

UNRULY BRIDES OF CHRIST: VIRTUOUS TRANSGRESSION  
AND INTERRUPTION AS *ETHOS* IN  
RELIGIOUS WOMEN'S RHETORIC

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how three religious women rhetors – St. Catherine of Siena, Sarah Grimke, and Mary Daly – rhetorically navigated and ultimately subverted the stringent ethical codes and gendered expectations imposed on “virtuous women” by crafting an *ethos* of interruption. Aristotelian *ethos*, a distinctly male creation, conceived of solely for use by the male citizen-orator of the *polis*, represents a hurdle for the female rhetor, who, in order to speak, must transgress gendered notions of virtue inherited from pagan, classical antiquity, and existent up until Christian modernity. Linking recent feminist re-imaginings of *ethos* to the rhetorical strategy of interruption, this study seeks to trace how religious female rhetors, who by investing themselves with rhetorical authority, subsequently divested themselves of traditional feminine virtue as they overcame the silent, passive ideal of the virtuous woman.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Virtuous Transgression .....	4
<i>Ethos</i> in Antiquity .....	6
Feminist Reimaginings of <i>Ethos</i> .....	7
Traversing Private and Public Spheres .....	8
Rhetorical Interruption as <i>Ethos</i> .....	10
Chapter Outlines .....	11
II. THE COMMUNION OF BODY AND SOUL IN THE WRITINGS OF ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA .....	16
III. AN INVOCATION OF THE MIND: SARAH GRIMKE’S RHETORIC OF MENTAL EQUALITY .....	37
IV. MARY DALY’S RADICAL INTERRUPTION CRITIQUED .....	58
V. CONCLUSION .....	79
REFERENCES .....	84
VITA .....	93

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

Recent contributions to feminist rhetorical historiography have undertaken the project of regendering the rhetorical canon in order to include the silenced and unacknowledged discursive practices of female rhetors dating back to classical antiquity. Most recently, in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, Kirsch, Royster and Bizzell identify two prominent changes to the rhetorical landscape, incited by “tectonic shifts” in feminist rhetorical practices: “One is breaking through the persistently elite, male-centered boundaries of our disciplinary habits, and the second is re-forming that terrain to create a much more open and expanded view of rhetorical performance, accomplishment, and rhetorical possibilities” (29). Adhering to this methodology, projects such as *Man Cannot Speak for Her*, *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition through the Renaissance*, and *Rhetorica in Motion* claim to “interrupt the seamless narrative usually told about the rhetorical tradition and to open up possibilities for multiple rhetorics” (Lunsford 6). By interrupting conceptions of the traditional rhetorical paradigm, these studies help us to contextualize the historical struggle of women within the public domain. More specifically, however, they enable us to conceive of the rhetorical maneuvers religious women have employed in order to overcome the social restrictions imposed upon them.

Just as feminist scholars have turned to interruption as a research methodology, female rhetors throughout history have similarly employed interruption as a rhetorical strategy that

afforded them agency within the socially prohibitive framework of Christianity. Moving chronologically, this study will explore how three different religious women rhetors, chained to the material and ideological restraints of their respective religious communities and cultural contexts, rhetorically navigated and ultimately subverted the stringent ethical codes and gendered expectations of virtuous women. These three public figures – St. Catherine of Siena, Sarah Grimke, and Mary Daly – are apt for analysis because they each represent different rhetorical strategies of interruption as a means of constructing *ethos* within particular religious rhetorics. Viewed in conversation with one another, their use and manipulation of religious rhetoric illustrate the difficult journey women have endured throughout history when attempting to enter a public discourse on God.

What this study endeavors to demonstrate is that as they enter the politically charged public domain, female rhetors often suffer a displacement within their personal lives, which is then given voice through their interruptions of religious rhetoric. St. Catherine, for instance, breaks ties with her family as she refuses the sacrament of marriage in favor of a life as a Dominican laywoman. Sarah Grimke, too, leaves her aristocratic upbringing behind in search of a more egalitarian culture, free from the social hierarchies of the slaveholding south in which she was born. Mary Daly, unable to reconcile her personal feminist beliefs with the sexist strands of traditional Catholicism, leaves organized religion entirely. For each woman, religious devotion brings about a sense of personal displacement that finds voice in interruptive rhetorical maneuverings, revealing the religious rhetoric of these women to be a practice, not wholly of persuasion through pious testimony, but also of self-exploration and self-identification.

Although I attempt to trace parallels in their discourse by analyzing their *ethos* construction as interruptive, the shifting cultural and historical contexts among these three

women are crucial to understanding women's longstanding struggle to overcome erasure within this particular discourse community and within society at large. Moving chronologically through the rhetoric of these three women reveals that, though the context and exigency from which they write alters, their strategies for crafting identity remained unwaveringly interruptive in intent. I also acknowledge and emphasize that as steadfastly devout religious figureheads and spokeswomen, these three female rhetors find themselves in very different, and sometimes contentious, relationships with religion, even as they pledge their lives and their life's work to God. What unites the three is that their rhetorical efforts are tied so inextricably to religious self-identification, and because of this, they must repeatedly adopt interruption as tool to navigate a discourse community in which they are not only marginalized members, but also transgressors of societal norms.

While I join with feminist rhetorical scholars in their efforts to revive such figures from centuries of erasure, my study adds to their lengthy discussion by devoting analysis to the personal sacrifice these figures suffer as a direct result of making public their private beliefs and convictions. So often scholars have ignored that this merging of the public and the private selves, for female religious rhetors, has both positive and potentially negative implications for the women charged with the task of traversing both public and the private spheres. Throughout my discussion of interruption as *ethos*, I will offer analysis, not only of the public reception of these female rhetors' rhetorical strategies within their respective contexts, but also an exploration of the interior, private, and in this case, spiritual ramifications of adopting interruption as a strategy for self-identification. Therefore, this study will seek to explore more centrally how religious women not only exerted authority within the patriarchal public sphere, but also how they came to terms with their own spiritual convictions while doing so.

## **Virtuous Transgression**

I argue that the rhetorical efforts of these women can be analyzed as acts of virtuous transgression, and that they achieved this end by constructing an *ethos* of interruption – a rhetorical strategy clearly not in accordance with the social dictates for religious women of their time periods. I term the rhetorical practices of these women acts of virtuous transgression because they adhered to the ethical codes of their religious beliefs, while still subverting their gendered expectations and thus transgressing societal norms. As the aforementioned scholarly projects so extensively outline, public speaking is in itself an act of transgression for religious women who were subject to the gendered limitations imposed upon them by biblical scripture, most notably by St. Paul’s mandate that women “must learn in silence and with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent” (I Timothy 2:11). Additionally, Gerda Lerner’s extensive study in *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness* has identified Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:20-23, Genesis 3:1-24, and the New Testament Paulinist tradition as the biblical core texts that espouse misogyny and perpetuate feminine erasure throughout history, in addition to the patristic writings of Tertullian, Ambrose, St. Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas (*Creation* 140-142). Inherited from a tradition of Aristotelian misogyny, these Christian “truths” come to instantiate submission, self-erasure, and piety as the dominant model of feminine virtue. This moral ideology is problematic for figures such as these rhetors, whose sense of virtue was formed, not from self-erasure, but from rhetorical performances of self-identification. Classical interpretations of *ethos* as moral goodness or character are intrinsically masculine and perpetuate a reductive notion of what constitutes virtue, in addition to how virtue is rhetorically constructed for women. It is necessary then to evaluate the virtue of the female religious rhetor alongside the Christian codes to which



she is subjected. In such a context, virtue becomes noticeably gender-inflected, as it is formed not only by the philosophical definition of virtue theorized by ancient rhetoricians, but more importantly by the Christian ideals regarding female piety. This fact reveals that the ideology of feminine virtue does not necessarily accord with the practice of feminine virtue as it is manifested rhetorically, nor does it acknowledge the nuanced rhetorical maneuverings employed by female rhetors. Linking *ethos* construction with the feminist rhetorical strategy of interruption, this study will trace how religious female rhetors, who by investing themselves with rhetorical authority, divested themselves of religious understandings of feminine virtue as they overcame the silent, passive ideal of the virtuous woman.

For each of these three women, the rhetorical pursuit of Christian virtue manifests itself in a radical transgression of the ethical codes imposed upon religious women. This thesis will therefore address the intersection of virtue and radicalism within a feminine discourse that prizes above all else adherence to the traditional notions of femininity. In doing so, I hope to emphasize that the act of virtuous transgression results in varying relationships with religion for these women. St. Catherine of Siena's embodied rhetoric, enlivened through her extreme asceticism and ubiquitous humanitarian efforts, leads her to become more affirmed in her faith and within her community, though her psychical self-abnegation ultimately results in her death. Even as she transgresses societal limitations, her *ethos* is bolstered by her subservience to God rather than to the self. In contrast, Sara Grimke becomes dislodged from her Episcopalian upbringing, seeking a voice in Methodism, Quakerism, Unitarianism, and ultimately finding her religious space within the practice of Spiritualism late in life. Mary Daly, after failing to reconcile her radical feminist views with the Catholic Church, unmoors herself from religion altogether in order to create a sisterhood free from God the Father, and all his sons. What this study will demonstrate,

then, is that the religious female rhetor's *ethos* is never wholly stable, but is often fluid as a result of her interior desire for identification within a discourse community to which she's been denied access.

### ***Ethos in Antiquity***

Despite its rich etymology, *ethos* is sometimes theorized in a reductive manner, with more attention paid to its classical lineage, most notably set forth in Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* and *Rhetorica*, as well as in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, and Cicero's *De Oratoria*. Aristotelian *ethos*, a distinctly male creation, conceived of solely for use by the male citizen-orator of the *polis*, represents a hurdle for the female rhetor, who, in order to speak, must transgress gendered notions of virtue inherited from pagan, classical antiquity and existent up until Christian modernity. It is therefore necessary to recognize the limitations of such a term when writing about women and women's rhetoric, since, within the context of ancient Greece and Rome, it was employed by and targeted exclusively toward elite males.

For Aristotle, a speaker's *ethos* was a rhetorical strategy employed by an orator whose purpose was to "inspire trust in his audience" (*Rhetorica* 1380). *Ethos* was therefore achieved through the orator's "good sense, good moral character, and goodwill," and central to Aristotelian virtue ethics was the notion that this "good moral character" was increased in virtuous degree by habit (*Rhetorica* 1380). Aristotle links virtue, habituation, and *ethos* most succinctly in Book II of *Nichomachean Ethics*: "Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching... while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name *ethike* is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word *ethos* (habit)" (952). The direct association between morality and

habit, as perpetuated by this understanding of *ethos*, is a source of contention for the female religious rhetor who resists this traditional charge to be “made perfect by habit” as she disrupts the habituated notions of feminine virtue within her cultural context (952). Commenting further on the classical etymology and understanding of *ethos*, Michael Halloran illuminates the interdependence between *ethos* and cultural context by claiming that “To have *ethos* is to manifest the virtues most valued by the culture to and for which one speaks” (60). While my study follows Halloran’s claim that *ethos* is culturally situated and constructed, it simultaneously complicates this notion by offering evidence and analysis of three women who, by acting in opposition to cultural mores imposed upon virtuous women, managed to interrupt the normative, patristic discourses of their time periods, albeit at a personal expense.

### **Feminist Reimaginings of *Ethos***

Feminist rhetorical theorists have begun to offer more nuanced ways to conceive of *ethos*, but they remain cognizant of how these classical associations have shaped and still do shape women’s use of the rhetorical tool. One such scholar is Johanna Schertz, who, in “Constructing Essences: *Ethos* and the Postmodern Subject of Feminism,” draws on Aristotelian *ethos* to reinterpret the term alongside feminist theories of subjectivity: “Instead of following a tradition that, it seems to me, reads *ethos* somewhat in the manner of an Aristotelian quality proper to the speaker’s identity, a quality capable of being deployed as needed to fit a rhetorical situation, I will ask how *ethos* may be dislodged from identity and read in such a way as to multiply the positions from which women may speak” (83). These positions from which women speak have been historically thought of as marginalized spaces, but this analysis of *ethos* broadens the discussion to include an intersection of both the public and the private spheres. In keeping with

Kate Ronald's claim that "*ethos* is the appeal residing in the tension between the speaker's private and public self," (39) this study will argue that *ethos*, though indeed socially constructed in the sense that it represents "a product of a community's character" for all three of these women, still stems in large part from each female rhetor's private experience with religion (Reynolds 327). Michael Halloran has argued that the classical understanding of *ethos* "emphasizes the conventional rather than the idiosyncratic, the public rather than the private" (60). In acknowledgment of Halloran's assessment, I argue that crafting *ethos*, especially for marginalized members of a culture or discourse community, necessitates rather than belies a constant negotiation between the private experience of religion and the public, rhetorical act of self-expression. Following Karen Burke LeFevre's argument that *ethos* "appears in that socially created space, in the 'between,' the point of intersection between speaker or writer and listener or reader" (45-46), my study similarly employs the "between" as a site of analysis within religious women's rhetoric, due to the inextricable link between the private and the public in the quest for feminine self-actualization.

### **Traversing Private and Public Spheres**

Interpreting female rhetors' *ethos* as contingent upon their public and private selves means acknowledging their historical exclusion within the public sphere generally, but also more specifically within the discourse community of religious rhetoric, due to the residual views of female virtue as consistent of piety, purity, and submissiveness. For medieval saints like St. Catherine of Siena especially, entry into the public sphere was a transgressive act because it problematized the nature of female sanctity. Elizabeth Petroff writes, for instance, that virginity, the "*sine qua non* of the female saint," was associated with "hiddenness, being invisible" (163).

By becoming a physical presence, then, St. Catherine interrupts these traditional notions of female sanctity, all the while clinging to her role as religious rhetor – a role dependent upon her subservience to the gendered notions of virtue which she habitually subverts. The physical presence of the female rhetor becomes no less transgressive throughout the proceeding reign of the Cult of True Womanhood, in which Sarah Grimke writes. As Karylyn Kohrs Campbell notes, entering the public sphere was considered an act of moral transgression for females of the nineteenth century: “Women who formed moral reform and abolitionist societies, and who made speeches, held conventions, and published newspapers, entered the public sphere and thereby lost their claims to purity and piety” (13). Crafting an *ethos* within such restrictive moral codes, therefore, meant adhering to membership of what Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner have theorized as counterpublics. While Warner contends that members of counterpublics are afforded little opportunity to join the dominant public and therefore exert true agency, Nancy Fraser has problematized Habermas’s conception of the public sphere as a dominant “social totality” (Warner 413) by theorizing “subaltern counterpublics,” which function as alternative publics that represent “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (67). Operating as marginalized members of counterpublics, religious women rhetors have historically employed interruption as a rhetorical strategy, and in doing so, they have crafted a participatory type of agency that simultaneously roots them to their communal ties, even as they break from the ethical codes of those communities. In her recent scholarship that links *ethos* construction to location, Nedra Reynolds has argued convincingly that “An individual’s *ethos* cannot be determined outside of the space in which it was created or without a sense of the cultural context” (“*Ethos* as Location” 329).

Therefore, in focusing on both the religious and cultural constraints of female rhetors acting as marginalized agents, this study draws upon the notion of interruption as *ethos* to form a framework for exploring the intersection of the public and private spheres, as well as the public and private selves of these three religious women.

My reading of the public sphere for the purpose of this study recognizes Habermas's delineation of it as a space of "public authority," (18) and also Michael Warner's conception that it is "a kind of social totality" or, more broadly, "a concrete audience" (413). The socio-political underpinnings of such an understanding of the public arena deem women's agency subordinate historically; however, this study acknowledges that for these three women, the "private sphere" is also, in some sense, consistent of the "public sphere." That is, because the rhetorical practices of these women are enacted as a result of their own need for religious identification (and are reliant upon their subsequent interruption of normative discourse practices in the pursuit of it), their exclusion from the private sphere becomes their exigency and their source of entry into the dominant public sphere. If we analyze these religious rhetors' religious identity, a dimension of the private self, as operating alongside their public personas, Kate Ronald's claim that *ethos* resides in the "between" of public and private selves becomes a useful means of articulating the collapsed distinctions between both spheres.

### **Rhetorical Interruption as *Ethos***

Following the recent feminist rhetorical scholarship of Laura Micciche, Nedra Reynolds, Johanna Schmertz, and Renegar and Sowards, I argue that interruption, once adopted as an *ethos*, allows female religious rhetors to navigate these cultural constraints imposed upon them by their roles within religious communities. Laura Micciche conceives of rhetorical

interruption as a displacement within normative discursive practices: “The intentional variety desires interruption as a political tool, the goal of which is to unstick normative conventions from fixed locations, making possible a questioning of what is in order to make claims for what might be” (177). Such a conception of *ethos* speaks to the radical rhetoric of all three of the women I analyze in this study, as it prizes *ethos* construction as a fluid process that disrupts the habituated rhetorical practices of the patristic tradition. Similarly, Nedra Reynolds articulates a feminist appropriation of interruption which facilitates rather than deters the creation of female agency and *ethos*: “Agency is not simply about finding one’s own voice but also about intervening in discourses of the everyday and cultivating rhetorical tactics that make interruption and resistance an important part of any conversation” (“Interrupting Our Way to Agency” 59). Renegar and Sowards theorize interruption or “contradiction” as a generative rhetorical force that prevents stasis for female rhetors overcoming a history of erasure: “Contradiction is not just a statement of opposition, but rather functions as a transcendent term that includes a myriad of other strategies such as ambiguity, paradox, multiplicity, complexity, anti-orthodoxy, opposition, and inconsistency” (6). By employing these recent feminist theories of rhetorical interruption in order to understand *ethos* construction, this study will dwell upon the difficulty faced by religious female rhetors, who, in this process of “intervening” and “unsticking” themselves from cultural conventions as they enter the public sphere, still craft authority and identity based on principles of religious virtue.

