use of discourse. A philosopher and teacher should instead use discourse that is analytic, objective, and dialectical to shape his audience for its own good.[17]

Foucault: In essence then you are merely using discourse—this analytic, objective dialogue that you speak of—to get your students to think the way you think.

Plato: No, together, you and your students, through dialogue, discover and remember the truth. The teacher is like a midwife who helps the student give birth to truth. "The teacher who is raising the student toward transcendence plants seeds in the student's soul that will eventually flower and in turn reproduce themselves in other souls, propagating transcendent knowledge."[18]

Foucault: Of course. An institution or a discipline can only survive if it reproduces itself. But just because you've succeeded in making all your students think alike does not mean that you have all arrived at some final transcendent knowledge.

Plato: Are you accusing me of ...

Woman: (She interrupts him; he glares at her) Excuse me gentlemen. I don't mean to interrupt, but it seems to me that this conversation could go on forever without either of you ever convincing the other of anything. So, if you don't mind I'll be on my way.

Plato: We never asked you to stay in the first place.

Woman: I don't suppose that either of you could show me which way is out?

Both Men: No.

Woman: I didn't think so.

(She again starts down the path with the baby carrier. In the background we hear the
men resume their argument.)

Woman: Well little boy, I don't know where we're going, but where ever we end up it can't be any worse than that awful tea party. Oh, look I think I see a house in the distance. (The woman crosses to a small stone cottage. As she approaches a loud crash is heard followed by a shriek and another crash, then silence.)

Woman: Oh dear, I hope nothing terrible has happened. I suppose that we'd better go and check though. (She somewhat timidly knocks at the door. The door is thrown open by a very large man in a white chef's hat and apron. He brandishes a cast-iron skillet in one hand like a weapon and waves a wooden spoon about with the other. He appears to be quite agitated.)

Cook: I suppose that you're here to see her.

Woman: Well, actually I heard the ....

Cook: Come on then. I don't have all day, she's inside.

(The woman follows the cook into the main room of the cottage. At one end of the room sits a lady—in an ornate renaissance dress. She is calmly rocking a baby while intently working on a manuscript in front of her. She is surrounded by piles of old leather-bound books.)

Cook: Someone to see you Madam.

(The lady looks up and smiles as the woman enters the room. The cook crosses to the other side of the room and begins loudly banging around with the pots and kettles in the background.)

Lady: Hello. I don't believe we've met. My name is Christine. Is that a baby in there?

Woman: Yes, it's my little boy.

(Christine gets up to look in the baby carrier)

Christine: What a pleasing face he has. And what a clever way of carrying him about. I wonder if I could design something like that for my little one. It's so difficult to hold him and write at the same time. (A loud bang comes from the cook on the other side of the room. The woman jumps, but Christine completely ignores it.)

Woman: I'm sorry to disturb you. It's just that I seem to be lost and I'm ...

Christine: (interrupting her) Oh you're not disturbing me. I always enjoy the company of other women. We must stick together you know. If we can't be a source of strength and defense for each other, what do we have? Certainly very few men will be willing to stand up for us. In tact, that's just what I was writing about when you came in.

Cook: (banging on a pot for emphasis) What business does any woman have with writing? "The woman of fluent tongue is never chaste."[19]

(Christine appears uninterested in this outburst. She merely smiles sadly and shakes her head.)

Christine: You see what I mean? When men don't even want to allow women to write we certainly cannot depend upon them to support and defend us. What man wants to acknowledge a woman as his equal?

Cook: Equal? Woman was made to be man's helpmate not his equal. God created woman out of man in so as to be subservient to him.

Christine: But, "God formed the body of woman from one of his ribs, signifying that she should stand at his side as a companion

and never lie at his feet like a slave, and also that he should love her as his own flesh. I don't know if you have already noted this: she was created in the image of God. How can any mouth dare to slander the vessel which bears such a noble imprint?"[20]

Cook: Noble imprint? Ha! It is man and only man that was made in the image of God. Woman is nothing but a silly, emotional, illogical imitation. And, don't forget that it is through woman that evil and sin were brought into this world.

Christine: "If you are claiming that man was banished because of Lady Eve, I tell you that he gained more through Mary than he lost through Eve. As far as women's emotions are concerned, God has certainly looked favorably on that trait in the past. He did not despise the tears of Mary Magdalen, but accepted them and forgave her sins and through the merits of' those tears she is in glory in Heaven. And do not forget that Jesus Christ wished that his resurrection be first reported by a woman."[21] You see, women's words—their speech and their writings—are important.

