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Listening to Cassandra: A Materialist-Feminist Exposé of the Necessary Relations between Rhetoric and Hermeneutics

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Cassandra, dragged by the hair, reached up to Heaven
Her unavailing hands, and the Trojan women
Crowded the burning temples holding there,
While still they could, the ancient images,
Their country's gods, till the Greek victors grabbed them,
A spoil that men might envy.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 411-16

Hearing and keeping silent [Schweigen] are also
possibilities belonging to discursive speech.

Heidegger 234

In our commonly received tradition of Greek mythology, Cassandra suffers great tragedies: her family and city are destroyed by Greek armies, she is dragged from the temple of Athena and raped by Ajax, she is kidnapped and enslaved by Agamemnon, and she is wooed but then cursed by Apollo. In this last instance, the god of light and rationality blesses Cassandra, a princess of Troy, with the gift of prophecy because, having been smitten with her beauty, he hopes to seduce her. However, when Cassandra rejects Apollo or simply fails to please him (depending upon which account one reads), he petulantly spits in her mouth, severing her relationship with Peitho, the goddess of persuasion. The chief result of Apollo's displeasure is that no one will ever believe Cassandra's prophetic claims, not about the Greek invasion, not about the Trojan horse, not about Agamemnon's murder. Hence, Cassandra comes down to us through a tradition of patriarchal myths as a wise woman to whom no one pays the slightest heed. But what if we reexamine the story of Cassandra from the site of materialist feminism and re-verse this founding myth of Western culture?¹ What might we learn if we listen to Cassandra? Perhaps Cassandra is not the only one who is cursed. Perhaps those who refuse to heed her—Priam and Hector, Ajax and Agamemnon—are also cursed. Their inability to listen to her warnings may imply not only their own separation from Peitho and the art of persuasion but also their limited conception of Hermes, the god of hermeneutics. Such a materialist-feminist re-versal, I will argue, redefines rhetoric and hermeneutics as acts of listening and then exposes the necessary relations between them.²

In the traditional versing of her myth, Cassandra interprets gods and humans "correctly" but finds little pleasure and much pain in her gift because no ground of common consent can be found. As Woman cursed, her horizons have been

narrowed; her opportunities for identification, denied. Belief (the province of rhetoric) is separated from interpretation (the province of hermeneutics). As a result, Cassandra discovers that her own hermeneutic, absent her audience's rhetoric, cannot foster change in her community. Unfortunately, Cassandra's audiences discover much too late that their rhetoric without her hermeneutics leads to disaster. Within the logic of a materialist-feminist re-versal, however, Cassandra can be reconstructed not merely as one of the cursed spoils of war but as a survivor who metonymically embodies a materialist feminism. Cassandra's truth proves to be grounded in her own experiences, with(in) her body, her intellect, her intuitions, her culture, and her language. Her particular truth acknowledges how her experiences with gender intersect with other embodied yet culturally constructed categories such as race, age, sexual orientation, nationality; moreover, her understanding and interpretations of all these experiences are constructed and expressed with(in) language.

To explore the possibilities of Cassandra's re-versed myth for my project of redefining rhetoric and hermeneutics while also exposing their mutual relations, I will make three rhetorical moves. First, I will analyze Peitho the goddess of rhetoric and Hermes the god of hermeneutics so as to conceptualize the process by which gendered biases in traditional descriptions of these deities in fact reflect a split between rhetoric and hermeneutics. Second, in order to challenge this gendered splitting, I will expose the necessary relations between rhetoric and hermeneutics³ via their uneasy relationships with truth as it is articulated and negotiated with(in) language. Third, I will offer a materialist-feminist re-definition of the two fields as acts not only of speaking, reading, and writing but also of listening.

Redefining Rhetoric

Although the deity of persuasion is a woman, she is frequently presented as a male fantasy, a seductress both desired and feared. Clad in rich cloth and jewels, Peitho embodies the ideal feminine beauty who enchants and mesmerizes men, sometimes beguiling them into acting against their better judgment. Hence, she reinforces Plato's definition of rhetoric as a mode of seductive flattery quite antithetical to any search for eternal truths. Within such a negative representation of rhetoric, it is no mere coincidence that the deity of persuasion takes the form of a woman; it requires a woman, so patriarchal myths contend, to teach men the "feminine" wiles of rhetoric. This gender-biased assumption partially explains our own culture's love/hate relationship with rhetoric. Although such a representation unfairly characterizes both rhetorical theories and women, it clearly demonstrates how classical theories of rhetoric-as-persuasion are tied to a gendered subjectivity. The theories assume a reading/writing/speaking subject who is male, who has power within the polis, who has the potential for being heroic in war, and who owns his slaves, his wife, and his children—at least