## **Chapter Outlines**

The chapters that follow will apply the theoretical framework of interruption as *ethos* to the specific texts produced by the three rhetors described above. Chapter II, The Communion of

Body and Soul in the Writings of St. Catherine of Siena, offers an opportunity to explore how the saint interrupts patriarchal theology through her body, but also how she interrupts the theology itself, through her discussion of the soul's precedence. The embodied rhetoric characteristic of St. Catherine of Siena's epistles and *Dialogue* interrupts normative religious writings by imposing a feminine voice upon the predominantly patriarchal society of medieval Europe. There is a pervasive emphasis within Catherinian scholarship to minimize the internal, governing role of the soul in order to accentuate the external, physical manifestations of the body. As the only visible source of divinity's existence, the medieval female body becomes a text out of necessity, but this fact is lost without emphasizing the interaction between both the body and the soul throughout Catherine's spiritual journey and her discursive progression. Drawing on St. Catherine's *Dialogue* and letters, this chapter will explore how the mystical saint derived rhetorical authority through the self-discipline of her soul, and how this governing spiritual asceticism – a private self-discipline that granted public authorization – was then made manifest by the body's subordinate roles as conduit, antagonist, and servant.

Chapter III, An Invocation of the Mind: Sarah Grimke's *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*, continues to trace women's historical pursuit of rhetorical authority by analyzing Grimke's "rhetoric of the mind" as an interruption of patristic discourses and exegetical writings. Grimke's *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes* illustrates a progression away from the female religious rhetor of medieval and renaissance eras, with argumentation steeped in God's revelation and mysticism, now to the 19<sup>th</sup> century female rhetor, relying on logic to perform the male-dominated task of exegesis. Within her collection of epistles, Sarah Grimke practices biblical exegesis as a means of substantiating her overarching claim that men, not scripture, have created female subjugation, primarily through their denial of educational rights to women. This



chapter will analyze how Sarah Grimke, noted abolitionist and spokeswoman for women's rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> century South, becomes the substantiation for her own claim of mental equality between the sexes as she effectively negates patriarchal assumptions of feminine reason by providing, through her "rhetoric of the mind," a literal representation of the unfettered female mind at work. This chapter will also analyze how Grimke's exertion of religious authority vacillates between the tension wrought from identification and alienation, as Grimke displaces herself from various religious communities, and yet never strays from religion altogether

Chapter IV, Mary Daly's Radical Interruption Critiqued, will explore Mary Daly's shifting constructions of *ethos* in her first two theological works, arguing that her progressively radical Voyage to feminism reveals her attempts to interrupt the ideology, language, and symbol system of the Catholic Church. Drawing on Krista Ratcliffe's theory of "rhetorical listening," this chapter will argue that this continuum of radicalism can be interpreted as a direct response to Daly's first failed attempt at negotiating a "listening" stance towards the church in her first work, *The Church and the Second Sex*. Daly, in her subsequently published text, *Beyond God the Father*, directly responds to this unsuccessful attempt at reconciliation between feminism, the church, and patriarchy by abandoning her previously established *ethos* of accommodation in favor of an *ethos* of interruption. Analyzed together as a dichotomous conversation, Daly's two early theological works reveal that her *ethos* of accommodation merely serves to reconcile patriarchy to a neglected feminist reality, while her *ethos* of interruption transforms these traditional ideologies with new ones. By adding Daly's first book to the conversation of her rhetoric, this chapter facilitates an understanding of modern scholarship's predominantly critical response to Daly's work.

Daly's rhetoric challenges women, who now have acquired for themselves the spiritual, psychical, and mental agency St. Catherine and Grimke espoused, to be cognizant of the residual notions of misogyny evoked in the scriptural words they still subscribe to, as followers of organized religion. In seeking to bring this to light, however, Daly's radical interruption further displaces her from organized religion as a whole, as she seeks to re-write and re-interpret the Christian truths she holds responsible for centuries of female erasure. But like St. Catherine and Grimke, Daly does not abandon her relationship with spirituality in the pursuit of rhetorical authority. As an analysis of her rhetoric will reveal, she merely reframes religious truth as a post-theology that exists "beyond God the Father" and accords with her radical feminist beliefs. In contrast to Sarah Grimke, who continues throughout her life to seek self-identification within various religious spaces, Daly, though she would ultimately leave Catholicism, kept her job as professor of theology at Jesuit-run Boston College until she was later fired for not allowing male students into her classes. Therefore, we see her shifting ideologies, but not rhetorical space, and such a discrepancy between community and the rhetoric that emanates from it supports the claim that rhetorical interruption is used as a means of self-identification, but also reveals that this process of self-identification can ultimately result in the displacement of the rhetor who employs it.

The above chapters will provide a framework within which to evaluate different modes of rhetorical interruption, just as they will facilitate an understanding of the effects associated with interruption when it is employed as a means of *ethos* construction. By analyzing St. Catherine's embodied rhetoric, it will become clear how such a discourse serves as an interruption to the patristic writings of the medieval period which still devalued women by propagating the notion of the female body as the site of original sin. Similarly, Sarah Grimke's rhetoric of mental

equality interrupts normative religious discourses of the nineteenth century as it seeks to purify in some sense the female mind as a site of agency for women, just as St. Catherine of Siena purifies the female body as a site of self-identification for women. In adding Mary Daly's religious rhetoric to the conversation of these two women who were radical in their own cultural contexts, it is evident that within Christian modernity, personal displacement is suffered even more radically than in centuries past by female rhetors who employ rhetorical interruption as their primary means of crafting authority.

CHAPTER II  
THE COMMUNION OF BODY AND SOUL IN THE WRITINGS OF ST. CATHERINE OF  
SIENA

The embodied rhetoric characteristic of St. Catherine of Siena's epistles and *Dialogue* is notable for the feminine voice it imposed upon the predominantly patriarchal society of medieval Europe. Although her eventual legacy as the Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church and patroness of Italy is acclaimed, her beginnings were remarkably humble. Born in 1347 Siena during the height of the Black Death, Catherine was raised in a wool-dyeing household of moderate means, as the twenty-fourth of twenty-five children. Many of her early epistles (of which 382 remain) are addressed to various members of her family; however, it was not her familial relationships, but rather her spiritual espousal with Christ which propelled her to an esteemed public life (Noffke 1-4). According to hagiographic accounts of her life circulated by her biographer and confessor, Raymond of Capua, Catherine experienced mystical visions as early as seven years old, leading her to adopt the life of a Dominican laywoman in her late teens, during which time she initially self-cloistered in her bedroom at home, where she fasted, prayed, and initiated her extreme aesthetic practices (Scott 35). Jennifer Kolpacoff Dean points to the significance of exterior and interior space in shaping Catherine's spirituality, writing that her bedroom was a "physical cell" that "retained its specifically holy meaning within the household, a material manifestation of the interior cell of the mind" (268). In 1368, Catherine experienced her well-known mystical marriage to God, a spiritual dialectic between God and the Soul which

she dictates in her only extant book, the *Dialogue*. From this mystical experience, Catherine emerged with an altruistic motivation to publically proclaim the private spirituality she had formerly cultivated in adherence to her self-directed mandate to “build a cell inside your mind from which you can never flee” (qtd. in “Pious Domesticities” 268). Throughout the ensuing years of her short life, Catherine served various public roles, including *apostola*, religious ambassador to two popes, and political mediator. In 1380, at thirty-three years old, Catherine, fatigued by the physical demands of her spiritual penances, died of heart failure in Rome, where she had assembled members of her *famiglia* to offer support in her political efforts with Pope Urban VI (“Sweet Words” 40).

Not only was St. Catherine an anomaly for dwelling as an equal within the male-dominated sphere of the clergy, but she was also an authorial anomaly, clothing God and religion in a woman’s form by means of birth and maternal metaphor. Much of the currently circulating scholarship focuses at length upon what Nancy Bradley Warren calls “incarnational epistemology” – “the process of knowledge production and acquisition grounded in corporeal, sensual, and affective experience” (7). Such a framework positions the saint’s physicality as her primary means of understanding her religious experience and then articulating that experience rhetorically. Scholars have noted striking and sometimes divergent nuances of this embodied rhetoric. Some take into account both Catherine’s textual rendering of the body, in addition to how her living body, psychically inscribed with the spiritual practices of fasting and self-flagellation, operated as text (Fleckenstein). Other scholars have illuminated the “paradox of flesh” and rhetoric of transgression which exists in Catherine’s writing, highlighting that the physical deterioration wrought from asceticism was Catherine’s only means of achieving spiritual health (Furth, Petroff). In a departure from the conventional analyses of Catherine’s embodied rhetoric,

some scholars essentially unsex Catherine in an effort to explain how it was the saint's androgynous rather than feminine language which constituted her written and public efficacy (Forbes, Watkins). The overarching argument in much of Suzanne Noffke's contributions to Catherinian scholarship argues for a fusion of both the mystical and embodied conception of Catherine's rhetoric ("The Physical in the Mystical"). Though Noffke begins the task of joining the soul and body in conversation, there is a pervasive emphasis within Catherinian scholarship to minimize the internal, governing role of the soul in order to accentuate the external, physical manifestations of the body. Renee Watkins, for instance, notes that many scholars maintain it was simply tradition for medieval mystical women to reject their bodies, and that such extreme asceticism was performed in order to achieve the accolade of sainthood on earth, not only spiritual transcendence (183). To refute these claims, I argue that as the only visible source of divinity's existence, the medieval female body becomes a text out of necessity, but more importantly, this fact is obfuscated without properly emphasizing the interaction between both the body and the soul within Catherine's rhetoric. Drawing on St. Catherine's *Dialogue* and letters, I will explore how the mystical saint derived rhetorical authority through the self-discipline of her soul, and how this governing spiritual asceticism was then made manifest by the body's subordinate roles as conduit, antagonist, and servant.

Guiding this communion between body and soul is the medieval notion that the body acted on earth as the mere vessel for the soul's ultimate union with God. Caroline Walker Bynum describes this "somatic" quality unique to the female mystic: "Control, discipline, even torture of the flesh is, in medieval devotion, not so much the rejection of physicality as the elevation of it – a horrible yet delicious elevation – into a means of access to the divine" (182). Viewing physicality as instrumental not only to the saint's piety, but also to her epistemology is

crucial in our endeavors to assess the efficacy of her *ethos* as rhetor, as her rhetorical effort to purify the body as a site of agency rather than sin coincides with the literal deterioration of her own physical body through asceticism. What this focus on embodiment minimizes, however, is the governing spiritual exigence from which Catherine writes, and in turn, what it simplifies is the interruptive intent she exerts in her efforts to publicly profess her private relationship with faith. Therefore, the soul, though often given subordinate treatment within the scholarship, should be brought to the forefront of discussion in efforts to analyze Catherine's embodied rhetoric. The saint's writing reveals that while the body, charged with the earthly task of conduit, is indeed essential to the soul's ascent, it is ultimately inferior due to its subservient nature and susceptibility to sin.<sup>1</sup>

Before the communion of both body and soul can be analyzed, it is first crucial to understand the primary significance of the soul – the intermediary between God and the body – in generating Catherine's rhetorical message. The ultimate source of autonomy for Catherine was found within one's own soul, and it is also from this interior dwelling that Catherine's *ethos* is constructed, allowing her to exert a divinely sanctioned rhetorical authority within the patriarchal confines of medieval Europe. In her extensive research on female medieval mystics, Caroline Bynum Walker observes that the prevailing image of the soul within religious writing of the Middle Ages was always gender-inflected, with the soul depicted as woman, bride or child (*Fragmentation and Redemption* 268). However, the meaning construed by such imagery of the soul also differed depending on the gender of the writer who employed it. Bynum writes, "When male writers used female images of the soul, they sometimes simply slipped into the metaphor in

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<sup>1</sup> I focus on the self-discipline of the soul; however, it is important to grasp from the outset that Catherine explicitly stressed that the body too ought to be disciplined and that self-will ought to be, not just disciplined, but killed: "What does the loving Paul say? 'Discipline the members of your body.' He doesn't say the same of the will; no, he wants the will put to death and not merely disciplined" (letter 1).

order to express the ‘child-like’ or ‘womanly’ dependence of the good Christian on a powerful, ‘fatherly’ God” (268). Catherine’s dependence on the imagery of the soul as a means of crafting authority subverts these prevailing depictions found in the writing of her male contemporaries and interrupts patriarchal theology through her discussion of the soul’s precedence over feminine physicality.

In a letter addressed to Bernabo Visconti, a tyrant of Milan, in response to his opposition to the papacy, Catherine argues that, although we do not have lordship on earth, we have “the most satisfying, most gratifying, most mighty lordship there is – lordship over the city of our own soul” (Letter 17). In the same letter, she proceeds to write that no sin or evil can enter this domain without our consent, denoting a sense of autonomy which is directly linked to the self-discipline of the soul through its adherence to God’s will rather than self-will:

No one can force us to commit the slightest sin, because God has put *yes* and *no* into the strongest thing there is, into our will. If our will says *yes* by consenting, we have by that very fact offended God by taking pleasure and delight in sin. If our will says *no*, we would sooner die than offend God and injure our own soul. (Letter 17)

This autonomy of the soul was not granted to earthly inhabitants without certain concessions, however. Catherine writes that each man or woman was tasked with striving to reflect God’s “Infinite Good” (*Dialogue* 35). In the *Dialogue*, the saint’s mystical account of “the soul’s” conversation with God, St. Catherine states that if God’s will is not the generative spark behind the soul’s activity, the soul is not only damaging itself through its own autonomy, but also damaging others who come into contact with it. Channeling the voice of God, she writes, “Because, when perfection is not in the soul, everything which the soul does for itself and for others is imperfect. It would not, therefore, be just that creatures, who are finite and created by Me, should be saved through offence done to Me, who am the Infinite Good” (*Dialogue* 35).



Although Catherine viewed the autonomy of the soul as a gift from God that afforded her a voice she otherwise would have been denied during the Middle Ages, she regarded this divinely sanctioned agency as a pact to uphold God's will rather than the will of the individual. Marie Walter identifies this pact as religious obedience: "The teaching of St. Catherine on religious obedience can be succinctly stated thus: the religious must no longer act under the influence of self-will" (361). From this, it can be inferred that Catherine's rhetorical message was able to enter public circulation because it was chiefly understood as God's message. Noffke further elaborates on this point, but draws attention to how obedience to God helped form a universal audience for the saint: "The principle is that God, truth, requires obedience of everyone – layfolk and clergies and religious, young and old, church authorities and subjects. And that universal call to obedience demands openness and respect from every side" ("Justly Doctor of the Church" 60). This notion of religious obedience insists that Catherine was serving God's will rather than her own, and by aligning herself with his already established *ethos*, she built her authority among both men and women from all class ranks.<sup>2</sup>

Further traces of this pact or religious obedience can be discerned through Catherine's description of the soul's interaction with the mirror of God:

In that same mirror of the goodness of God, the soul knows her own indignity, which is the consequence of her own fault. Wherefore, as a man more readily sees spots on his face when he looks in a mirror, so, the soul who, with true knowledge of self, rises with desire, and gazes with the eye of the intellect at herself in the sweet mirror of God, knows better the stains of her own face, by the purity which she sees in Him. (*Dialogue* 37)

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<sup>2</sup> While I primarily argue that Catherine's autonomy of the soul and alignment with God's *ethos* allowed her to transcend gender boundaries through her rhetoric, other scholars assert that it was Catherine's use of androgynous rhetoric which made her rhetorically accessible to all classes and genders. I do not discount these ideas raised by Forbes (124-125), Fleckenstein ("Incarnate Word"), and also by Watkins (188): they name the imagery and voice employed in the *Dialogue* as their reasoning for such a conclusion. In addition to their argument of androgynous embodiment, I also suggest that Catherine generated universal rhetorical authority through this spiritual self-discipline which governed her conception of the body.

This glimpse of Catherine's epistemology reveals how the reflection of God's goodness in Catherine's soul allowed her to establish her rhetorical authority in two primary ways. By naming God as the generator of self-knowledge (and therefore agency), she subverts the gender norms she simultaneously clings to, becoming at once the unruly usurper of cultural norms, but also the humble "servant and slave of God's servants"<sup>3</sup> (Letter 5). Watkins explains that the only authority available to women was a religious authority: "While there were certainly male mystics and ascetics, especially St. Francis of Assisi, who contributed to this line of development, the fact is that religious women, unlike men, were unable to speak with religious authority in the church unless they were visionaries and committed to a life of deliberate pain" (183). The soul, then, was autonomous through its self-discipline, but spiritual autonomy was only granted to women and acknowledged by men if this feminine – and intrinsically inferior – *ethos* was aligned with God's and was performed corporeally.