Cook: Women, like children, are better if seen and not heard.

Christine: (looks sadly at the woman) You see how it is. Men will not defend us. I *don't know how* it *happened that so many different men are so inclined to express so many wicked insults about women. It seems that they all speak from one and the same mouth.* [22]Nor do I know what motivates these attacks, perhaps it is greed, envy, impotence or thwarted desire. But. whatever the motivation, I see it as my task, indeed my mission, to dispel these virulent falsehoods about women. With my pen I am "attempting to build a city of' ladles in which all valiant women might find refuge from attacks and slander."[23]

Woman: With your pen ...?

Christine: Yes. For it is by my writing that I both support and defend myself. Of course some insist that my writing is not my own. They claim that clerks or priests must have written my works for me, for they could not come from feminine intelligence. But those who say such things are ignorant, for they are not aware of the writings of other women who have been mentioned in **past times.**[24]

Cook: Feminine intelligence? Ha! There's a contradiction in terms. If women are so intelligent show me your famous writers, skillful

leaders, courageous fighters, or learned philosophers. Who among your sex can be counted as great?

Christine: Why the list is nearly inexhaustible. Elizabeth of England, Catherine de Medici, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Isabella of Aragon—who can deny that they were powerful and skillful rulers? The Bible tells us of the bravery and strength of Ruth, Rachel, Sarah, Rahab, and Deborah. From the ancients we learn of the nobility of Hecuba, the cleverness of Penelope, the wisdom of Cassandra, the faithfulness of Iphigenia, and the strength of Medea. Who can dispute the intelligence of Sappho, Isotta Nogarola, Zenobia, or Nicostrata? Of course Athena, the goddess of wisdom and justice, was a woman. As I said the list is lengthy and I have only just begun to name the names. This despite the fact that women are rarely educated and often must fight for every bit of knowledge that comes their way because most men maintain that schooling is wasted on women.

Cook: Exactly so. Women, on the whole, are notoriously ignorant.

Christine: But it is due to the constraints on women's activities that they do not learn more. "Women, confined to their domestic duties are not challenged to know more and thus remain simple-minded. All the same, there is no doubt that Nature provided them with the qualities of body and mind found in the wisest and most learned men. If it were customary to send daughters to school like sons, and if they were taught the natural sciences, they would learn as thoroughly and understand the subtleties of all the arts and sciences as well as men."[25] In fact, they might even do better. After all, it is not they who start wars, create famine, impoverish children, or cause political turmoil. If this world of ours is an example of the best that learned men can do, then perhaps they had better turn it over to the women. Certainly none of this sorrow exists in my city of ladies. (At this, a particularly loud bang is heard as one of the pots goes flying through the window and the room is filled with a cloud of pepper.)

Christine: Oh dear. I'd ask you to stay for dinner, but whenever he gets upset the cook puts entirely too much pepper in the soup. I'm sure that it will be completely inedible today. (Another pot flies across the room as the cook sputters curses.)

Woman: That's all right. I really should get going anyway. If you could just tell me how to get out of this place and back to...well...to

where I came from...that is...the top of the rabbit hole I think ...
Christine: I would suggest following the path. It generally takes people where they need to go.
Woman: Thank you and good luck with your writing. (A clay jug shatters against the wall behind Christine's head as the woman exits through the front door.)
Woman: (To the baby, as she continues down the path) Well, my little one, I'm not sure if we'll ever make it back at this rate. (A short while later she comes to a rose garden. It is carefully laid out in a clear grid pattern with red and white rose trees precisely placed according to their size and color. A man is standing on a stool beneath one of the red rose trees carefully painting each of its roses white. He is meticulously dressed in French Renaissance clothing—every crease has been carefully pressed and every thread is in exactly its proper place. This is clearly a man to whom style and decorum are of great importance/)
Woman: Excuse me. Mr. ah ....
Man: Ramus
Woman: Thank you, what are you doing?
Ramus: What does it look like I'm doing?
Woman: It looks like you're painting those red roses white. However, I have learned that one is not to take things at face value in this place. A rabbit hole becomes a library, tea is mistaken for cabbage... it can all be very confusing.
Ramus: That is ridiculous and stupid. Good God, a rabbit hole is a rabbit hole; a library is a library; tea is tea; and cabbage is cabbage. Each of those things is clearly observable. Obviously, you haven't been paying attention.
Woman: (beginning to get annoyed) Very well then, perhaps you can explain your perfectly observable reason for painting those roses white.
Ramus: Of course. The roses on this tree were supposed to be white. The diagram of the garden that I have clearly specifies this. However, the stupid and useless gardener did not follow the model as he was directed to. Consequently we now have red roses where there are supposed to be white ones.
Woman: I don't see that it really matters whether the roses are red or