until the male children reach the age of citizenship (Aristotle 35; Woods 18). Moreover, classical theories assume that this male subjectivity may be generalized and presented as universal, as equally applicable to any and all “others” in the past, present, or future. While excluded “others” such as women may at times employ these theories and even employ them successfully, the theories themselves do not always prove universally valid or applicable. The dilemma for “others” has been, and still is, how to adapt culture-specific and gender-specific rhetorical theories to their own contexts, their own ends, and their own invention of proofs.

Because classical theories of rhetoric posit particular subjects in the act of constructing common-sense proofs, such theories necessarily focus on probable or contingent truths; however, they simultaneously imply an uneasy relationship between contingent truths and metaphysical truths. Too often, debates about rhetoric are framed in terms of *which* truth is more honorable to pursue, the metaphysical or the contingent. Plato champions metaphysical truth in his *Gorgias*, vigorously denouncing a false rhetoric that deals only in probabilities and hesitantly positing a true rhetoric that dialectically leads souls of speakers and audiences to a recollection of ideal truths. Aristotle negotiates the question of metaphysics a bit more shrewdly. Although ideal truths may exist, Aristotle’s rhetoric cannot discover them; instead, it discovers contingent truths, probable truths, those truths that must be invented and negotiated for society to function properly, as for example questions of who will rule, who will serve, who will speak, who will remain voiceless. When St. Augustine places rhetoric in a Christian context, he adapts Plato’s metaphysics. Only God’s grace can persuade humans of eternal truth; certain men-as-priests can merely teach parishioners how to implement the Word in accordance with its institutionalized interpretations.

In the Renaissance and early modernity, however, Western rhetoricians in a Christian tradition maintain traces of Augustine while harkening back to Aristotle and Cicero. They uneasily accept rhetoric’s province as that of teaching, delighting, and persuading people of probable truths in political, judicial, and epideictic arenas, as well as of God’s Word in religious arenas. Modern and postmodern theories of rhetoric are also haunted by a tension between metaphysical and contingent truth.⁴ Although debates are not framed in terms of which truth is more honorable to pursue, each new theory has to argue its position in the context of a metaphysical/contingent framework. The presence of such a tension creates the possibility for a binary logic within discourse, giving us splits between spirituality/flesh, mind/body, good/bad, man/woman, black/white, and even thought/language. While such discursive dichotomies are not necessarily “bad” in and of themselves, they do limit perceptions. When Cassandra’s voice enters this debate, it emerges from the slash, the mark of division and connection, the mark of both absence and silent presence. If we listen to Cassandra as a metonymic soothsayer for materialist feminism, we may

hear the rhetoric/truth connections differently and, more importantly, the rhetoric/hermeneutic connections more clearly.

Even though classical rhetoric has traditionally concerned itself with the integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, the latter has long since become an assumed skill and ceased to be taught as a rhetorical art or skill (Murphy 5, 11). If we juxtapose the devolution of rhetorical training with a reversed Cassandra myth, we can recover listening as a materialist-feminist possibility for rhetoric. But this possibility is not as simple as merely recovering the listening strategies in Quintilian's pedagogy; it will be determined by how materialist feminism links listening with language. Materialist feminism assumes that *language is a material component of the real* (Newton and Rosenfelt xix-xxi). Although other equally important material components exist (e. g., the body and culture), materially embodied language is what helps us conceptualize these other components *via the cultural discourses enveloping them. Discourses function metonymically and, by so doing, socialize human subjects. Not only do they reinforce existing ideologies, but their contradictions also emerge as spaces of agency that allow us to rewrite them. Materialist-feminist re-writing can draw attention to ideologically grounded gendered actions and assumptions as well as to accompanying inequities of power that emerge as these gendered actions and assumptions intersect with other cultural categories such as age, nationality, and race. Through such re-writing, personal and collective change can be not only imagined but effected. Because materialist feminism foregrounds how we use and are used by gendered discourse, it complicates the traditional rhetorical assumption that speaking is prior to listening. Cassandra's re-verses myth asks us to rethink this cause/effect relationship and imagine listening both as prior to and as subsequent to speaking and writing. Such logic offers us two materialist-feminist possibilities for rhetoric: *listening to* and *listening from within* discourse(s).*