Catherine was certainly regarded as a pivotal political figure at the time; however, her religious authority was not entirely without speculation among the clergy. She faced official inquiry regarding the authenticity of her mysticism twice: once at a gathering of the leaders of the Dominican Order and again at the Papal court (Watkins 192). While the majority of men accepted Catherine's mysticism as a form of religious authority, women interpreted Catherine's use of the "Bible as textual mirror" as a subversion of the very patriarchy Catherine seemed to be aligning herself with ("Incarnate Word"). Fleckenstein explains the importance of the Bible's role as textual mirror, noting that medieval religious thought was highly governed by mirror metaphors, as this use of language conceived of the mirror as a means of transformation.

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine repeats this phrasing and self-titling (in some variation) at the beginning of each of her epistles. While this rhetorical move is consistent with most religious epistles of the period, and even later prophetic writing, the gendered implications it raises for Catherine, as a female religious rhetor, are more problematic. She substantiates her claims of divinely sanctioned will, but could also be said to mitigate her own subjectivity as author.

Defining the medieval perception of females as it was perpetuated by the Bible, she writes, “Thus, Paul’s words to Timothy<sup>4</sup> with which I opened this essay provide a textual mirror, an unstained mirror, a model of silent, subjected women that women were to use as reflection and self-reflection.” Catherine’s writings, then, offer a subversion of this original biblical mirror, and Fleckenstein argues even further that Catherine herself created “a textual mirror, one that alters the image of what women can be and should be by providing verbal images of experiences that can be actualized in corporeal form” (“Incarnate Word”). With Fleckenstein’s conclusions in mind, I interpret the rhetorical authority Catherine derived through the self-discipline of her soul as both reflective and productive. Her soul’s reliance upon the mirror of God allowed Catherine to generate a textual mirror of her own; this textual mirror then re-shaped the perception of female medieval women while simultaneously adhering to the patriarchal dictates of the time period.<sup>5</sup>

Although the soul was the ultimate source from which Catherine gained her rhetorical power, her mysticism was chiefly made manifest by the body, which served as an earthy conduit for the soul’s spiritual tasks. She writes of their mutual instrumentalism in the *Dialogue*: “At the time of death, the soul is reproved together with the body, because the body has been the companion and the instrument of the soul – to do good and evil according as the free-will pleased. Every work, good or bad, is done by means of the body” (71). This passage highlights the essential role the body served as vessel, but it is also crucial to keep in mind that the soul was still sovereign of the flesh. The ascent to heaven involved transcending a hierarchy of power: As

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<sup>4</sup> “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (I Timothy 2:11-12).

<sup>5</sup> The general perception of females during the middle ages was linked solely to their bodies. Warren states that Catherine altered the accepted opinion of women’s bodies as cures of original sin by depicting the female body as *imitatio Christi*. She argues that Catherine’s writing has a connection to “the experience of a female body, a connection to the body of Christ, and a corporeal materiality of its own” (42).

Catherine was charged with the spiritual task of serving God's will, the body was obligated to serve the dictates of the soul. This close reliance between the two is what leads most scholars to associate the body and soul as equals – almost as if the body is a mirror, a replication of the soul, rather than a channel through which the soul's truth is represented.

I have discussed in isolation Catherine's conception of the soul's prominence, noting that this spiritual self-discipline was essential to Catherine's achievement of rhetorical authority within the context of the Middle Ages, chiefly because it aligned her *ethos* with God's. Various, and sometimes divergent, arguments abound, discussing the connection between Catherine's own body and her use of embodied language to construct her rhetorical message. I follow the arguments brought forth by these scholars, but suggest a more nuanced manner of interpretation with my assertion of the soul's role as sovereign. Through its subordinate relationship with the soul, the body, as characterized by Catherine's writings, fulfills the roles of conduit, antagonist, and servant.

For the majority of scholars, Catherine's extreme asceticism is a recurrent point of discussion when evaluating the embodied rhetoric of her letters and *Dialogue*. Although the saint herself does not dwell extensively upon her physical penances within her writing, her biographer Raymond of Capua describes them at length. His narrative account of Catherine's life reveals a striking portrait of spirituality, which is performed by the body. By the time Catherine was twenty, she had stopped eating food, and subsisted entirely on raw herbs and the Eucharist. In addition to her religious fasting, Catherine also slept on a bed made of a few boards. She dressed only in clothes made of wool, and also wore a hair shirt; later she exchanged it for an iron chain, which she wound around her waist so tightly that it clinched into her skin and made the flesh raw (51-53). Raymond poignantly characterizes the battle of body and spirit Catherine suffered

during the height of her asceticism: “During all the time I knew her anyone could see that her strength was very much reduced and insufficient – because, of course, growing in the spirit, it was natural that her body should waste away, the latter being, so to speak, subjugated by the former” (57). Raymond’s narration of Catherine’s physical struggle shows the collision of the divine and corporeal worlds, and more importantly, it emphasizes the literal, physical displacement suffered on account of the saint’s adherence to her spiritual convictions. Although we are able to see the necessity of the body’s role as conduit from the excerpts Raymond relates, it is still evident that the soul is sovereign of the flesh, and that the two entities – body and soul – do not exhibit a reflexive quality. As is evidenced by Raymond’s words, Catherine’s soul, at its most buoyant and healthy, was housed within a conduit only fit for temporary earthly habitation. This temporary physical suffering, however, as an earthly manifestation of the soul’s self-discipline and adherence to God’s will, was necessary for the soul’s eternal reign in heaven.

Some scholars suggest a modern audience is poised to bristle against such severe ascetic practices, as this behavior casts the saint in the role of self-contrived victim (Scheeler 67). Andrea Dickens, for instance, argues that Catherine’s physical self-discipline has created a binary of madness and sanity in the scholarly perception of the medieval spiritual practices of females (49). Certainly, it could be argued that, through mysticism, the medieval saint upholds feminine ideals of self-erasure, passivity, even impassioned irrationality, by employing *kenosis* – an emptying of self-will – as a means of crafting selfhood. However, if we keep in mind that St. Catherine’s physical practices were governed by the soul, it is easier to interpret her asceticism, not as “mad” ostentation, but as spiritual obedience to God. Dickens describes the medieval notion of lust and appetite, and I would argue that these ancient attitudes are key to understanding Catherine’s spiritual exigence for creating a text out of her body: “Furthermore,

gluttony in the middle ages was a sign of inordinate lusts towards things other than God. To control one's appetites in eating, one could show control over inordinate lusts" (159). Catherine directly answers these medieval attitudes toward appetite in a letter she composed to an unidentified religious person in Florence who expressed scorn toward her asceticism:

Over and over I have prayed and do pray and will continue to pray to God for the grace to live as other people do in this matter of eating – if it is his will, for it certainly is mine. When I have done as much as I can, I enter within myself to get to know my own weakness and God, and I realize that he has given me a very special grace to overcome the vice of gluttony. (Letter 1)

This passage speaks to the prominence of the soul in guiding this physical display of self-discipline. In denying herself physical nourishment, Catherine then nourished her soul, with the expectation that this earthly self-denial would then lead to spiritual self-fulfillment through adherence to God's will.

The Roman Catholic sacrament of Holy Communion acknowledges that the Eucharist and wine are the actual body and blood of Christ, not mere symbols. Catherine's sole subsistence on the Eucharist, then, further indicates a form of purely spiritual nourishment, even though this subsistence on the body of Christ resulted in the physical deterioration of her own body. When describing communion, Catherine reveals that her physical self-denial is a form of religious devotion: "We have taken our example from the one who is continuously pouring out his blood at this table – and not for his own good but for ours. We who eat at this table and become like the food we eat begin to do as he does – not for our own good but for God's honor and for our neighbor's salvation" (letter 6). Catherine acted as an imitation of Christ, in an effort to serve God's will rather than her own, and these excerpts from her epistles reveal most clearly the purpose of the body as the soul's conduit. She believes that the spiritual nourishment of Holy Communion supersedes physical nourishment, because the flesh is merely a temporary

encasement for the eternal soul. Webb clarifies the spiritual nourishment offered by the sacrament of Communion: “Christ’s blood offers eternal life to the soul; the heart’s blood offers life to the body...Just as there is only one central source of life in the body, there is only one way to salvation and only one Christ” (807). Webb’s remark supports the argument that this spiritual self-discipline, mandated by God, was the governing force of the body. Further, by understanding the role of Holy Communion,<sup>6</sup> it is more apparent that Catherine’s asceticism was compelled by a purely devotional will.

Catherine further proclaims the guiding will of God in the communion of body and soul in letter twelve. Here she echoes the Christian teaching that God alone could destroy both the body and soul, but that humans could only destroy the body. Catherine writes, “The blessed Christ said, ‘Don’t be afraid of human beings, who can destroy only the body, but do fear me, for I can destroy both soul and body’...First he threatens us by reminding us that he can destroy both body and soul (and he does this to make us humble and wholesomely fearful)” (61). Catherine takes this as proof that humans should live in God, and living in God, for her, meant denying the temptations of the physical through asceticism and Eucharistic piety (letter 19, letter 7).

In the preceding discussion of the body, I analyzed its supplemental role as conduit, but Catherine’s writing indicates that the body served another subordinate role in relation to the soul: antagonist. Again, Catherine derived rhetorical and religious authority by exerting self-discipline of her soul, and although the body was essential for spiritual transcendence, this earthly conduit at times presented itself as an antagonist to the soul’s sovereignty.<sup>7</sup> While Catherine’s asceticism was a means of publishing her spiritual devotion on earth – with her body as her soul’s inscribed

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<sup>6</sup> To further flesh out the metaphor of feast and communion, it is necessary to conceive of the relationship between God and the soul as a food chain of sorts. Catherine writes of God’s “hunger to have souls as his food” (letter 37). Likewise, the soul, through Holy Communion, nourishes itself with the body of Christ.

<sup>7</sup> Furth terms Catherine’s antagonistic relationship with the body the “paradox of flesh,” noting that, for Catherine, “While all other physicality is the portal to sin, Christ’s body is the key to salvation” (97).

text – her asceticism was also a means of combatting the corporeal temptations of earth, which, if succumbed to, could transform the body from spiritual conduit to antagonist.<sup>8</sup> In the *Dialogue*, the voice of God explains that he has “imprisoned” the soul within the body for a purpose:

Wherefore you see that, while I created the soul to Mine own image and similitude, placing her in such dignity and beauty, I caused her to be accompanied by the vilest of all things, imposing on her the law of perversity, imprisoning her to be accompanied by the vilest substance of the earth, so that, seeing in what her true beauty consisted, she should not raise her head in pride against Me. (126)

The repetition of the word “vile” in characterizing the body is worth noting in this instance, as it seems to negate the supplemental quality that Catherine most often associates with the body as conduit. In part, it also seems as if God’s imprisonment of the soul is an effort to keep the soul humble and in servitude to Him. Noffke details Catherine’s dual perception of the body:

“...while Catherine often speaks of the body as an obstacle, as ‘a sack of dung’ and ‘the corrupt clay of Adam,’ she is careful to clarify that she means this only in the sense of its being used as an instrument for selfishness and sin” (“Physical in the Mystical” 115). This notion that the body could also be used as a conduit of selfishness and sin further strengthens the rhetorical authority Catherine gained by self-disciplining her own soul, and accordingly, her body. The body was not an exact representation of the soul, but a vessel in need of the soul’s guidance for purity.

In denying the sinfulness of corporeality, Catherine accepts God’s will. God himself tells Catherine that spiritual rewards await her in heaven as recompense for her earthly penance:

And therefore, justly, My daughter, glory and infinite good are rendered to My elect ones with their glorified body, rewarding them for the toils they bore for Me, together with the soul. And to the perverse ones will be rendered eternal pains by means of their body, because the body was the instrument of evil. (71)

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<sup>8</sup> Gardner describes the saint’s asceticism as “*tanti dolci tormenti corporali*,” (so many sweet bodily torments) and states that Catherine believed she would transcend the earthly realm through such practices (qtd. in “Holy Alliance”).



Therefore, the body, if it succumbed to the corporeal temptations of earth, was held accountable for failing to uphold the mandates of the soul, which was forced to serve God. This passage, perhaps more than others, reveals the separation between the body and the soul, and the manner in which temptations of sin and evil keep the two entities at odds on earth. Catherine describes heaven as the site of division in her letters: “And don’t imagine because Christ may *seem* not to see in this life that there will be less punishment in the next. Once the soul is stripped of the body, Christ will show that he has indeed seen” (letter 17). The body, then, is a deterrent to the soul’s true fulfillment: the ascent to heaven. The spiritual quest is paramount to whatever earthly toils tempt the body, and therefore, nourishment of the soul must be prioritized over nourishment of the body.

Such a conclusion might seem unsubstantiated, since so much of Catherine’s writing concerns, not the soul, but the body and bodily language. But Noffke explains that this focus on the physical is guided by a divine purpose:

[...] Catherine’s own writings make very clear that for her the reason for every recounting of a physically vivid experience, for every image introduced and woven into the fabric, is to clarify for her readers a view of God and of human spirituality which both incorporates and transcends the physical. It is a vision of the divine embracing the human. (128)

Catherine’s spiritual self-discipline – her exertion of agency through her autonomous soul – was her only means of bridging the earthly and spiritual plains, and her attempt at doing so strengthened her rhetorical authority, as her body became a textual message inscribed by her soul. Warren explains the medieval perception of the female body as a living text: “In the late medieval religious culture inhabited by St. Birgitta, St. Catherine, and Julian of Norwich, bodies produce texts, and texts are themselves in some respects living bodies” (42). However, this same spiritual penance which God instructed Catherine to perform against the antagonistic body was

the very cause of her death at age thirty-three. Furth points to this “paradox of flesh,” writing that “For a woman who lived with her physical body as her mortal enemy, it is strangely appropriate that her final demise would be rife with physical pain and suffering” (88).<sup>9</sup> Catherine’s manner of death is further proof that her soul guided her entire earthly life, and more importantly, her rhetorical message. Although her ascetical practices might have been met with scorn and speculation during her lifetime and within the scholarship, it is important to regard her earthly penance as being governed by her soul, which was fulfilling God’s will rather than earthly self-will.

While Catherine’s writing shows the body acting as a conduit and antagonist, she periodically describes the soul as sovereign of the flesh, further stressing the governing role of the soul in the journey toward spiritual transcendence. Catherine writes of this interaction between the soul, the body, and God’s will in a letter to an Augustinian hermit:

And at once, between soul and body, the word Christ spoke to his disciples is fulfilled: ‘Let the little ones come to me, for to them belongs the kingdom of heaven.’ This is how God treats his servants when he takes them from this miserable life and leads them to a place of rest. He commands this flesh of ours, which has been our soul’s servant and disciple: ‘Let this soul come to me, for to her belongs the kingdom of heaven!’ (Letter 35)

It is interesting that, although Catherine depicts both body and soul as in communion with one another, the relationship between the two has the capacity to be both mutualistic and antagonistic. Even if the soul is reliant upon the body to act as conduit, it ultimately possesses an autonomy of its own. But Catherine does make it apparent that the soul, though ruler of the body, is still committed to fulfilling the service of God. It is important to consider the communion of the body and soul in accessing Catherine’s rhetorical authority – not merely the roles each entity

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<sup>9</sup> She also states that Catherine viewed herself as under the siege of the following three toils: the world, the flesh, and the devil (89).

serves in isolation. God's will is the ultimate source from which Catherine derived agency in medieval Europe, but he granted her an autonomous soul which, through self-discipline, made the body into a physical manifestation of her spiritual penance. Keeping in mind that the body is not a replica of the soul – but a mere vessel – the soul's task is twofold: it must discipline itself, but must also discipline its servant, the body – the very entity which holds it captive.

This interaction of body and soul is also manifested rhetorically by a shift from the passive life to the active in Catherine's writings and the written chronicles of her life. Catherine's devotion to a purely religious existence began at the age of fifteen when, forced by her mother to consider the prospect of marriage, she cut off her hair in an effort to make herself less attractive, and ultimately, less marriageable. She then assumed the role of domestic servant in her family's home until age eighteen, when she joined the Dominican order. First she lived as a recluse,<sup>10</sup> during which time she learned to read and cultivated her extreme asceticism. After being admitted to the Sisters of Penance, she became a laywoman, ministering to the sick and "picturing the wounded Christ" in everyone she aided (Fatula 26-28). In 1368, her cloistered life ended entirely after she was seized by a vision often referred to as her "mystical marriage" to God (Raymond 99). During this vision, God urged Catherine to embrace the *activa via*,<sup>11</sup> and accordingly, she shifted from a purely spiritual existence to a physical presence, following God's mandate that spirituality necessitates that the body be a site of service, not just of contemplation. God, depicted as "the Spouse of the soul" in this section of the *Dialogue*, tells Catherine that her virtues should be visible and should extend beyond her solitude:

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<sup>10</sup> Her biographer and confessor, the Blessed Raymond of Capua, refers to this period of strict contemplation as "a secret cell which she vowed she would never leave for anything in the world" (43).

<sup>11</sup> I borrow this terminology from Barrett and Lukowski's "Wedded to Light: The Life, Letters, and Legend of St. Catherine of Siena" (1).