white.
Ramus: Of course it matters. I abhor sloppiness and disorganization—whether in gardening or anything else, philosophy for example. Without a clear plan of organization everything gets muddled and confused.
Woman: (becoming more skeptical by the minute) How can you have disorganized philosophy?
Ramus: Clearly you have not read Aristotle, Cicero or Quintilian or you would not ask such a stupid and useless question. All of them are prime examples of miserable, fallacious, sloppy thinking.
Woman: How curious. It seems to me that most people consider Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian to be some the most intelligent men of their time—perhaps of all time.
Ramus: Naturally, "if I were to say that Aristotle was a failure in philosophy, and Cicero and Quintilian each a failure in style, I would seem to be not quite sane. However, must those who excel in one or many virtues necessarily excel in them all ? And is it necessary to think them not men, but gods in all things?"[26]
Woman: Well no....
Ramus: The writings of these scholars reveal that while they indeed collected a lot of material, they did not evaluate it sufficiently, for in some places I look in vain for a syllogism. And they did not arrange it in a sufficiently fitting order, the dialectical and rhetorical arts of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian are fallacious and confused in their treatment of' the dialectical and rhetorical usage of reason, and then of speech—he usage. "[27]
Woman: And I'm sure you'll tell me just how they are confused.
Ramus: Certainly, take Quintilian for example. "His instructions of oratory were not correctly ordered, organized or described. He teaches that an orator cannot be perfect unless he is a good man. Ha! I assert indeed that such a definition of an orator seems to me to be useless and stupid."[28] An orator needs to speak eloquently and convincingly. Whether he is a good man or not is of little consequence. Even a bad man can speak well. Good God, there are countless examples of scoundrels and charlatans smooth-talking their way into people's minds. "For although I admit that rhetoric is a virtue, it is virtue of the mind and the intelligence, as in all the true liberal arts, whose

followers can still be men of the utmost moral depravity. Nor is rhetoric a moral virtue as Quintilian thinks, so that whoever possesses it is incapable of being a wicked man."[29] "Rhetoric should demonstrate the embellishment of speech first in tropes and figures, second in dignified delivery."[30] It should not be concerned with moral philosophy. "Quintilian should have defined rhetoric so that first of all he would grasp as a whole the material belonging strictly to the art and distinct and separate from all other art's material. "[31] Quintilian and his sort just didn't have a practical view of the world. Instead they sat in their little Greek gardens and talked in circles around each other in an attempt to discover the "truth". And what did those dialogues accomplish? Nothing! Good God, What is the practicality of pursuing some intangible truth? What will that get you? It is not what is true, but what is teachable that matters. And, if it's not tangible, it's not teachable.

Woman: So what is the practicality of painting all those roses? Isn't that just a useless and stupid waste of time?

Ramus: Certainly not. This garden was carefully laid out in the most stylish, practical, and orderly way possible. I am simply carrying out the plan! (He turns his back to her and pointedly resumes painting roses. The woman shakes her head and continues on down the path.)

Woman: (to the baby) Well, my little one. He certainly wasn't much help. I'm not sure if we'll ever make it back at this rate. Oh dear, what can that possibly be? (The woman is walking towards a giant mushroom. A man huddles on top of this mushroom reading a book of Latin poetry. He is surrounded by billows of smoke pouring forth from a hookah and he is drinking a cup of very black tea. The man is, of course, Bahktin. He looks up as the woman approaches.)

Bahktin: Hello, who might you be?

Woman: (looking up at the giant mushroom, a little overwhelmed) I hardly know anymore sir. At home I knew who I was, but in this strange place it's becoming harder and harder to tell who I am, what I think, or where my identity is.

Bahktin: I see. Would you care for some tea?

Woman: (a slightly alarmed expression crosses her face) Oh no. Thank you, but I'm discovering that one doesn't always receive what one expects in this place. The last person who offered me tea gave me

cabbage instead.

Bahktin: Ah, language can be a tricky thing.

Woman: I'm not sure what you mean, sir. It seems to me that tea is tea. Either you know what tea is or you don't.