Listening to the interwoven discourses of culture, of others, and of ourselves from the site of material feminism is a strategy for exposing rhetorical constructions of gender. This strategy of focused listening helps us to articulate the claims, reasonings, and assumptions of gendered discourses, including our own. Listening to experience as both cause and effect of feminist speaking and writing has been described by Mary Daly as follows: "In the beginning was not the word. In the beginning is the hearing. . . . We can weave and unweave, knot and unknot, only because we hear, what we hear, and as well as we hear" (*Gyn/Ecology* 424). The following passage from Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* exemplifies how the discourses of culture, of others, and of ourselves closely intertwine:

Women's minds have been mutilated and muted to such a state that 'Free Spirit' has been branded into them as a brand name for girdles and bras rather than as a name of our verb-ing, be-ing Selves. . . . Patriarchy has stolen our cosmos and returned it in the form of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and cosmetics. (5)

Three points seem pertinent here. First, gendered discourses of culture may be heard in the terms common to all of us, e.g., “Free Spirit” signifying a brand of women’s underwear. While such claims may appear as only clever plays on words, they are much more profound. Our cultural socialization assures that such gendered discourses become embodied and, according to Daly, may result in amnesia, aphasia, and apraxia in women (*Pure Lust* 132). However, these gendered discourses of culture also resonate with other cultural assumptions, such as Western notions of fashion, class issues of access to magazines and cosmetics, and historical locations of technologies. Second, gendered discourses of others may also be heard in Daly’s “Free Spirit” passage. As I listen, I hear Daly’s ideologically grounded claims about language; I also hear echoes of a rhetoric professor who decided that Daly is not truly serious about her own language play. Other readers may, of course, hear different voices. Third, my own gendered discourses may be heard as I listen to Daly’s “Free Spirit” passage. These largely agree with Daly and disagree with the rhetoric professor, but they also wonder about the categories that language may or may not make available to us and about the efficacy of categories for describing different women’s and men’s experiences with(in) language. Listening to such overlapping discourses exposes spaces between conflicting ideologies that may become spaces of agency for both men and women; this agency, in turn, may foster recursive weavings and unweavings of discourses that break the threads of “standard” usage, “normal” assumptions, and linear cause and effect. From such agency may emerge political action.

Because agency is situated within webs of conflicting ideologies, each of which generates and is generated by its own discourse conventions, we must continually remember that while Cassandra and those of us around her are listening to discourses we are also listening from within them. Foregrounding Cassandra’s link with discourse does not background her material experiences with her body and her culture; instead, such linkage recognizes the materiality of language and its importance in the conscious and unconscious construction of subjects and of cultural narratives. The problem with listening from within discourses is that, for Woman and women, this process may sometimes reveal “a sense of homelessness, a sense of alienation, and lack of belongingness to the earth and to the world that cannot be had through concepts and theories” (Worsham 236). If concepts and theories that exist within discourses do not provide viable premises from which Woman or women may construct their truths, then an alternative premise must be found. For materialist feminists, that alternative is experience.

Although the epistemology of experience can be problematic,⁵ materialist feminism focuses on experience, not as a positivistic rendering of biologically-determined identities but as a continual process of negotiating embodied yet culturally-constructed identities, particularly identities of different women and their experiences with their bodies, intellects, intuitions, cultures, and languages.

Because women-as-subjects are born into already existing discursive conventions, their experiences are not only shaped by but also reinforce and/or revise these conventions. Adrienne Rich explores this metonymic connection between discourse and experience when recalling her childish reaction to her mother's absence in relation to her nanny's presence:

White child growing into her whiteness. Tin shovel flung by my hand at the dark-skinned woman caring for me, summer 1933, soon after my sister's birth, my mother ill and back in the hospital. A half-effaced, shamed memory of a bleeding cut on her forehead. I am reprimanded, made to say I'm sorry. I have "a temper," for which I'm often punished; but this incident remains vivid while others blur. The distance between language and violence has already been shortened. Violence becomes language. If I flung words along with the shovel, I can't remember them. Then, years later, I do remember. *Negro! Negro! . . .*

A white child's anger at her mother's absence, already translated (some kind of knowledge makes this possible) into a racial language. That *They* are to blame for whatever pain is felt. (183-84)

As Rich demonstrates, such unconscious socialization with(in) language is both caused by and results in a conflicted yet interconnected class-, gendered-, and racialized-knowledge. Accordingly, nannies are fixtures within families; women must not show bad temper; whites may use minorities as scapegoats. If such unconscious socialization and its resulting knowledge are to be challenged, they must be brought to consciousness via language. This project may be facilitated by a materialist-feminist definition of rhetoric as listening to and listening from within discourses. The project could be even further clarified by juxtaposing this materialist-feminist redefinition of rhetoric with a materialist-feminist redefinition of hermeneutics.