[...] if virtue were not visible and did not shine in the time of trial, it would not have been truly conceived; for, I have already told you, that perfect virtue cannot exist and give fruit except by means of the neighbor, even as a woman, who has conceived a child, if she do not bring it forth, so that it may appear before the eyes of men, deprives her husband of his fame of paternity. (36)

This extended metaphor essentially describes the invisible, unshared virtue as a stillborn child that Catherine, wedded to her solitude, has failed to bring forth into the world, further indicating that the virtues of the soul, if unarticulated on earth by the saint's physical presence, do not fully uphold what she envisions as God's calling for her. It is not sufficient that the soul should remain in a state of privatized cultivation, free from the trappings of temporal existence. In order to avert stasis, true virtue, though seated in the soul, must also be performed corporeally, and therefore, publically.

But, God's mandate is not only meant to inspire Catherine to spread his virtue, but to aid other souls in attaining virtue of their own on earth. Raymond narrates Catherine's shift from the *contemplativa via* to *activa via* as if it were an awakening: "...[God] awakens His spouse from her sleep on the bed of contemplation, where she has been lying unmindful of temporal things and washed clean of all filthiness, and invites her to open the door – not, of course, her own 'door,' but the 'door' of other souls" (105). So in many ways, the *Dialogue* departs from the previously discussed idea that the body and soul are in conflict. When Catherine embraces the *activa via* within the *Dialogue*, the body is described more as a vessel used to conduct God's work – still subservient to the soul, but not a potential antagonist to it. God is goading her toward civic engagement. Her early letters, however, stress the self-reliance of the soul and seem to suggest that the soul is the only means of achieving virtue: "I don't think it is possible to have virtue or the fullness of grace without dwelling within the cell of our heart and soul, where we will gain the treasure that is life for us; I mean the holy abyss that is holy knowledge of ourselves

and God” (letter 1). Here, we see Catherine’s cloistered soul drawing inward to secure her agency as rhetor. This is the soul attempting to conduct God’s work without its conduit, and therefore, without efficacy, as her conversation with God indicates. She attempts to harness both knowledge and self-will by cultivating a spiritual autonomy, but as the *Dialogue* suggests, her rhetorical authority, as mandated by God, is meant to encompass both the contemplative (spiritual) and active (physical) forms of civic engagement.

Catherine repeatedly refers to her spiritual autonomy as “the cell of self-knowledge” (letter 74). The consensus among the scholarship is that the cell was meant to “animate the person once again to seek the outside community” (Warren 159). In this way, Catherine’s *ethos* can be analyzed as consisting of both the private and public selves, and furthermore, the tension between the two can be understood as the interruptive force that perpetuates Catherine’s message. Catherine’s rhetorical authority was derived from her ability to craft a public persona rooted in spiritual conviction. But, more importantly, the act of integrating the public and private selves was directed toward self-identification for Catherine. This ongoing process of seeking identification through her writings is what prevents stasis in regard to the saint’s public authorization. Because she is constantly propelled by the necessity both to interrupt patristic discourse and to uphold religious obedience, her *ethos* resides somewhere between public projection and private self-reflection: she must assert her public authority within her politically-charged epistles, even as she, on account of her mysticism, disappears from the text of the *Dialogue*, serving as the earthly vessel through which God’s prophetic message is given voice.

Perhaps it is not explicitly apparent that Catherine, by immersing herself in the world, was engaging in an act of what the church fathers would consider sinful behavior, and what Petroff terms a “rhetoric of transgression” (163). Petroff states that virginity is the “*sine qua*

*non*” of the female saint and that virginity was associated with “hiddenness, being invisible” (163). Catherine’s visibility within the public domain, then, would have been considered the equivalent of “the suffering of rape,” had Catherine not projected her public image in God’s likeness (164). However, it can be discerned through Catherine’s writing that her ability to align her *ethos* with God’s, while still subverting the paradigm of the silent, subjected female, allowed her to transcend these societal limitations. The governing role of her soul overpowered the cultural expectations of her body, and this is why it is essential to place her spiritual self-discipline at the forefront of her embodied rhetoric.

Scott builds on this union of transgressive activism and religious contemplation, arguing against the forced binary that often enshrouds discussion of the saint as she moved from a purely spiritual existence towards one steeped in interaction with the physical world. Scott writes that Catherine “portrayed herself as an itinerant preacher and peacemaker, as a female apostle or *apostola*, and that this role enabled her to integrate the political and contemplative dimensions of her life” (37). I would argue that, on a rhetorical level, this shift from contemplation (through written word), towards activism (through civic engagement) is brought about by the communication between both the soul and body. The soul acts as the bodily text’s exigence, inspiring and giving shape to a tangible representation of what is divine and abstract. Because of this interdependence, the body and soul are both essential to the dissemination of Catherine’s spiritual message.

While I conceive of Catherine’s rhetorical authority as being derived from the communion between her body and soul, Fleckenstein focuses mostly on Catherine’s physical rhetorical message, arguing that Catherine, as an image event within medieval Europe, enacted a rhetoric *on* the body (through her asceticism) and a rhetoric *with* the body (through her civic

activism). An element of Fleckenstein's that departs from my own reading of Catherine's writing is the idea that the soul and body somehow become united during earthly habitation.

Fleckenstein writes, "The soul is embodied through its participation in and with the world... God counsels the soul to submerge herself in the virtues done by means of the body" ("Incarnate Word"). This implies equilibrium between the two, and seems to assume that the soul is granted agency by the body. The soul is indeed encased within the body, but the governing role of the soul, in obedience to God, is responsible for bringing about Catherine's earthly penances. It is also important to note that, while Catherine tells us God placed importance on the soul's immersion in the world, He also instructs Catherine that "[Holy and sweet acts] not only consist of those virtues which are done by means of the body, that is, with an exterior act" (*Dialogue* 31). From this we can discern that the source of virtue (the soul), not the agent of virtue (the body), was paramount in God's perception of goodness.

Catherine's writings are pivotal because they began the task of purifying the female body in the minds of a patriarchal society that was all too quick to deny them a voice, much less rhetorical authority. The embodied arguments which assess the efficacy of Catherine's rhetorical authority have succeeded in analyzing the texts Catherine left behind – both her written texts and the written chronicles of her body operating as text. However, Catherine's writings reveal the overarching importance of the soul's role in invoking these physical manifestations of her religious and rhetorical messages. Without the soul's call to instruct its conduit in fulfilling God's will, there would be no text. Likewise, without the body, acting as earthly conduit, Catherine's rhetorical message would have remained merely bound to the page, unwritten within the living world. Therefore, the best means of evaluating Catherine's rhetorical authority is to conceive of it as a rhetorical trinity: The soul is the sovereign of the body, and both body and

soul are subject to the lordship of God's will – the ultimate source of rhetorical authority within medieval Europe.



CHAPTER III  
AN INVOCATION OF THE MIND: SARAH GRIMKE'S RHETORIC OF MENTAL  
EQUALITY

Within her collection of epistles entitled, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman*, Sarah Grimke practices biblical exegesis as a means of substantiating her overarching claim that men, not scripture, have created female subjugation, primarily through their denial of educational rights to women.<sup>12</sup> When surveying the women rhetors of preceding and proceeding centuries, Grimke's "rhetoric of the mind" marks a radical shift away from both opposing ends of feminist rhetoric, which aim to "write the body" and therefore reclaim it as a generative site of agency and authorization. Grimke's rhetoric in these epistles illustrates a progression away from the female religious rhetor of medieval and renaissance eras, with argumentation steeped in God's revelation and mysticism<sup>13</sup>, now to the 19<sup>th</sup> century female rhetor, relying on logic and reason to perform the male-dominated task of exegesis. Grimke's rhetoric also offers a much different perspective than the later embodied rhetoric of contemporary feminist theorists like Cixous, who argue that feminine authority cannot be separated from the lived reality of the female body as a site of agency.<sup>14</sup> This chapter will

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<sup>12</sup> These letters were published as a series of articles in the *New England Spectator*, considered a radical press of the era, and they were later re-printed in the *Liberator*, along with her sister Angelina's letters, which covered equal rights for women and abolition. Sarah's *Letters*, however, were considered by Eleanor Flexnor to be "the first serious discussion of woman's rights by an American woman" (Gold 343).

<sup>13</sup> In referencing these female rhetors, I primarily seek to draw attention to how, through birth and maternal metaphor, they re-envisioned the female body as in *imago Christi*, rather than simply as the site of original sin.

<sup>14</sup> Cixous writes, for example, "Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond

analyze how Sarah Grimke (1792-1873), noted abolitionist and spokeswoman for women's rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> century South, becomes the substantiation for her own claim of mental equality between the sexes as she effectively negates patriarchal assumptions of feminine reason by providing, through her rhetoric of the mind, a literal representation of the unfettered female mind at work.

It is crucial to understand the specific cultural context in which Sarah Grimke writes in order to analyze the nuance with which she crafts her *ethos* and to evaluate the radicalism within her rhetoric. Born in 19<sup>th</sup> century South Carolina to a father who was a Supreme Court judge, colonel in the Revolutionary War, and slaveholder, Grimke's status as an aristocrat's daughter poised her for a life of assimilation into the customs of the wealthy and ruling class, rather than a life of spiritual and public rebellion. Grimke's mother, who descended from European and American aristocracy, is said to have "imbued the family with staunchly Huguenot-Puritan attitudes" that in effect instantiated in Sarah a "sturdy love of truth, and [a] clear sense of justice" (Carlacio 249). Instead of adopting these mores, Grimke devoted her life to breaking free from these societal constraints through her sustained arguments for women's rights and abolitionism (Birney 16). Such a radical stance was particularly a risk during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which women were still confined to the domestic sphere in preservation of the cult of true womanhood – a "widespread cultural project" meant to "police the borders between domestic and public space and to keep the average woman in her home and off the podium" (Johnson 277). While Grimke's rhetoric does acknowledge women's positive contribution to society due to immersion in the domestic sphere, she also viewed access to the public sphere as the only means of securing education for females, a rhetorical stance that came into conflict with ideals of submissive

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the ultimate reserve-discourse..." (*The Laugh of the Medusa* 1531). Language and embodiment are inextricable: "Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" (*The Laugh of the Medusa* 1527).

femininity, given the “generally held nineteenth-century view that character and the nature of one’s rhetoric are mutually revealing” (Johnson 275). Therefore, taking a stance in 19<sup>th</sup> century South meant interrupting not only religious discourses about women, but also interrupting the tightly structured gender norms prescribed for all classes, but most stringently prescribed for rigidly hierarchical upper class families like Grimke’s. What this transgression meant for Grimke was a break both from her family, after the death of her father, and from her Episcopalian upbringing, leaving her to seek a voice alongside her younger sister Angelina in Methodism, Quakerism, Unitarianism, and ultimately Spiritualism later in life (*Feminist Consciousness* Lerner 160).

Grimke’s *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes* were addressed to Mary Parker, the President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, who had recommended the sisters to the editor of the *Spectator*, William Lloyd Garrison. But Sarah’s exigency for writing the letters stems not from the longing for public recognition, but from her long-term struggle to obtain a life of the mind that was only afforded to her brothers, on the basis of nothing other than their gender (*Grimke Sisters* 188). Lerner writes that Grimke acquired “different branches of polite education for ladies” at one of the institutions in Charleston where the daughters of the wealthy were schooled in all the niceties published in the conduct manuals of the period (*Grimke Sisters* 17). This feminine equivalent of education included such practical skills as needlework, stitchery, beadwork, reading, writing, a little French, and enough arithmetic for household budgetary management. According to Lerner, this education afforded to wealthy daughters provided a “curriculum offering a little of everything and not very much of anything, designed not to tax excessively the gentle female mind” (*Grimke Sisters* 17). However, Grimke’s strong rapport with her older brother Thomas helped her subvert this feminine mental subjugation in part. Before

Thomas left for law school at Yale, Sarah studied under his tutelage, taking in lessons as diverse as history, geography, and Greek. Although her father observed and appreciated Sarah's precocious mind, he subscribed to the societal ideologies that confined women to the work and concerns of the household by refusing her the opportunity of a genuine education. His rationale was based on nothing other than gendered ideals: her father frequently remarked that his daughter would have made the best lawyer in town, had she only been born a boy (Birney 8). This contextualization provides a basis for Sarah's lifelong pursuit of female mental liberation and her desire to completely unmoor herself from the hierarchical and restrictive upbringing that denied her an education and a voice. Not only did she inhabit a society in which women were only valued within the domestic sphere, but she was raised in a family structure that, while it acknowledged her uncanny mental acuity and provided her certain monetary luxuries, still rendered her agentless and mentally inferior.

This desire to be recognized as a mental equal with her male counterparts led Grimke to entirely disassociate herself from her family (excluding her sister and co-speaker Angelina<sup>15</sup>) and her Episcopalian religion by the age of twenty-nine, following the death of her father. Carlacio notes that it was Sarah's morality and quest for justice that led her to adopt Quakerism, a religion that allowed both men and women to speak authoritatively according to their "inner light" (250). Carlacio writes, "Indeed, it was the putatively nonhierarchical structure of the Quaker religion that originally attracted Grimke, who eschewed this very aspect of southern life" (250).

Therefore, it is crucial to note that throughout Sarah's rebellion against societal norms, she never

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<sup>15</sup> Angelina's life is often interwoven into the telling of Sarah's life, but the scope of this chapter centers exclusively upon Sarah, partly because of her neglect within scholarship of women's rhetoric. Lerner recognizes several factors that might explain this lack of critical reception: "Sarah, on the other hand, was a poor public speaker, and her major writings were focused on women; she was considered to have no historical significance apart from her sister" (*Feminist Thought of Sarah Grimke* 4). Angelina, in contrast, was "the celebrated public speaker" and the "heroine of the antislavery movement" (4).

disassociates her message from its grounding in religion, even as she recognizes and exposes the injustice that religious officials have enacted due to faulty interpretation. Having been displaced on account of her discordant personal views, she merely shifts her religious affiliations to suit the needs of her rhetorical message, an important point to consider when evaluating how she crafts her *ethos* within the context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The radicalism of Grimke's rhetoric is only heightened by her sustained adherence to religion as a primary means of authorization. The political involvement of 19<sup>th</sup> century women – “consciousness-raising” as Karlyn Kohrs Campbell describes it – was bolstered by women's adherence to religious concerns, yet these concerns were often extrapolated upon, serving as the impetus for other issues of import such as slavery or, in Grimke's case, equal rights between the sexes. Campbell notes,

Nonetheless, by framing their petitioning as consistent with their Christian duty, women redefined such political action as consistent with a traditional womanly role. What began in prayerful supplication, however, soon became a powerful political tool that altered petitioners' consciousness and laid the foundation for political action through petitioning on other issues...” (53)

While this framework of Christianity worked well to prime an audience for an otherwise anomalous speaker, complications arose when female speakers such as Grimke and her sister Angelina spoke in front of mixed or “promiscuous” audiences (Zaeske). Ellen Reid Gold claims that the Grimke Sisters' public efficacy, though enacted among a promiscuous audience, was strengthened by their “group membership”: “Once authenticated by group membership, feminists have more easily gained the attention of an audience, just as the Grimke sisters, agents of the Abolition movement, achieved a goal which Frances Wright, acting alone, was not able to achieve” (360). However, although she was no longer a participant within the rigidly affixed social hierarchy of southern aristocracy, Grimke was no less subject to the gendered expectations

encoded by 19<sup>th</sup> century mores, which recognized a speaking woman as a sinning woman, and associated a woman's entry into the public sphere with her subsequent divestment of purity and piety.

Zaeske describes the social risk women like Grimke subjected themselves to by entering the public sphere and addressing a "promiscuous audience":

Grounded in deeply-rooted myths about the irrationality and seductive powers of the female sex, the prohibition against addressing 'promiscuous audiences' reinforced early nineteenth-century conceptions of woman's sphere and became a puissant weapon in the hands of traditionalists – secular and religious alike – who sought to keep women off the platform and out of the public arena. (192)

Within her writing, religion functions as a private means of self-identification for Grimke, but it also served a utilitarian purpose as a rhetorical aegis of sorts, offering her authorization within a discourse community and public setting to which she would have otherwise been denied access.<sup>16</sup> On a personal level, Grimke's relationship with religion occurs as a series of failed attempts at identification and subsequent spiritual displacements, leading her to seek public expression within a different sect of spiritual affiliation each time. Rhetorically, however, Grimke's religious convictions aim also to counter these charges of promiscuity, proving once again that the private and the public spheres, for religious female rhetors, are constantly convergent. Zaeske argues further that Grimke overcame these societal strictures by employing a "rhetoric of gendered morality that emphasized the special nature of female benevolence and the social utility of exercising that benevolence through the spoken word" (192). Grimke's rhetorical efforts, analyzed in conversation with these various rhetorical theories, show her attempts at

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<sup>16</sup> While class and gender are ostensibly the biggest hindrance to Sarah's efforts, religion, too, though it served as a spiritual and public aegis, was not entirely free from complication. David Wallace notes the "important but *problematic* role organized religion played in that spiritual journey" (50). He terms it problematic because, even though religion promised spiritual equality, it too limited the sisters' exertion of agency: Angelina was denied the chance to attend a new women's seminary, and Quaker elder Jonathan Edwards prohibited Sarah from becoming a Quaker minister (50).

adopting traditional conventions such as exegesis, while delivering her message in such a way that still accords with the traditional ideal of the virtuous woman. What we see in her rhetoric is not a departure from the domestic or private sphere, but an attempt to negotiate this space with that of the public, even as she finds that one displaces the other.