Bahktin: But there is nothing about the word tea that inherently means it must signify a dark, slightly aromatic beverage prepared from tea leaves by infusion with boiling water. "Tea" only means that if you and the person with whom you are engaging in dialogue both agree that it means that. Meaning can only be understood within the social situations in which language appears. It is a negotiation between the speaker and the receiver, and it is ultimately only one element of the broader theme of the utterance.

Woman: (looking confused) Theme of an utterance?

Bahktin: You have determined within your social constructs that the individual word. tea, has a given meaning—mainly that it signifies a dark, aromatic beverage. That meaning is expected to remain constant. The beverage in question is generally not called tea one day and lemonade the next. However, "tea" is just one element of the utterance, "Would you care for some tea?" "The theme of that utterance is determined not only by the linguistic forms that comprise it—words, morphological and syntactic structures, sounds, and intonation—but also by extraverbal factors of the situation. Should we miss these situational factors, we would be as little able to understand an utterance as if we were to miss its most important words." [32]*You* must listen to my voice, watch my expressions, and compare these things to your previous experience in order to determine if the theme of that utterance is in truth an attempt to offer you a cup of hot, aromatic liquid, flavored with tea leaves. As a listener you are an active receptor of all that I say. From the first word I utter, you are already mentally forming a response. Your mind is undergoing a constant process of analysis and comparison. If I were to offer you a cup of tea while laughing hysterically, smiling slyly, or holding out a cabbage to you, you might begin to question whether you are correctly understanding the theme of my utterance. But, since I am doing none of those things, and am in fact holding a cup of tea in my hand as we speak, you might wisely assume that the expectation of actually receiving a cup of tea is a valid one.

Woman: Well, actually whether you intend to give me tea or cabbages really doesn't matter since in any case I really don't have time for either one. I'm sure that my baby is getting hungry and I really must get home to feed him. And, as he neither eats cabbages nor drinks tea yet, I must be on my way. Good bye.

(She continues down the path away from the giant mushroom. As she leaves, Bahktin can be heard mumbling Latin poetry. Presently she comes to a carefully mowed field in which a number of croquet wickets have been set up. At one end of the field a regal looking woman is playing croquet. She is using a pink flamingo as a mallet and a small hedgehog serves as the ball. The woman, however, seems to generally be paying very little attention to the croquet game and in fact frequently stops playing, sets the flamingo aside, takes out a journal-like notebook and begins writing in it in white ink.)

Woman: How curious. I don't think that I've ever seen anyone play croquet like that before. Don't you think that it's a little hard on the poor hedgehog?

Croquet Player: (looks up from her notebook and yells with a heavy French accent) Off with her head!

Woman: (with a shocked expression) Excuse me, Ma'am ....

Croquet Player: Madame.

Woman: Madame.

Croquet Player: Cixous.

Woman: Cixous?

Croquet Player: Madame Cixous.

Woman: Oh, of course. I'm sorry. Madame Cixous, I didn't mean to disturb you. I just thought...

Cixous: (interrupts her) That is precisely your problem.

Woman: What?

Cixous: Thinking. All of Western thought has been based on a systematic repression of women's experience. We have been taught that to think means to use only the mind, to be logical--to be like men are supposed to be. We are expected to separate ourselves from our bodies and our emotions and become little more than talking heads spewing forth meaningless logic. We must regain our bodies. We must begin to think and to write as women, using our own words and structures. We must throw away the chains of our phallocentric past

and begin to write our bodies with pens that are not merely a symbolic substitution for the sword, but with ink that comes from mother's milk.

Woman: Mother's *milk?*

Cixous: Yes. For a woman—"t here is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink. "[33]

Woman: That seems a little unreasonable. I mean wouldn't it be awfully hard to read something written in milk?

Cixous: Reason? You must drop this obsession with reason. "Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallocentric tradition."[34] Off with the head! Off with reason and logic and phallocentric thinking. "Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth. "[35]

Woman: I'm not sure that I understand what you mean by writing the body? Can only women do this?

Cixous: No, no some men *can* achieve it—some poets like Joyce and Mallarme have done so. But it is harder for them. For us, "our texts are our bodies—hot through with streams of song. "[36]

Woman: But what does that have to do with writing in milk?

Cixous: You are a mother, no? That is your child?

Woman: Yes.

Cixous: Perhaps that will help you understand. There is within each of us an inner mother. I don't mean the overbearing, clutchy "mother" but, rather, "what touches you, the equi-voice that affects you, fills your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your force, the rhythm that laughs you, the intimate recipient who makes all metaphors possible and desirable; body, no more describable than god, the soul, or the Other; that part of you that leaves a space between yourself and urges you to inscribe in language your woman's style."[37] It is from that place that we must try to write. That will inspire us away from the linear, logical, rigid ways of thinking, speaking, and writing that we have been indoctrinated into for centuries. We have been taught to turn away from our bodies, from that inner voice that nurtures us. It is that inner

voice that we need to regain and reclaim.
(The baby begins to cry; the woman leans over the carrier and tries to soothe it.)
Cixous: (The baby continues to cry more and more loudly while Cixous speaks and the woman tries without luck to soothe it.) You see, when the child cries the mother responds immediately. Her body itself responds to the cry. Her blood curses more quickly, her heart races, her breasts begin to tingle. It is this physical response that you want to bring to the written page. "Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem. [38]Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty, obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that works against us and off our backs; and not yourself. Smug-faced readers, managing editors, and big bosses don texts of women..."[39]
(During this speech Cixous' voice begins to be increasingly drowned out by the crying baby, and the croquet course begins to fade, blurring into the park from the opening scene. The woman has fallen asleep against the side of a tree—Bizzell and Herzberg open in her lap. The crying baby startles her awake and she moves to the baby carrier to pick him up and calm him.)
Woman: There now, little one, it's all right. Everything's OK. (She pats him on the back.) Goodness, what a curious dream that was. It all seemed so real though. I think that I had conversations with Aristotle and Isocrates, and I think I remember Plato and Foucault having a debate of some sort.
(an oddly dressed man with a gentle face walks up behind the woman during this speech listening to her as she speaks to the baby.)
Man: It sounds really very interesting. (realizing that he's startled the woman) I'm sorry, I didn't mean to eavesdrop on your conversation with your little one here, but dreams fascinate me. (He nods towards the book) I see that you're studying rhetoric?
Woman: Yes.
Man: (gesturing towards her pen) And, you're writing a paper as well?
Woman: Well, I'm trying to. But it seems like every time I get started

my baby decides to cry. So, it's pretty slow going.
Man: But, slow is better than not at all. Writing is important work. "In writing are the foundations of eloquence; by writing resources are stored up, as it were, in a sacred repository, whence they may be drawn forth for sudden emergencies, or as circumstances require. "[40](*The* woman looks more closely at the man—something about his words and his style of speaking are beginning to seem very familiar to her.) Of course the work you do is important for your child as well as for you.
Woman: How so?
Man: It is most important, for the proper education of a child, to surround him with educated people. His nurses and servants must be intelligent. His teachers must be selected with the utmost care, and above all, his mother—the person who will have the most influence on his earliest years must herself be an educated and well-spoken woman.
Woman: (laughs a little) Well, this little one won't have any servants or nurses to worry about.
Man: Then your influence becomes all the more important.
Woman: Oh dear.
Man: And you must do all you can to see to it that he has excellent teachers. An instructor should adopt the feelings of a parent toward his pupils. "He should neither have vices in himself nor tolerate them in others. Let his austerity not be stern, nor his affability too easy, lest dislike arise from the one or contempt for the other. Let him discourse frequently on what is honorable and good, for the oftener he admonishes, the more seldom will he have to chastise. Let him not be of an angry temper, and yet not a conniver at what ought to be corrected. "[41]
Woman: (aside) Sounds like you're looking for Mary Poppins.
Man: Excuse me?
Woman: Sorry. Don't you think that it will be awfully hard to find teachers like that?
Man: Of course. But no effort should be spared in a child's education. And, I think that you will find that there are many more dedicated teachers than you think.
Woman: I hope so.

Man: You must of course be sure to observe your child closely. Learn where his natural talents lie and then carefully foster those things for "nature attains far greater power when seconded by culture; and he that is led contrary to nature, cannot make due progress in the studies for which he is unfit, and makes those talents, for the exercise of which he seemed born, weaker by neglecting to cultivate them." [42]

Woman: But, isn't it important for students to try some things that may not come easily for them—to challenge themselves?

Man: Of course. The student should be encouraged to strive to excel, not merely in one accomplishment, but in all the accomplishments even if some seem difficult while he is learning them. However, the emphasis of the instruction should always be placed on the student's strengths. And definitely there are two things especially to be avoided; one, to attempt what cannot be accomplished; and the other to divert a pupil form what he does well to something else for which he is less qualified. "[43]

Woman: That makes sense. But, I think I have a while before I need to worry about all this. He's only four months old.