Grimke's argument that women's educational deprivation prevented them from interpreting the Bible on their own terms participates in a larger genre of religious women's rhetoric focusing on similar concerns. For instance, women such as Margaret Fell, Mary Astell, Judith Sargent Murray, Julia Smith, and Rachel Speght all reinterpreted the biblical core texts in order to prove that God's word, if filtered through a singularly male perspective, took on different meanings that were grounded less in objective fact and more in subjective interpretation. Lerner also notes that religious women's rhetoric of this variety followed a similar argumentative structure, a structure that Grimke also adopted in her letters: "Their criticism followed predictable patterns: they juxtaposed contradictory statements from the biblical texts (such as the two versions of Genesis); they used texts from other parts of the Bible to interpret the core texts differently; they cited different patristic authorities over the dominant ones" (*Feminist Consciousness* 159). Lerner adds, however, that although Grimke's letters participated in and adhered to the conventions of religious women's rhetoric, her text was considered the most radical of the feminist texts of her time. The extent of Grimke's radicalism, according to Lerner, is due to the fact that she relied not only on words, but also on deeds to craft her argument. Because her argument stemmed from her direct experience<sup>17</sup> in the female antislavery movement, it bridged the gap between theory and practice, allowing her to fulfill the tenets of

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<sup>17</sup> Grimke's reliance on personal experience also supports more recent theories of traditional feminine rhetorical style. As Dow and Tonn note in "Feminine Style," "...women have developed particular capacities for concrete and contingent reasoning, for reliance on personal experience, and for participatory interaction" (315).

traditional feminine style as she entered the public sphere and lost claim to traditional conceptions of femininity (*Feminist Consciousness* 161). While Grimke's rhetoric does participate in a long line of feminist biblical criticism, Lerner illuminates the innovations Grimke brought to the genre. For instance, much of Grimke's work centers on accusations of faulty translation skills and linguistic analysis – an uncharted method of analysis within this particular type of religious women's rhetoric. Similarly, Grimke "moved far ahead of her predecessors and her contemporaries" by furthering the argument of female degradation to include analysis of the manner in which men have used women for instrumental ends (*Feminist Consciousness* 162). For the purposes of this chapter, I dwell on what I consider to be Grimke's most innovative contribution to feminism and religious women's rhetoric: her argument against feminine mental enslavement. In the analysis that follows, I trace her rhetoric of the mind in order to establish how she interrupts religious writings by claiming the mind as a site of feminine agency and subsequently crafting an *ethos* contingent upon both opposition and acquiescence to gender norms.

My analysis centers primarily upon Grimke's rhetoric of mental equality within her *Letters*. However, Vonnegut has offered interesting commentary on how Grimke shifts her "persona" or *ethos* from her first attempt at writing an epistle ("An Epistle to the Clergy of the Southern States")<sup>18</sup> to composing a series of what she terms "private letters" in her *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*. Vonnegut's claims are necessary to contextualize Grimke's later composition of her *Letters*:

Grimke's use of the letter form is of special interest because it changes over time. Initially she employed the epistle model: a public letter. But the implications of

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<sup>18</sup> In this text, Grimke appeals to southern clergymen of Charleston, refuting pro-slavery religious arguments by claiming that ownership over any individual is against God's decree, given that divinity lives within all humans, and therefore, all humans are equal and thus unable to be owned by anyone but God.



that form and its attendant persona, the apostle, limited her ability to persuade. In later work, she shifted to the private letter and the persona of a sister, which served her purposes well. (74)

According to Vonnegut, then, Grimke's *ethos* was not wholly stable. Writing within the genre of letters allowed Grimke to exercise fluidity when crafting her *ethos*. Similarly, Carlacio argues that writing within the epistolary genre allows Grimke not only to construct her message, but also to construct her audience. This analysis of Grimke's epistolary rhetoric considers her inhabitation of both the public and private spheres and articulates the fluidity granted by writing within this genre: "The permeable nature of the epistolary genre did more than make fluid a boundary that would otherwise separate the public from the private; it also helped bridge geographical distance" (253). According to this perspective, then, Grimke's rhetorical form and choice of genre helped spread her message to audiences that otherwise would not have had access to her views. Grimke's *ethos* undoubtedly had interruptive intent, but it is important to view it within the epistolary genre in order to understand it as a shifting construction rather than as a static rhetorical force that did not have to change according to audience reception or cultural climate.

Grimke's argument for mental equality between the sexes never strays from the text of the Bible for substantiation. As noted earlier, her attack on male translation of the Bible (particularly its capacity to historicize a male-centric worldview) sets her apart from female religious rhetors writing contemporaneously with her. She writes that relying on exegesis is the only means of defining the proper sphere of woman because she believes that "almost everything that has been written on the subject, has been the result of a misconception of the simple truths revealed in the scriptures" (4). For instance, from the outset of her collection of letters, Grimke dismisses many arguments of female degradation on biblical grounds by drawing attention to the

misinterpretations of the word “men.” She argues convincingly that all accounts of the creation of “man” also include “woman” given that this term was a generic one used in all patristic writings: “In all this sublime description of the creation of man, (which is a generic term including man and woman) there is not one particle of difference intimated as existing between them. They were both made in the image of God; dominion was given to both over every other creature, but not over each other” (4). This is an effective strategy to begin the proceeding arguments she constructs throughout her collection, because it draws attention to how words can serve an instrumental purpose if employed for a specified end.

In contextualizing Grimke’s linguistic, text-centered approach to biblical criticism, it is important to note the concept of *logos*, which resides in the relation between word and reason. Central to a logocentric belief is that truth can inhabit the word by reason; however, within religious writing and epistemology, *logos* is also synonymous with “the Word of God.” Citing the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Jasper Neel writes, “The Word (Greek *logos*) of God is more than speech; it is God in action, creating, revealing, redeeming” (117). Furthermore, the Word of God is affective, embodied in the Son: “As a human being, with his human name, Jesus Christ is thus the Word whereby man addresses God the Father: *per Ipsum et cum Ipso et in Ipso*, the Church prays, ‘Through him and with him and in him’” (Ong 13). The prominence of these notions, most of them inherited from the medieval religious culture of primary orality, explains in part why Grimke, like so many other religious women writers, would have recognized the need to pay close attention to how misinterpretation of God’s word creates a worldview not in accordance with true Christian values of spiritual and mental equality between the genders. These “simple truths” Grimke points to in Scripture are indeed simple, but not inert: as she argues, the words have been used as a tool by male translators to craft and affirm female

submission, and in pointing to this fact from the outset of her argument, Grimke reveals how cultural ideologies impinge upon the written text.

The central thesis of Grimke's argument for mental equality places the blame not on the word of God, but on the men who have mistakenly misinterpreted scripture and thus used it as a means of keeping women in subjection. For instance, Grimke repeatedly proposes comments similar to the following as her substantiation of this claim: "I am inclined to think, when we are admitted to the honor of studying Greek and Hebrew, we shall produce some various readings of the Bible a little different from those we now have" (16). If women are indeed inferior, then, it is because they have been denied an education. Following this claim further, she writes, "[Man] has done all he could to debase and enslave her mind; and now he looks triumphantly on the ruin he has wrought, and says, the being he has thus deeply injured is his inferior" (11). From this position Grimke extrapolates to include the manner in which the female mind, like the slave's mind, has been fettered by patriarchal dominion. She writes in "The Pastoral Letter of the General Association of Congressional Ministers of Massachusetts":

I rejoice because I am persuaded that the rights of woman, like the rights of slaves, need only be examined to be understood and asserted, even by some of those, who are now endeavoring to smother the irrepressible desire for mental and spiritual freedom which glows in the breast of many, who hardly dare to speak their sentiments. (15)

Grimke's argument here is effective because she links mental enslavement with spiritual enslavement, overtly challenging patriarchal, religious thinkers and commentators to separate the spiritual life from the mental and thereby admit that in denying women and slaves access to mental freedom, they have similarly denied them spiritual agency.

Central to this argument is Grimke's redefinition of what male translators propose as "commandments of God" (16). She redefines these derived scriptural truths as "anti-Christian

traditions of men,” asserting that the “distinction now so strenuously insisted upon between masculine and feminine virtues” does not in fact exist within scripture, only within the commentary and interpretations derived from scripture (17). What the church fathers have subjected women to, instead, is an influence “private and unobtrusive,” but such a conception of gender roles, Grimke argues, is not supported by the entirety of the Bible. For instance, she cites Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount in order to show that this passage delineates how humans should be governed in relation to God, “without any reference to sex or condition” (16). For Grimke, this sex-role indoctrination is particularly challenging to combat because its ramifications have no physical manifestation as it did when men were allowed to lay “aside the whip as a means to keep woman in subjection” (17). Grimke argues that the psychological trauma of sex-role indoctrination is just as potent as the physical:

He spares her body; but the war he has waged against her mind, her heart, and her soul, has been no less destructive to her as a moral being. How monstrous, how anti-christian, is the doctrine that woman is to be dependent on man! Where, in all the sacred Scriptures, is this taught? Alas! She has too well learned the lesson which MAN has labored to teach her. (17)

If the female mind were incapable of learning, then, it would not have been able to absorb these “anti-Christian” teachings. The problem is instead that the fettered female mind, deprived of education, has not been afforded the chance to exert autonomy through translation and interpretation of these scriptures. Equality of intellect, for Grimke, begins with the task of considering the sexes of equal import to society and to one another: “We approach each other, and mingle with each other, under the constant pressure of a feeling that we are of different sexes; and, instead of regarding each other only in light of immortal creatures, the mind is fettered by the idea which is early and industriously infused into it, that we must never forget the distinction between male and female” (22). The distinction between male and female, for

Grimke, is one defined not only by educational depravity, but also by space. What Grimke promotes, however, is not an outright rejection of woman's place in the home, but rather, a potential expansion of the private sphere's influence by adding mental freedom to the acceptable list of "women's work." For instance, Grimke writes, "If the minds of women were enlightened and improved, the domestic circle would be more frequently refreshed by intelligent conversation, a means of edification now deplorably neglected, for want of that cultivation which these intellectual advantages would confer" (121). The important point to be gleaned from Grimke's assertion is that the political climate was such that even radicalism had to be introduced by degrees in order to accommodate certain biases of her audience, even as she negated the prevailing societal arguments against women's presence outside of the home.

Grimke's claim here aligns with what Campbell terms the "argument from expediency" (16). As Campbell describes it, this strategy allows female rhetors to argue that the female-inhabited private sphere of domesticity can purify the male-dominated public sphere, if the two are allowed to intersect: "If women were allowed to vote, they would bring to bear on politics their purity, piety, and domestic concerns, and thus purify government and make it more responsive to the needs of the home" ("Introduction to *Man*" 16). In the same way, Grimke argues, if women are allowed access to education, their newfound knowledge would only enrich the domestic sphere, not sully it. Her argument for public access therefore relies upon a construction of selfhood, but on the basis of selflessness. Grimke's rhetorical maneuverings of selfhood and selflessness follow historical precedent of the time. Women during the 19<sup>th</sup> century were expected to construct an *ethos* based on traditional feminine values of humility and self-sacrifice at the expense of themselves and for the benefit of others. Campbell theorizes the argument from expediency: "Women who argued from expediency did not seek rights for their

own sake but only for the good that could be done with them for others” (“Introduction to *Man*” 17). In line with this, Grimke also argues that education would not cause women to lose “any thing of the purity of her mind,” but instead, education would enable women to purify the minds of others: “While laboring to cleanse the minds of others from the malaria of moral pollution, her own heart becomes purified, and her soul rises to nearer communion with her God” (25). The fact that women act as primary agents within the domestic sphere is further proof that they should have access to education, given their roles as educators of their own children. She writes, “The influence of women over the minds and character of *children* of both sexes, is allowed to be far greater than that of men...[W]omen should be prepared by education for the performance of their sacred duties as mothers and as sisters” (49). Again, Grimke bolsters her *ethos* by aligning her argument with Christian duty and by subscribing to traditional arguments of femininity. This argumentative strategy may not seem ostensibly radical by the standards of contemporary feminism, but such nuance demonstrates the gradual progression in female rhetors’ construction of the self during this era and throughout history. Although Grimke employs selflessness as a means of authorization, she does not do so through *kenosis*, as St. Catherine of Siena does. Instead of relying on an emptying of the self as many female rhetors in the medieval era did, Grimke simply foregrounds others (husbands, children) in her construction of the self, effectively uniting the public and private spheres, as well as her private and public projection of selfhood.

Also of great import to Grimke’s rhetoric of the mind is how educational depravity not only restricts, but dehumanizes women. As asserted before, Grimke claims that lack of education relegates women to the status of children and slaves. This argument recurs here and there in slightly varied wording: “We are much in the situation of the slave. Man has asserted and

assumed authority over us” (33). In addition to aligning women with other “legally dead” social groups, Grimke also argues that men, by denying women mental equality, have devalued her as a human and have deemed her purely instrumental and animalistic. Grimke writes that men have made women into “pretty toys” or “instruments of pleasure,” indicating a “vacuity of mind” that men have imposed upon them (47). However, women, on account of this treatment, have been reduced to animals and “machinery”: “This mode of training necessarily exalts, in their view, the animal above the intellectual and spiritual nature, and teaches women to regard themselves as a kind of machinery, necessary to keep the domestic engine in order, but of little value as the intelligent companions of men” (48). Perhaps limiting to Grimke’s discussion of feminine rationality is the fact that she separates the mind from the body too severely and seems to advocate a complete denial of the body in order to advocate the mind’s superiority. Unlike St. Catherine of Siena, who employs embodied rhetoric in order to interrupt patristic discourses of the medieval era, Grimke’s rhetorical interruption is steeped purely in logic and reason, so much so that the valuation of the mind at times overpowers the affective, feminine reality with which St. Catherine seeks to imbue her writing. For instance, Grimke writes, “If we indulge our fancy in the chameleon caprices of fashion, or in wearing ornamental and extravagant apparel, the mind must be in no small degree engaged in the gratification of personal vanity” (70). Indulging attention to physical appearance, then, derides mental acuity and subsequently harms the spiritual purity of women. Purification of the mind, for Grimke, is achieved through denying the body and rejecting the traditional physical performance of femininity. Grimke urges women to adopt a more androgynous persona of simplicity in order to prevent the fulfillment of patriarchy’s objective, which is for women “to gratify the eye of man” (71). Certainly this argument for simplicity in appearance accords with tenets of Quakerism, which Grimke followed at the time

of her letters' composition. However, this claim that women must construct a physical presence that does not allure men still leaves men in control, as it unsexes women in order to claim mental equality between the sexes. In this way, Grimke's rhetoric tends to blur the distinction between gendered equality and mental equality. If the mental capabilities of both genders are equal, it follows from this line of logic that the genders are equal. But Grimke sometimes theorizes this gendered notion of "equality" as "sameness," and in her attempted displacement of traditional gender roles, we see little room for the notion that the sexes are separate but also equal.<sup>19</sup>

Adhering to traditional rhetorical appeals, Grimke also draws on "the page of history" (59) to substantiate her claim that "intellect is not sexed." As Ellen Gold has argued in support of her claim that "an important function of protest rhetoric is to support one's ego and confirm one's selfhood," (341) "Sarah's *Letters* affirm the ego of woman by citing examples of women leaders in history and by suggesting how contemporary woman might live if man permitted her to attain her rightful place" (352). Grimke cites historical females ("women who have purchased their celebrity by individual strength of character" 59) in order to illustrate that gendered notions of intellect, much like gendered notions of virtue, are not supported by scripture, but are the result of male interpretation and commentary:

I mention these women only to prove that intellect is not sexed; that strength of mind is not sexed; and that our views about the duties of women and the duties of men, the sphere of man and the sphere of woman, are mere arbitrary opinions, differing in different ages and countries, and dependent solely on the will and judgment of erring morals. (60)

Her use of the phrase "erring mortals" is worth noting, because it groups women and men

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<sup>19</sup> David Wallace has remarked on this trend within Grimke's rhetoric: "Grimke seeks to unseat essentialist assumptions about gender/sex roles but also makes an essentializing move in her presumption that all women have been affected by patriarchy to some extent and thus action is required on behalf of women (as well as society in general) to correct the attendant problems" (64).



together as sinners and keeps them both at a remove from God, who is the only fit authority over men and women – a point she often returns to. Furthermore, her focus on shifting historical contexts through these historical examples illustrates the absurdity of such a static view of femininity, especially since she effectively cites women who, though perhaps historical anomalies, have overcome these gendered expectations and have illustrated through determined action that women are as rational as men.<sup>20</sup>

Grimke's advancement of women's rights through religious rhetoric, though radical in its condemnation of male translators and interpreters, is also at times much less transgressive than might be immediately apparent – most notably because Grimke accepts the doctrinal charge that woman is the root of sin: "I am one of those who always admit, to its fullest extent, the popular charge, that woman brought sin into the world. I accept it as a powerful reason, why woman is bound to labor with double diligence, for the regeneration of that world she has been instrumental in ruining" (115). This biblical interpretation, accepted by Grimke as a claim for female agency, could be initially interpreted as problematic to her larger claim of mental equality between the sexes, as her acceptance of the divinely sanctioned "double diligence" imposed upon the female gender somewhat negates her prior accusations against the patriarchy for perpetuating female subordination through mental enslavement. Here, at least, Grimke seems to accept female inferiority as a biblical truth; however, she makes this claim in order to support her larger argument that women could extirpate this sin, if they had unfettered minds to do so:

My present object is to show, that, as woman is charged with all the sin that exists in the world, it is her solemn duty to labor for its extinction; and that this she can never do effectually and extensively, until her mind is disenthralled of those shackles which have been riveted upon her by a 'corrupt public opinion, and a perverted interpretation of the holy Scriptures.' (116)

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<sup>20</sup> She cites, for example, Phillippa, wife of Edward III, Joan of Arc, Hortensia, Lady Broughton, and Anne, countess of Pembroke (156-160).