Man: It's never too early to start thinking about his future you know. Well, it's getting late, and I really should be going.

Woman: Thanks for the advice. You're right—it's never too early to start thinking. And, I really like your ideas. I bet you'd make a good teacher yourself.

Man: Thank you. I have done some teaching in my day.

Woman: Really? I'd be interested in hearing more of your views on education—I'm a
teacher myself.

Man: Well, actually most of my views are set down in that book you have there. (He points at the Bizzell and Herzberg.) It's the last bit of part one. Good luck, now, to you and your little one. (He nods his head, sagely, at her and walks away.)

(The woman curiously picks up the Bizzell and Herzberg.)

Woman: The last bit of part one? Hmmm, (She turns to that section and then looks up after the man with a suddenly suspicious look on her face.) Quintilian?

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Notes

1 Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, **The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present** (Boston: Bedford Books, 1990) 1. All direct quotations taken from Bizzell and Herzberg or any other work are noted in italics to avoid any confusion that quotation marks witbin the dialogue might have caused.

2 Bizzell and Herzberg 1.

3 Plato, *Gorgias* in Bizzell and Herzberg 63.

4 Bizzell and Herzberg 45.

5 Isocrates, *Antidosis in* Bizzell and Herzberg 5~.

6 Isocrates, *Against the Sophists* in Bizzell and Herzberg 48.

7 Isocrates, *Antidosis* in Bizzell and Herzberg 51.

8 Aristotle, *Rhetoric* in Bizzell and Herzberg 154.

9 Aristotle, *Rhetoric* in Bizzell and Herzberg 170.

10 Aristotle, *Rhetoric* in Bizzell and Herzberg 179.
Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in Bizzell and Herzberg 1135.[11]
12 Bizzell and Herzberg 1127.
13 Plato, *Gorgias* in Bizzell and Herzl~erg 65.
14 Bizzell and Herzberg 1127.
15 Paul Rabinow, ea., **The Foucault Reader** (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 4
16 3izzell and Herzberg *55.*
17 Bizzell and Herzberg 56.
18 Bizzell and Herzberg 60.
19 Bizzell and Herzberg 484.
20 Christine de Pisan, **The Book of the City of Ladies** quoted in Gerda Lerner's, **The Creation of Feminist Conscious** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 144.
21 Christine de Pisan, **The Book of the City of Ladie***s* in Lerner 145.
22 Christine de Pisan, **The Book of the City of Ladie***s* in Lerner 258.
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24 Christine de Pisan, *L'Avision* in Lerner 50.
25 Christine de Pisan, **The Book of the City of Ladies** in Lerner 193.
26 Peter Ramus, ***Arguments in Rhetoric Against Quintilian in*** Bizzell and Herzberg 564.
27 Peter Ramus, **Arguments in Rhetoric Against Quintilia***n* in Bizzell and Herzberg 564.
28 Peter Ramus, **Arguments in Rhetoric Against Quintilian i**n Bizzell and Herzberg 565.
29 Peter Ramus, **Arguments in Rhetoric Against Quintilian** in Bizzell and Herzberg 567.
30 Peter Ramus, **Arguments in Rhetoric Against Quintilian i**n Bizzell and Herzberg 566.
31 Peter Ramus, **Arguments in Rhetoric Against Quintilia***n* in Bizzell and Herzberg 567.
32 Mikhail Bakhtin, **Marxism and the Philosophy of Language** in Bizzell and Herzberg 942.
33 Helene Cixcus, *The Laugh of the Medusa* in Bizzell and Herzberg 1237.
34 Helene Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*"in Bizzell and Herzberg 1235.
35 Helene Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* in Bizzell and Herzberg 1236.
36 Helene Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* in Bizzell and Herzberg 1237.
37 7Ielene Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* in Bizzell and Herzberg 1237.
38 Helene Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* in Bizzell and Herzberg 1236.
39 Helene Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* in Bizzell and Herzberg 1234.
40 Quintilian, **Institutes of Oratory Book X** in Bizzell and Herzberg 338.
41 Quintilian, **Institues of Oratory Book II** in Bizzell and Herzberg 299.
42 Quintilian, ***I***nstitues of Oratory **Book II** in Bizzell and Herzberg 311.
43 Quintilian, **Institues of Oratory Book II** in Bizzell and Herzberg 311-12.