As is the case with many of her other claims, this assertion aligns with the argument from expediency, placing the need for self-actualization upon woman's instrumental role within society and within the home. Such an argumentative maneuvering shows the careful rhetorical layering needed to interrupt biblical rhetoric used against women in the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Though Grimke can certainly problematize many scriptural translations and commentaries, she cannot entirely re-write scripture without alienating her audience. Therefore, reframing the origin of original sin as an argument for the purification of the female mind (which then purifies the community) provides the best available means of crafting an *ethos* that both interrupts a traditional and sacred core belief but still upholds these traditional and accepted notions of true womanhood.

While Grimke's efforts were pivotal in the development of rhetoric for both human rights and women's rights as political movements, her shifting religious affiliations and her later letters reveal that, though her rhetoric served as a catalyst for exterior, societal reform, her interior, spiritual struggle for mental equality followed her throughout her entire life. Her letters describe her childhood and adolescent disillusionment with the aristocratic south she proceeded to break ties with:

During the early part of my life, my lot was cast among the butterflies of the *fashionable* world; and of this class of women, I am constrained to say, both from experience and observation, that their education is miserably deficient; that they are taught to regard marriage as the one thing needful, the only avenue to distinction. (46-47)

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<sup>21</sup> A glimpse of Mary Daly's radical, modernist perspective on original sin, for instance, shows the nuance with which Grimke has crafted her interpretation. Daly writes in *Beyond God the Father*, "The fact is, however, that the myth has projected a malignant image of the male-female relationship and of the 'nature' of women that is still deeply imbedded in the modern psyche" (45).

The “fashionable” class’s preoccupation with the “external charms” of the female gender in no way afforded her the chance to seek gratification for the internal charms she longed to cultivate alongside her male peers, nor did the Episcopalian faith she had been raised to follow within her family’s household permit a woman to speak publically on matters of religion (47). Grimke’s spiritual displacement from the religion in which she was raised was followed by a series of subsequent displacements from other religions – after briefly affiliating with Methodism, she turned to Quakerism due to its egalitarian views on speaking, yet, late in life, she found herself “fairly ground to powder in the Quaker Society,” then sought refuge in Spiritualism (“Sisters of Charity” 247). What Grimke’s writings reveal is that this displacement of religious space constitutes both a desire for public voice and an interior drive for self-identification. She writes, for instance, “Hitherto [woman] has surrendered her person and her individuality to man, but she can no longer do this and not feel that she is outraging her nature and her God” (*Feminist Thought* 135). For Grimke, then, the pursuit of spirituality is also a pursuit of self-actualization and autonomy. The imperative to write and act as an equal to her male counterparts was, for her, considered not just a personal whim but a divine charge.

Although Grimke never married, remaining dutiful to her ideals of spiritual and public autonomy, her efforts as an abolitionist speaker ceased after the 1838 marriage of her sister and co-speaker Angelina to Theodore Weld. This marriage – “a paternalism of male abolitionist sponsorship” – was a source of indirect authorization *and* silencing for both Sarah and Angelina (Wallace 56). Weld was a leading abolitionist who considered the “woman question” unfit for inclusion in the cause, and he therefore expressed much disdain for Sarah’s work. Wallace writes, “Both of the sisters resisted Weld’s attempts to limit their roles [...] however, Weld’s attacks eventually silenced them. Angelina gave up her plans to lecture on women’s rights in

Boston, and Weld's critiques of Sarah's less-engaging speaking style led her to retire from public speaking in the spring of 1838" (56). Upon retirement, Grimke retreated to the cloistered life of domesticity from which she had so feverishly fled early in her life. By 1852, at 60 years old, Grimke had been living with her sister Angelina and Theodore Weld for 14 years. During this time, Grimke had become the caretaker of her sister's children and found herself devoted solely to the domestic sphere, in stark contrast to her earlier public presence. In the following letter, Grimke expresses sadness at having neglected the skills she once argued so vehemently for fostering in women:

I have for so long been cooking, sweeping and teaching the abc of French and the angles and curves of drawing that I seem to have lost the mental activity I once had. Besides the powers of my mind have never been allowed expansion; in childhood they were repressed by the false idea that a girl need not have the education I coveted. (qtd. in "Sisters of Charity" 247)

Grimke's departure from public speaking following the marriage and retirement of her sister Angelina is not a mark of failed rhetorical performance, but is instead further proof of the personal difficulty wrought from interrupting a discourse community to which women were denied access. The personal displacement Grimke suffers on account of her entry into the public sphere is ultimately one of mental autonomy. Gold writes, "However, hovering on the brink of autonomy and a long career as lecturers, they retired... Their behavior suggests that even when rhetoric is used to sustain one's ego and self-concept, societal pressures may limit personal growth and accomplishments" (358). The strictures imposed on Grimke's self-actualization stem from societal, personal, and spiritual domains. Therefore, while Grimke's public and personal struggle, manifested through her rhetoric, illuminates power structures operating from the various domains in her life, her attempt at interrupting biblical writing by employing a "rhetoric

of the mind” also demonstrates her simultaneous exertion of agency in opposition to these strictures.

## CHAPTER IV

### MARY DALY'S RADICAL INTERRUPTION CRITIQUED

Mary Daly's infamous persona as a radical feminist theologian, philosopher, and professor often overshadows her significant contribution to the rhetorical tradition. Despite the overt antagonism she expresses toward Catholic conservatism in her two early theological works, Daly still remained devoted to her role as professor of theology at Jesuit-run Boston College until she was asked to retire in 1999, due to her refusals to allow male students into her women's studies classes, relegating them instead to individual tutoring sessions with her (Madsen). Mary Daly's first published work, *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), offers a historical analysis of the Catholic Church's oppression of women throughout the centuries. However, her subsequently published text, *Beyond God the Father* (1973), expands the argument against Catholic patriarchy to encompass the misogyny of Western Christianity at large. In this text, Daly severs all ties with Catholic doctrine and begins her foray into "post-Christian" theology – a philosophical realm of thought she hoped would be more accommodating of her voice as a radical feminist and lesbian. What Daly's personal struggle with religion reveals is that even as she dismissed the ideologies perpetuated by the Church, she did not initially break ties with Catholicism altogether, choosing, perhaps paradoxically, to remain affiliated through her profession with a religion that she thought "prolonged a traditional view of woman which at the same time idealizes and humiliates her" (*Second Sex* 11). Mary Daly's life reads as an ostensible foil to that of St. Catherine of Siena – a woman so committed to Catholicism that she ultimately

died in subservience to her spiritual penances. However, through Daly's choice to continue working as a professor at a Catholic college, we can still see her desire to remain in adherence to Catholicism as a means of self-identification. As is evident in her historical analysis of the church's systematic oppression, she accepts the past injustices committed toward women without dismissing the negative societal effects wrought from them. It is Daly's unanswered call for systematic reform for the future, then, that incites her rejection of a religion she feels has rejected her voice and her beliefs. Like Sarah Grimke, Mary Daly ultimately suffers a displacement from religion on account of her personal worldview, but in contrast to Grimke, who spends her life first displaced and then relocated within different religious denominations which better accommodate her egalitarian views of spirituality, Daly rejects organized religion as both a public and private space, theorizing a new theology in her creation of the "Cosmic Covenant of Sisterhood" that is admittedly "Anti-church" (*Beyond God* 155).

The nexus of Daly's work reveals a gradual progression toward radical feminism that reaches its pinnacle in her later, more radical texts.<sup>22</sup> But, what remains to be discussed at length in conversations pertaining to Daly's radical feminist agenda is how her initial attempt to reconcile with Catholicism in her first work, *The Church and the Second Sex*, differs so drastically from her subsequent works which blatantly argue that patriarchy uses Christianity to perpetuate cultural myths of female subordination. Daly in fact apologizes for this first attempt at reconciliation with the Church in her later text, *Quintessence*, referring to what I term her *ethos* of accommodation as "the early Daly" who is merely a "quaint foresister" of Daly's self-

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<sup>22</sup> After publication of her first two theological works, Daly self-identified no longer as a theologian, but as a philosopher, with published works such as *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (1984), *Quintessence... Realizing the Archaic Future: A Radical Elemental Feminist Manifesto* (1998), *Outercourse: The Bedazzling Voyage, Containing Recollections from My Logbook of a Radical Feminist Philosopher* (1992), and *Amazon Grace: Re-Calling the Courage to Sin Big* (2006).

actualized, “post-Christian” self (14). Daly describes the failed reception of *The Church and the Second Sex*, highlighting what I will argue is the result of a failed “listening” stance toward Catholicism:

My effort was based on the premise that by clear reasoning and presentation of evidence of the church’s androcentrism I could change that institution. The book’s history and its infamous consequences served to illustrate the absurdity of this presupposition. Thus without realizing what I was doing, I actually wrote mySelf<sup>23</sup> Out of the catholic church and, by logical extension, Out of Christianity in general and Out of all patriarchal religion. (15)

I argue that Daly’s works have become progressively radical since the outset of her writing, and that this continuum of radicalism is in direct response to Daly’s first failed attempt at negotiating a listening stance toward the church in her first work, *The Church and the Second Sex*. Her proceeding text, *Beyond God the Father*,<sup>24</sup> can be taken, then, as a response to this unsuccessful attempt at reconciliation between feminism, the church, and patriarchy. More specifically, this chapter will address how Daly’s two early theological works, *The Church and the Second Sex* and *Beyond God the Father*, most clearly delineate her contrasting rhetorical shifts from accommodation in the first work to polarization in the latter. Such an analysis of Daly’s early rhetorical perspective is useful for contextualizing the radical ideas espoused in her later works, but it also problematizes and explains the predominantly critical response Daly has elicited within contemporary scholarship. Rather than addressing radicalism as the defining characteristic of Daly’s work, I will argue that the process of charting this rhetorical progression

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<sup>23</sup> As Foss, Foss, and Griffin explain, Daly’s rhetorical use of capitalization is meant to bring linguistic attention to how “words are meant to be seen as well as heard, and the creation of a different visual reality leads to a different reality for women of the Background” (149).

<sup>24</sup> This work was written in 1973, five years after *The Church and the Second Sex*.



or Voyage to radical feminism, as Daly would term it, reveals that Daly adopted an *ethos* of interruption<sup>25</sup> as a response to failed initial attempts at accommodation.<sup>26</sup>

As a rhetorician, Mary Daly employs innovative language strategies and ideological constructs to interrupt a Western patriarchal linguistic system that has, in turn, attempted to impose its masculinist perspective upon women's experiences for centuries.<sup>27</sup> As a combatant against this erasure of femininity, Daly's later, more radical text, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, has exposed and outlined the various strategies used by foreground rhetors as a means of oppressing and silencing Background rhetors.<sup>28</sup> Daly writes of this antagonistic interchange between feminist Background and patriarchal foreground:

Breaking through the Male Maze is both exorcism and ecstasy. It is spinning through and beyond the fathers' foreground which is the arena of games. This spinning involves encountering the demons who block the various thresholds as we move through gateway after gateway into the deepest chambers of our homeland, which is the Background of our Selves. (2)

Karen Foss, Sonja Foss, and Cindy Griffin most succinctly characterize the opposing linguistic terrains Daly ascribes to the foreground and Background: "The foreground is misogynistic – antiwoman and oppressive – and Daly sees this misogyny as linked to the hatred of all life forms. The Background, in contrast, is the realm in which women move beyond oppression and hatred

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<sup>25</sup> Nedra Reynolds articulates a feminist appropriation of interruption which facilitates rather than deters female agency and *ethos*: "Agency is not simply about finding one's own voice but also about intervening in discourses of the everyday and cultivating rhetorical tactics that make interruption and resistance an important part of any conversation" ("Interrupting Our Way to Agency" 59).

<sup>26</sup> My discussion of "accommodation" in this chapter aligns most closely with the definition Wayne C. Booth provides in *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective Communication*: "From the Sophists and Aristotle on, all rhetoricians have stressed the necessity of accommodation to the audience: attention to the biases, beliefs, hopes and fears, emotional habits, and levels of comprehension about the subject" (51).

<sup>27</sup> Kirsch, Royster and Bizzell describe the traditional paradigm of rhetorical history as being "anchored by Western patriarchal values" and asserts that this dominion of patriarchy has been shown within scholarship to reflect "historical patterns of exclusivity" for women (30).

<sup>28</sup> Because the scope of this paper is limited mostly to Daly's theological works, I will not provide extensive commentary on her various linguistic innovations and language strategies. For a comprehensive analysis of Daly's use and description of the terms Background and foreground, along with the foreground's rhetorical strategies for keeping women silenced, see Foss (134-156), Griffin, Ratcliffe (65-106), and Rousselow.

and journey into a life-loving and life-affirming state of Be-ing” (134). By introducing and modeling these language strategies throughout her texts, Daly continuously illuminates the interconnection between language and experience.<sup>29</sup> That is, in a culture where patriarchal experiences and ideologies are given primacy over female ones, the collective consciousness of that culture reflects a unitary gender bias.<sup>30</sup> Mary Daly’s later rhetoric, however, advocates an inverted conception of the gender binary, in which feminism is not equal to or subordinate to patriarchy, but takes precedence over it entirely. A radical feminist approach of this sort can be viewed as essentially attempting to undo decades of feminine erasure by likewise imposing an erasure of patriarchal ideologies and the linguistic structures that reinforce them.

The distinctly radical feminist perspective of Daly’s rhetoric has been outlined at length by modern theorists. Krista Ratcliffe, for instance, most clearly notes that Daly’s “radical feminist separatist agenda has as its primary goal the transformation of a woman’s Self and as its secondary goal the transformation of the social” (68). Cindy Griffin too highlights the radical feminist rhetorical perspective of Daly’s work, arguing that this rhetorical perspective rests on three assumptions:

(a) the oppression of women is at the root of all other systems of oppression and subordination; (b) important insights can be gained from women’s own experiences of oppression; and (c) primary energy is devoted not to ‘organizing direct confrontations with patriarchy’ but rather to ‘developing alternative social arrangements.’ (159)

Cindy White and Catherine Dobris deem Daly’s rhetorical contributions the “bible of contemporary radical feminism,” and briefly touch upon the rhetorical significance of Daly’s

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<sup>29</sup> Frances Gray argues, for instance, that “language becomes ontology for Daly: language is the material out of which ontology is constructed, it is the being or *esse* of ontology” (230).

<sup>30</sup> Cindy Griffin cites Foucault’s rhetorical *episteme* – “a cultural code or structure of relations that dictates the language, perceptions and values of an age” – as a means of explaining this cultural occurrence. Griffin also suggests that the *episteme* is responsible, not only for silencing women’s voices, but also for misnaming or erasing their perspectives and experiences (160).

shifting her position from accommodation in *The Church and the Second Sex* to “outright rebellion” in her proceeding texts (242). Although White and Dobris hint at it, this subtle progression in the development of Daly’s radical feminism is often overshadowed within the current scholarly conversations that probe the nexus of her work. While *Gyn/Ecology*, and all of her proceeding texts,<sup>31</sup> showcase a rhetorical performance that is blatantly radical in its intent, Daly’s first theological work, *The Church and the Second Sex*, mitigates the extremism of such a rhetorical stance by instead applying an egalitarian perspective to its analysis of the church and its corresponding language, symbol systems, and ideologies.

The current scholarly conversations of Daly’s work are largely critical of the exclusionary effect her texts elicit from the audience. I argue that this element of exclusion results from Daly’s later radical feminist theology – a rhetorical sampling that merely represents the endpoint, rather than the evolution of Daly’s work as a rhetorician. In her subsequent radical feminist texts such as *Quintessence...Realizing the Archaic Future* (1998) and *Amazon Grace: Re-Calling the Courage to Sin Big* (2006), Daly clearly shirks any previously attempted endeavor to craft an academic *ethos*, as she envisions herself voyaging to 2048 B.E. (Biophilic Era), where she meets a tribe of lesbian “Wild Women” in an all-female utopia she deems the “Lost and Found Continent” (*Quintessence*). Kathryn Telling has recounted the numerous criticisms against these later works, but the commonality she discerns is that Daly’s most radical texts read as a “failed utopian novel” with “forays into the past” that are “contrived and self-indulgent” (38). One need only read an excerpt of Daly’s *Quintessence* for confirmation of these

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<sup>31</sup> Following the publication of *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), Daly has since published seven other book-length texts, as well as various essays, all of which focus upon issues of feminism, religion, and language in one way or another (Griffin 157).

claims. Here, Daly describes the “Voyage” to radical feminism as she traverses the “Lost and Found Continent”:

As the Voyage continues, Wonderlusting women who are the Furious Fighters of these infernal molesters increase in numbers and in Spirit-force. Fired by Elemental E-motion, we Move onward, upward, downward, outward, traversing New Realms of Spheres. We first A-maze<sup>32</sup> our way through *Archespheres*, the Realm of Origins. Then we Charge into and through *Pyrospheres*, the Purifying Realm of Fire. Finally we soar through *Metamorphospheres*, the Be-witching Realm of graceless/Graceful transformation. (16)

Helpful in contextualizing the exclusionary reaction to Daly’s work is Kenneth Burke’s rendering of the terms “identification” and “division” within his work, *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Burke writes, “Because, to begin with ‘identification’ is, by the same token, though roundabout, to confront the implications of *division*” (1326). That is, because rhetoric offers a means of self-identification, it subsequently brings about an accompanying sense of separation and displacement, as the rhetor inherently excludes those with whom she has not identified. Following Burke’s assertion, I argue that Daly, by exerting her rhetorical authority as a radical feminist, creates fissures, not only upon the landscape of patriarchal language, but also between herself and various other facets of her audience, such as feminist rhetorical scholars. Before analyzing Daly’s accommodation of her audience within her first work, however, it is first useful to confront many of these divisions incurred as a result of her later, more radical texts.

One such critique of Daly’s rhetoric is articulated by Susan Hill, who analyzes Daly’s rhetoric as if it were a foil to St. Augustine’s conciliatory attempts at incorporating the reader into his life story. Hill asserts that Augustine, unlike Daly, wields rhetorical strategies of identification, redefinition, and interrogation as a means of diffusing the tension between the

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<sup>32</sup> Daly’s use of hyphenated words is what she terms “Archimagical Shape-shifting,” a rhetorical strategy whereby the “slash in a word, for example, changes an oppressive foreground term into a liberating Background one” (Foss, and Griffin 149).

public and private realms.<sup>33</sup> She concludes that Augustine, who aligns himself with the predominantly Christian culture in which he writes, encompasses the reader within his personal narrative, while Daly, writing in opposition to the prevailing societal norms, alienates the audience by using her rhetoric as a means of exposing the “hegemonic worldview” (156). William Covino continues with Hill’s assertions of Daly’s alienating discourse by asserting that Daly’s rhetoric has as its intent the purpose “to confront and disrupt the culture in power” (154). Central to Covino’s claim that Daly’s discourse is one which fosters communal discord is Kenneth Burke’s definition of the term piety – a term that Covino conceives of as malleable, especially regarding Daly, for whom “radical nonconformity is precisely what counts as good behavior” (161). This exploration of identification and piety is useful for understanding why Daly’s discourse evokes such an alienating response from critics, such as Meaghan Morris, whose review of Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* highlights how Daly’s wordplay serves as linguistic elitism that distances her readers from any semblance of meaning. Adopting Daly’s linguistic strategies, Morris writes,

It is a drama of discourse as an Anti-communication: a celebration of the State of Complete Closure constituted by the Gyn/Ecological speaking position .... But ... it is the function of a largely untransformed romantic discourse on meaning which concerns me most: a romantic speaking-position, and a romantic position on speaking. (40)

Daly not only creates factions by identifying as a radical feminist, but she appeals to a nonconformist sense of piety through her subversion of language and ideology, which, to the modern audience, may not resemble piety at all, merely since it does not resemble societal norms.

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<sup>33</sup> Cindy Griffin, in “Women as Communicators: Mary Daly’s Hagiography as Rhetoric,” makes the opposite claim concerning Daly’s use of private and public discourse: “While attempts are made to keep these two spheres distinct, and scholarship has focused primarily on rhetoric as it occurs in the ‘public’ realms and as it focuses on ‘public’ topics, Daly’s work provides a framework for exploring the intersection of these two realms” (160).

Amber Katherine builds on the notion of Daly's "outsider" status by referencing African American poet Audre Lorde's well-known critique of Daly's homogenizing rhetoric. As a response to Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, Lorde exposed what she interpreted as Daly's latent racism in her 1979 "Open Letter to Mary Daly": "To dismiss our Black foremothers may well be to dismiss where European women learned to love. As an African – American woman in white patriarchy, I am used to having my archetypal experience distorted and trivialized, but it is terribly painful to feel it being done by a woman whose knowledge so much touches my own" (67-68). After defining the power relations inherent within both patriarchal and race-supremacist societies, Katherine follows Lorde's assertion that the only Background tradition re-membered in *Gyn/Ecology* is European; a feminist from another tradition is constructed in the text as a racial/ethnic outsider.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, Katherine argues that Daly not only fulfills the role of an outsider, but also harnesses the power of an insider, a rhetorical position which allows her to advocate inclusion while imposing exclusion in equal measure.

Lorde speaks directly to Daly's duality of exclusion and inclusion in her "Open Letter to Mary Daly":

But simply because so little material on nonwhite female power and symbol exists in white women's words from a radical feminist perspective, to exclude this aspect of connection from even comment in your work is to deny the fountain of noneuropean female strength and power that nurtures each of our visions. (68)

Daly, then, is not the victim of exclusion, according to Katherine's and Lorde's scrutiny of her rhetoric; instead, her discourse functions as the chief agent of exclusion within the larger scope

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<sup>34</sup> I agree with Lorde and Katherine's assertions that Daly's rhetoric has the potential for a homogenizing effect in *Gyn/Ecology*; however, my analysis will deal mainly with Daly's theology – a rhetorical space which is intrinsically exclusionary, as its breadth only encompasses Catholicism and its corresponding institutions and ideology.

of community.<sup>35</sup> With this in mind, Katherine argues that Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* should be read with a pluralist self-consciousness, which encompasses the perspective of both the feminist Outsider and the Eurocentric insider (300).<sup>36</sup>

A commonality among these modern scholarly discussions is that they critique the nexus of Daly's rhetoric based solely upon her works subsequent to the publication of *The Church and the Second Sex* – works which notably reflect a more deeply rooted radical feminism than the rhetorical perspective Daly assumes in her inaugural publication.<sup>37</sup> I will argue that this scholarly analysis fails to incorporate the gradual progression of Daly's radicalism into its unitary view of her rhetorical authority. Drawing on *The Church and the Second Sex* and *Beyond God the Father*, I will chart the shift in Daly's rhetorical perspectives from an initial position of reconciliation in the first text to a subsequent one of interruption in *Beyond God*. Analyzing these first two theological works as a dichotomous conversation facilitates an understanding of the current scholarly response to Daly's work and reveals the development of her *ethos* as a rhetorician.

In *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, Kirsch, Royster and Bizzell identify two changes to the rhetorical landscape, incited by “tectonic shifts” in feminist rhetorical practices: “One is breaking through the persistently elite, male-centered boundaries of our disciplinary habits, and the second is re-forming that terrain to create a much more open and expanded view of rhetorical

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<sup>35</sup> Meaghan Morris argues that Daly is unsuccessful and exclusionary in her discursive strategies because she “situates meanings in words instead of in contexts” (qtd. in “Elemental Philosophy” 224). For this reason, Morris concludes that Daly offers (in *Gyn/Ecology*) “a politics of subverting signs, not one of transforming discourse” (223).

<sup>36</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of the Lorde-Daly debate, see Krista Ratcliffe's *Rhetorical Listening* (78-100), in which she uncovers the debate's “tactics for recognizing a dysfunctional gendered and racialized silence as well as tactics for resisting it” (80). Also, Ratcliffe's *Anglo American Challenges to the Rhetorical Tradition* (68-70) treats Lorde's letter to Daly as a “gift” meant to problematize Daly's separatist ideology while simultaneously “negotiating the very real differences between our intentions and our receptions” (70).

<sup>37</sup> Katherine, for instance, centers her analysis of Daly's exclusionary effects upon *Gyn/Ecology*, while Hill draws her analysis from Daly's *Outercourse*, and Covino develops his notions of heretical rhetoric from *Wickedary* and *Outercourse*.

performance, accomplishment, and rhetorical possibilities” (29). Daly’s *Church and the Second Sex* can be viewed as fulfilling the first of these two changes: this text lays the foundation for a listening stance towards the church by uncovering Catholicism’s gendered biases, which are reflected and then reinforced through myth, language, and ideology. Daly’s intent is one of reconciliation, and she includes men in this proposed journey of mitigating female degradation. *Beyond God the Father*, however, represents the second identified change within the landscape of feminist rhetorical terrain. Here, Daly’s tactic of accommodation is abandoned; instead, she advocates a feminist rejection of Christian doctrine – that is, a complete “exorcism” of God the Father, along with all of his sons. These two texts, read as rhetorical conversation, suggest that merely “breaking through the boundaries” of a discourse community (in this case the church’s) is not always sufficient for achieving one’s desired goal. Daly’s progression toward a radical feminist philosophy indicates that the act of rupturing the patriarchal belief system is only a potential catalyst for change; it must also be paired with the rhetorical art of creating a uniquely feminist perspective as a combatant against the traditional one. Daly’s listening stance merely *reconciles* patriarchy to a neglected feminist reality, while her interruptive stance *transforms* these traditional ideologies by replacing them with new ones. Jablonski provides useful terminology for differentiating between what I perceive to be the two contrasting rhetorical stances of *Second Sex* (“selectively orthodox”) and *Beyond God* (“selectively heterodox”). She characterizes the selectively orthodox stance as identifying “strongly with the institutional Church, hoping to reform it by enlarging women’s and men’s awareness of female spirituality” (165) I argue that this position is fulfilled in *Second Sex*. In contrast, those who adhere to the selectively heterodox stance “distance themselves from the institutional Church without separating from it” (165). This, likewise, seems to be the aim of *Beyond God*.



It is perhaps surprising that Mary Daly's work as a rhetorical theorist did not begin from an exclusionary stance, but from an egalitarian perspective which envisioned both men and women as co-partners in the process of overturning the church's inherent advocacy of female suppression and erasure. Frances Gray argues that Daly's conception of the church in *Second Sex* was an androgynous one: "For her, acceptance of women as equal partners in an androgynous church would lead to the transformation of the institution itself" (228). In an interview published three years after the publication of *Second Sex* (but prior to *Beyond God*), traces of Daly's egalitarian mindset are also present: "The women's revolution is challenging the patriarchal society – not to make a matriarchal society, but to bring about equality between women and men: a diarchy" (349). Daly's equalist perspective during the publication of her first theological work can be interpreted as an effort to create an *ethos* within the church. I argue that Daly accomplishes this *ethos* of accommodation by means of audience awareness within *Second Sex*. She does so by employing rhetorics of silence and listening, which as Wayne Booth articulates, are primary tools of successful argumentation: "All good rhetoric depends on the rhetor's *listening to and thinking about the character and the welfare of the audience*, and moderating what is said to meet what has been heard" (54). She strategically crafts her arguments within *Second Sex* in such a way that facilitates, and even necessitates inclusion of men in the women's movement – a sharp contrast to *Beyond God*, which argues for masculine erasure. Through her analysis of patriarchal myth, symbol systems, and language in *Second Sex*, Daly offers a critique of Catholic doctrine without altogether alienating the audience or the Church.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> It is worth noting that Foss, Foss, and Griffin offer a different analysis of Daly's audience adaptation than I do, although their analysis glosses later works such as *Gyn/Ecology*, rather than the early theological works: "Audience adaptation, then, is not a means to make a message more acceptable but a foreground method of constraint that silences, denigrates, and manipulates women" (156). This was certainly the perception of Daly in the later works, but is not fully applicable to her early theology in *Second Sex*.

Krista Ratcliffe has written that “at the intersections of myth, language, and ideology, we arrive at rhetoric” (70). Tracing these intersections is precisely at the heart of Mary Daly’s early theological journey. *The Church and the Second Sex* chiefly argues that Catholicism’s effort to relegate women to subordinate status is primarily perpetuated by a “defective symbol syndrome” (114). Ratcliffe observes the unique relation between symbol and metaphor within Daly’s writing, and it is important to understand this difference in order to fully grasp Daly’s conception of Catholicism’s constricting “symbol syndrome”: “Although symbols function as metaphors within Daly’s theory of language, metaphors possess more possibilities than mere symbolic function” (72). Metaphors, then, necessitate Be-ing, while symbols perpetuate stasis. Complicit within this symbol system are elements of patriarchal myth, language, and ideology – all of which, Daly argues, work in unison to further the act of female denigration within the church.

*The Church and the Second Sex* argues that the myth of the “Eternal Feminine” serves as the primary deterrent for gender equality within the church, since it links femininity to an unattainable ideal, which, in turn, results in stasis. Her critique of Marianism, the idolization of the Virgin Mary, is that it obscures the reality of the modern woman: “What it can spawn is that dream world which is precisely ‘the metaphysical world of woman,’ the ideal, static woman, who is so much less troublesome than the real article” (*Second Sex* 119). An ancillary effect of the “eternal feminine” myth is that it creates false binaries specific to women: “...the ‘good girl,’ who is the Eternal Woman, is the only answer to the challenge of the ‘bad girl,’ who is The Girl of the world of James Bond, of Playboy, of advertising” (128). Central to Daly’s argumentative strategy here is that she differentiates between Mary as a historical figure versus a symbolic one. In a sense, Daly redefines Mary as a concept, and her argument hinges upon Mary’s function within culture as a symbol or idea, rather than as a historical reality that should serve as a model

to all women. She writes, “I am now talking about the symbols in people’s imaginations as conveyed through the tradition of Jesus and Mary. These symbols can’t really function as models for us in the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (“Interview” 350). This argumentative strategy, in effect, provides Daly with a rhetorical buffer: she is not criticizing Mary in isolation, but rather what culture and society have projected onto her image, and also upon the image of females within the church.

Daly also argues that the symbol syndrome is perpetuated by the terminology of “the divine plan” – a static conception of being which is reinforced within culture by phrases like “God’s ordinance,” or “God’s plan” (115). Daly identifies three specific rhetorical purposes for which Catholic doctrine employs this terminology, and asserts that all of these purposes contribute to feminine subjection within the Church. I would argue that all three of these uses facilitate the continuation of female silence, more specifically. Cheryl Glenn has argued that silence has a presence and an importance: “Silence is rewarded only when signifying obedience or proper subordination: The sub-altern should not speak but feign rapt listening with their silence” (5). In analyzing these various rhetorics of “the divine plan” and “Mary as the model for all women,” I argue that Daly is identifying the means by which the church has prolonged female silence, as well as female subjection in general. Understanding the erasure of women as rhetorical silence also points to power differentials, as Glenn observes: “Like speech, the meaning of silence depends on a power differential that exists in every rhetorical situation: who can speak, who must remain silent, who listens, and what those listeners do” (9). Daly can also be viewed here, then, as drawing attention to the totality of the rhetorical situation which perpetuates female silence through patriarchal ideology and rhetoric.

Aside from prescribing a divinely sanctioned gender hierarchy, “the divine plan” terminology, according to Daly, is used as a rhetorical tool of manipulation to arouse certain

desired emotional responses, which are “unaccompanied by any critical understanding” (116). Daly writes, “First, as is generally recognized by those who study the uses of language, words and phrases are often used (consciously or unconsciously) for purposes other than that of communicating ideas” (116). Daly argues that by employing this specific rhetoric, clerical authors and Catholic doctrine have knowingly conditioned audiences, particularly females, to assent to patriarchy. They borrow God’s authority for the purpose of inspiring reverence – and ultimately obedience – in the female audience; it is the use of God as justification for unsubstantiated claims of female inferiority. What such rhetoric results in is an eradication of free will and agency for females within the church, as male leaders, aligning their *ethos* with God, rely upon ecclesiastical rhetoric to justify humanistic maltreatment. Daly also asserts that the “divine plan” terminology promotes stasis among women, because it perpetuates false assumptions of changeless ideology (116). For Daly, and certainly for many modern women within the church, the man-woman relationship is “evolving.” But, as Daly observes, “The writers who are prone to invoke the ‘the divine plan’ hide this variety behind the monolithic mask of a supposedly changeless ideology” (117). Therefore, doctrine and ecclesiastical writing assume these divinely sanctioned terminologies as a means of silencing women who are not granted the agency to infuse masculine writings with female experience.

Throughout *Second Sex*, Daly is careful to critique the belief systems perpetuated by the Church without advocating a staunch rejection of religion, the church, or men. She writes, for instance:

Our, efforts, then, must be toward a level of confrontation, dialogue, and cooperation between the sexes undreamed of in the past, when the struggle for biological survival of the species and numerical multiplication had to take precedence over any thought of qualitative development of relation between the sexes. (153)

This rhetorical choice of maintaining neutrality between the sexes bolsters Daly's *ethos* and demonstrates an audience awareness that she perhaps lacks in her more radical texts. It is also interesting that while modern scholarship has often criticized Daly's rhetoric for its homogenizing effects, she too criticizes Catholicism for its symbol-oriented writing, which similarly fails to realize a pluralistic vision of femininity in the place of its prescribed universalization of women. Daly writes, "Symbols, which record human experience in shorthand, stress similarities – some of the frequently repeated elements of experience. What they leave out are the differences. It is especially the uniqueness and dynamism of the person which cannot be captured in the symbol" (122). Although Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* does indeed gloss over feminine differences in favor of a homogenous conception of femininity, Daly, in *Second Sex*, seeks to broaden the scope of the effects wrought from the symbol system by including men in her argument. She counters the myth of the "Eternal Feminine" with the equally defective myth of the "Eternal Masculine": "...the 'eternal masculine' itself is alienating, crippling the personalities of men and restricting their experience of life at every level. The male in our society is not supposed to express much feeling, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation, imagination, consideration for others, intuition" (152). There are no traces in this early work of her later separatist ideology, which keeps both men and the church in opposition to feminism. Instead, the interdependence of the genders is envisioned as the means of eradicating the gender hierarchy. This is an argument for female inclusion *without* male erasure.

While *Second Sex* demonstrates Daly's efforts to create an *ethos* within the Church, these rhetorical tactics are completely abandoned in *Beyond God the Father*, which, as the title suggests, advocates an erasure of masculinity in favor of female-identified language and ideology. This shift in rhetorical stance marks the beginning of Daly's journey toward radical

feminism, and I would argue, toward an exclusionary rhetorical performance,<sup>39</sup> accomplished with an *ethos* of interruption.<sup>40</sup> Jablonski aptly articulates Daly's shift from a revision of the Church's doctrine to a blatant rejection of its mandates:

Unless women denounced the entire conceptual apparatus of Christian theology, she argues, they would not be able to push beyond the boundary of religious experience to where insight can grow. Daly's exodus from the ranks of the faithful carried with it the implication that once they 'claimed the power of [their own] speech,' Catholic women would no longer be bound by the language – or authority – of the orthodox Church. (168)

As Jablonski observes, and as Daly notes, the only remedy to the “symbol syndrome” of the Catholic Church is to completely reject its doctrine, and in doing so, to create a new theology which included those experiences and voices it had erased for centuries. *Beyond God the Father* serves as an exorcism of the conceptual apparatus of the church, and it also represents a strategic rhetorical choice on Daly's part – namely, to forego the language of the Church in order to argue against it. James Chesebro, cited in “Rhetoric, Paradox, and the Movement for Women's Ordination in the Catholic Church,” suggests that in order for women to reconcile themselves to the Church, they must adopt a “pluralistic worldview”: “...the decision to embrace a paradoxical world-view is made possible through a reflexive rhetoric that combines a compensatory ideology of selfhood with a highly developed sense of rhetorical choice” (174). I would argue that Daly's *Second Sex* employs this pluralistic worldview, while *Beyond God*, in its rejectionist stance, does not incorporate such a conception.

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<sup>39</sup> I do not term Daly's work “exclusionary” in the pejorative sense that many modern scholars do. Instead, I argue that this rhetorical shift from reconciliation with the Church to rejection of it is Daly's attempt at creating agency, after failed attempts to be “heard” in her prior text.

<sup>40</sup> Laura Micciche conceives of rhetorical interruption as a displacement within the discourse, an idea which holds true for an analysis of Daly's rhetoric in *Beyond God*: “The intentional variety desires interruption as a political tool, the goal of which is to unstick normative conventions from fixed locations, making possible a questioning of what is in order to make claims for what might be” (177).

In the opening of *Beyond God the Father*, Daly makes clear that proactive methodology must be paired with the revised theology proposed in *Second Sex*:

The method of liberation, then, involves a castrating of language and images that reflect and perpetuate the structures of a sexist world. It castrates precisely in the sense of cutting away the phallogentric value system imposed by patriarchy, in its subtle as well as in its more manifest expressions...[W]omen are beginning to recognize that the value system that has been thrust upon us by the various cultural institutions of patriarchy has amounted to a kind of gang rape of minds as well as bodies. (9)

Liberation is only attainable once women have first dislodged themselves from the role of the “other” – a role which Daly argues is perpetuated by the myth of Eve. The power of this myth to project misogynistic images of the male-female relationship is “deeply embedded in the modern psyche,” according to Daly (45). The greatest injustice, however, is that a failure to “exorcise evil from Eve” allows the patriarchal regard for women to be “metamorphosed into God’s viewpoint” (47). This perspective marks a sharp change from Daly’s inclusion of the male gender in *Second Sex*. No longer are men and women equal helpmates in the challenge of female liberation, but there is instead a need for the exorcising of images and ideologies constructed solely by male thought. Daly advises, not a revised version of the existent doctrine and its associated images, but a replacement of them. While Daly, in *Second Sex*, highlights the manner in which the myth of the eternal feminine also causes damage to the image of the eternal masculine in modern culture, she does not employ this equalist tactic when addressing the myth of Eve. Instead she discusses the myth of Eve as a means of redefining concepts of “original sin” and “the fall,” from a radical feminist perspective: “Rather than a Fall *from* the sacred, the Fall now initiated by women becomes a Fall *into* the sacred and therefore into freedom” (67). What Daly does here is apply an alternate, feminist perspective with which to view the existent patriarchal myth, and in doing so, she completely changes the use of myth within the context of

religion. Her re-appropriation of the myth here also bolsters her initial claim that ideologies are constantly in flux and are not subject to the rigidity that patriarchal religion has assigned them. This ideological paralysis is one which can only be overcome by women acting, without men, as a “sisterhood”: “The positive refusal of cooptation means in effect the becoming of the sisterhood of women, which is necessary to overcome paralysis, self-hatred extended to women as a caste, self-depreciation, and emotional dependence upon men for a feeling of self-esteem” (59). Adopting an exclusionary stance, *Beyond God the Father* illustrates that, for Daly, the only effective type of change is radical change. Because the very language, symbol system, and ideology of the church are all inherently patriarchal, Daly employs a form of interruption that thoroughly “exorcises” all residual misogyny from her conception of spirituality, which she conceives of as a “Sisterhood” (*Beyond God*).

Rather than molding her argument in such a way that facilitates a reconciliation between feminism and the church, Daly blatantly creates rhetorical distance between the two conflicting entities by proposing that “Sisterhood” is strictly “Antichurch”: “Even without conscious attention to the church, sisterhood is in conflict with it... This conflict arises directly from the fact that women are beginning to overcome the divided self and divisions from each other” (133). The traces of a radical rhetorical approach are readily apparent. In order to confront the existent divisions between the Church and women, Daly proposes a complete cessation from patriarchy, not an inclusion of its oppressive forces in her effort to overcome it. In order for women to find their way within the church, they must reject it entirely in favor of Daly’s “sisterhood.” Daly draws on the concept of “sisterhood” not only to replace the concept of church, but to illuminate how the church exists as “a space set apart” (156). She writes, “A church construed as space set apart, then – whether the term is intended to mean a building, an institution, or an ideological



‘sacred canopy’ – has certain propensities for serving as an escape from facing the abyss. It then becomes a place for spinning webs of counterfeit transcendence” (156).<sup>41</sup> Daly’s argument for sisterhood, then, is also an argument for departure from the church<sup>42</sup> and a rejection of all its associated symbols and ideologies – that is, her argument for inclusion *necessitates* exclusion. While *Second Sex* calls upon the church and existent doctrine to include feminism within its vision, *Beyond God* snips the ties that once bound the two systems in order to create a new, removed space for women.

This reconstruction of the Christian community, for Daly, is an opportunity for women’s silence to be heard:

The male religion entombs women in sepulchers of silence in order to chant its own eternal and dreary dirge to a past that never was. The silence *imposed* upon women echoes the structures of male hierarchies. It is important to listen to the structures of this imposed silence in order to hear the flow of the new sounds of free silence that are the voice of sisterhood as Antichurch. (150)

Silence, ultimately, becomes the issue which links both of Daly’s theological works. It is crucial to note that Daly, in her quest to combat the imposition of silence within *Beyond God*, is not suggesting an open, listening stance akin to the one she adopts within *Second Sex*.<sup>43</sup> Instead, she encourages women to “listen to the structures of this imposed silence” in an effort to exorcise these structures from the female religious experience. “Listening,” in *Beyond God*, is a solely feminine experience, because, according to Daly, “men can and do avoid hearing women’s new

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<sup>41</sup> Likening the church to a site for counterfeit transcendence rather than genuine spiritual guidance is an instance of perspective by incongruity, a Burkean rhetorical tool Foss has observed in Daly’s various religious essays. She articulates the ability of opposing images to convey the relationship between accepted tradition and reality: “The rhetor arguing against tradition who employs this technique begins inside the traditional world or reality with an image that conforms to that reality. But then a jarring, opposing image is introduced that forces the auditor or reader to re-think and question the components of his or her world” (“Feminism Confronts Catholicism” 13).

<sup>42</sup> In a 1971 *Theology Today* article, Daly argued that we have to “reconsider the world church” because “The church is wherever liberation exists” (353).

<sup>43</sup> Ratcliffe, for instance, defines rhetorical listening as “a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, culture; its purpose is to cultivate conscious identification in ways that promote productive communication, especially but not solely cross-culturally” (25).

words while appearing to listen” (169). Furthermore, for Daly, language, if not purified through exorcism, becomes the mirror reflecting and reinforcing these limitations. She writes, “Women are starting to know now the defects of language because it is not ours” (152). Daly’s theological works also function as modern self-awareness projects, exposing the constricting nature of words throughout history in order to highlight the magnitude of silence.<sup>44</sup> In some sense, Daly’s rhetorical shift between these first two works reveals that Daly has re-appropriated *kenosis* for a reverse effect: instead of cleansing themselves of self-will in order to be filled by God’s will, women are now urged to purge themselves of patriarchy’s will so that they may facilitate the realization of self-will. Through Daly’s use of interruption, it is clear that this rhetorical strategy is inextricably linked to indentification in the rhetor’s attempt to craft *ethos*. What Daly rejects (patriarchy, Christianity, oppressive ideology) directly defines, and even creates, her accepted philosophy and worldview. Tracing the evolution of Daly’s rhetorical stances from accommodation to interruption also demonstrates that *ethos* construction is never thoroughly stable, but changes as the female rhetor finds herself caught between the struggle of personal self-indentification and public alienation. Although modern scholarship scrutinizes in critical detail Daly’s later radical feminist texts, this tendency merely uncovers what Daly has become, but not what exactly has led her to this state of Be-coming.

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<sup>44</sup> Cheryl Glenn has argued that speech and silence are not only related, but inseparable: “Given how our language works, then, speech and silence are not mutually exclusive; they are inextricably linked and often interchangeably, simultaneously meaningful. Speech and silence depend upon each other: behind all speech is silence, and silence surrounds all speech” (7).

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

There is a tendency among modern scholars to apply a surprisingly secular perspective to the analysis of these women's rhetorical practices, overshadowing the fact that their commitment to spirituality guided their desire to engage in public discourse. Central to my analysis of these three women is that religion does not only function as a means of rhetorical authorization, but also as a means of self-identification. However, I do not entirely refute that female rhetors have historically been more readily afforded self-authorization through their religious affiliations. It cannot be denied, for instance, that St. Catherine's theological perspectives would not have been allowed into the general circulation of public discourse had her *ethos* not been bolstered by her role as Christ's bride and interlocutor. Her erasure of subjectivity from the mystical text of the *Dialogue* ensures that it is God's word rather than her own word that allows her, as a woman, to speak publically about matters reserved for male church authorities. Similarly, Mary Daly's choice to remain within the scholarly religious community at Jesuit-run Boston College, even after publishing her critique of Catholicism in *Second Sex*, allows her to speak authoritatively about the Church, simply because she has demonstrated a willingness to reconcile her personal worldview with a religion that, in return, has failed to listen to her call for reform. Sarah Grimke's *ethos* is also strengthened by her relationship with religion, as her arguments for mental liberation still rely partially upon women's adherence to traditional Christian duty for substantiation. Her committed efforts to relocate herself within

various religious denominations further illustrates her desire to remain within organized religion, even as she found that her personal beliefs were discordant with the doctrine espoused with each affiliation.

To counter these secular strands within the scholarship, I propose spirituality as a means, not only of authorization, but of self-identification for these particular women whose varying relationships with religion directly shape their projection of selfhood. Furthermore, their efforts toward self-identification are enacted by rhetorical interruption, which then incurs personal displacement on the part of the rhetor who attempts to enter public discourse as a marginalized member of society. Nedra Reynolds touches on the interdependence between interruption and identification, writing, “Through interruption and talking back, women rhetors can draw attention to their identities as marginalized speakers and writers as they also force more attention to the ideological workings of discursive exclusion” (898). But placing interruption in a religious context, in which women’s roles are more stringently defined as submissive and without agency, means that self-identification is only achieved through public transgression of societal norms, resulting in a personal displacement evidenced by each woman’s struggle to reconcile her personal beliefs with the religions she practiced and the culture she inhabited. In addition to addressing how the pursuit of religion functions as an identifying, though transgressive, act, my analysis extends the ongoing scholarly discussion by surveying how these rhetors must continue throughout their lives to, in some sense, re-negotiate their spiritual identities on account of their interruptive rhetorical efforts. Such a conclusion supports feminist rhetorical theorists’ claims that *ethos* construction is never wholly stable, but is an ongoing creation that stems from the context in which the rhetor writes and speaks. An *ethos* constructed through rhetorical interruption is not “split” in the sense of a fractured “self,” but rather it aligns

with Reynolds and Jarratt's theorizing of the "splitting image" of feminist subjectivity, which acknowledges that *ethos* is the "admission of a standpoint, with the understanding that other standpoints exist and that they change over time" (53).

Like *ethos* construction, interruption as a rhetorical act also changes as it is employed by different rhetors who write within different historical and cultural contexts. Interruption is the means by which St. Catherine, through her self-discipline of the soul, overcomes the cultural limitations imposed upon her body. Her sense of displacement accordingly results from the tension located between the spiritual and the corporeal realms. Devoted initially to a self-cloistered existence that would allow her sole focus upon subservience to her religious penances, Catherine becomes estranged from the physical, active life around her, seeking identification through a spirituality that existed within the isolated cell of her mind, until God called her to a life of charity. Ultimately, Catherine's life and rhetoric reveal that through her spiritual self-identification, she alienates herself from physical existence, as the Eucharistic piety and physical penances that sustain her soul result in the deterioration and death of her physical body.

Sarah Grimke's rhetorical interruption is an act of reclamation – namely, of the educational rights she argues that have been denied to the female sex in efforts to keep them tame and voiceless. She combats this injustice by allowing her own text to become the substantiation of the claim that mental enslavement rather than mental inferiority has kept women in subordination. Drawing on the rhetorical conventions of her male contemporaries, such as exegesis, epistolary writing, and logocentric argumentation, Grimke interrupts by transformative imitation. A woman equipped with an education, her writings directly evidence, can employ the same tactics as males in order to achieve her desired end. The tools of both Daly's and Grimke's minds – linguistic analysis, translation skills, and exegesis – also interrupt

biblical discourses by showing that the meaning conveyed through the language of the church, regarded as sacred and therefore infallible, can be de-stabilized through interpretation.

As is the case with St. Catherine of Siena, Grimke's interruption is an attempt at self-identification, but, for Grimke, it brings about a communal displacement suffered both privately and publically. She finds herself constantly unmoored from the religions in which she seeks a voice, and from this it is apparent that religion is not solely a means of authorization that Grimke drew upon for admittance into the public domain. Rather, Grimke's evolving spirituality shows the "splitting image" of her subjectivity, as her dislocation from various public religious spaces continually clashes with her spiritual beliefs. Her reluctant retreat into a life of domesticity at the height of an incendiary public career, like Daly's forced departure from Boston College, further demonstrates the personal difficulties of interruption as a rhetorical act. In both cases, we see each rhetor, not forcefully removed from public space, but urged into a reluctant exit by the dominant social totality she has unsuccessfully interrupted. Although interruption allows female rhetors access to the public domain, it is no guarantee of a sustained presence there.

In terms of subjectivity, Grimke interrupts more directly than St. Catherine of Siena, whose mysticism in the *Dialogue* not only displaces her subjectivity, but essentially erases it. Analyzing Grimke and St. Catherine in conversation with one another, therefore, allows us to trace the shift between female rhetors of the medieval period and those of the nineteenth century, who rely on logic rather than revelation to articulate their religious messages. Mary Daly, displaced from organized religion as a whole, perhaps employs the most radical of interruptions through her expulsion of patriarchy and God. Unlike Grimke, who circumnavigates the strictures already inherent within existing ideologies and scripture by re-interpretation, Daly rejects these pre-existing ideologies of Christianity and replaces them with her newly envisioned

philosophical tenets of Sisterhood, present only in a post-Christian philosophical space. Through her various religious affiliations, Grimke alters the spiritual space from which she contemplates issues of gender equality, but Daly evinces a revisionist stance, having already failed to accommodate a religion she felt had rejected her. Therefore, for Daly, any sense of spirituality must exist beyond previously established religions, which perpetuate a past of injustice without offering an avenue for future reform. But even as Daly leaves organized religion for spiritual habitation within her Sisterhood, like all three women discussed, she remains true to a sense of spirituality that she re-defines as a state of Be-coming.

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