Redefining Hermeneutics

The deity of hermeneutics, Hermes the Hastener, is commissioned to conduct dead souls to Hades but is most remembered as a messenger of the gods. As such, his connection to hermeneutics is not only etymological but functional. His task of delivering messages for the gods means that he has to listen closely to their messages, interpret their meanings, and then transmit these meanings to other gods and humans (Bleicher 11; Mueller-Vollmer 1). Often pictured wearing only a winged helmet and winged sandals, Hermes is famous for his physical beauty, perpetual youth, and athletic prowess. He is especially noted for his "strength, keenness of wit, powers of persuasion, ability to entertain [with storytelling], and a liking for adventure" as well as a willingness, on occasion, to tell lies (Sabin 111, 109). As a trickster god, Hermes charms both gods and humans against their better judgment; part of his mesmerizing power comes from his caduceus, the magic wand entwined with serpents that holds power

over waking and sleeping. Seemingly a masculine version of Peitho, Hermes's very maleness enhances his reputation, a sociosexual phenomenon which may partially explain the favorable reputation philosophy enjoys when compared to rhetoric. Although both deities are viewed with suspicion, Peitho is commonly seen as the "bad girl" condemned by everyone whereas Hermes is seen as the "bad boy" whom everyone loves and forgives. When delivering messages, Hermes is presumed to tell the truth. He fosters a gendered tradition of philosophy that assumes a thinking/being male subject who is inclined toward the intellectual and possessed of the leisure to pursue it (Nye 1-4; Waithe xii-xiii). Although "other" subjects such as women may study hermeneutic treatises, hermeneutics, like rhetoric, is silent about how these "others" should adapt its concepts for their own situations, their own ends, their own understandings and interpretations.

Hermeneutics has traditionally distinguished between acts of understanding and acts of interpreting, a distinction no longer as viable as it once was.⁶ Classical hermeneutics seeks a method of interpretation that guarantees objective understanding, e. g., Aristotle's treatise on interpretation, Augustine's biblical exegesis, Friedrich Schleiermacher's philology, and Wilhelm Dilthey's metascience.⁷ By contrast, philosophical, or positive, hermeneutics explores the intersection of language and being in our interpretations of texts, subjects, and cultures, e. g., Gadamer's use of the early Heidegger to examine how language affects interpretation at the fusion of horizons between subject and object.⁸ A third kind, radical or negative hermeneutics, tries to deconstruct metaphysical presence in classical and philosophical hermeneutics and recover the difficulty in discussions of truth and reason, e.g., Derrida's critique of Heidegger.⁹ In all such permutations, hermeneutics stands in an uneasy relationship with truth; like rhetoric, it is haunted by a tension between metaphysical and contingent truths. John Caputo describes this tension as follows:

We have it from Aristotle himself that life is hard. There are many ways to miss the mark of virtue, he said, but only one way to hit it. . . . 'Factual life,' the young Heidegger comments, seeks the easy way out. . . . Thus philosophy for the young thinker must become a 'hermeneutics of facticity' . . . a reading of life which . . . restores factual existence to its original difficulty. . . . This new [Heideggerian]hermeneutics would try . . . to recapture the hardness of life before metaphysics showed us a fast way out of the back door of flux. (1)

By shifting the emphasis of hermeneutics from truth (the transcendental) to being (the ontological), Heidegger shifts hermeneutics from an uneasy relationship with truth to an uneasy relationship with *Dasein*, or being-there (Heidegger 215-21).

Yet assumptions about truth still haunt hermeneutics. Being-in-the-world assumes that understanding and interpreting, i.e., truths, should no longer be

understood as “descriptive and evaluative” reifications but rather as “reflective and self-critical” processes (Bruns 6). Subsequently, building on Heidegger’s concept, Gadamer positions understanding and interpreting within a fusion of horizons or recognition of historical standpoints. He suggests that we are positioned *in relation to* an object in a particular situation in which we discover ourselves (Gadamer 269-73). By contrast, Derrida claims that the Heideggerian bid to set aside metaphysical truth is unsuccessful; he offers deconstruction as an alternative. Despite the complex differences between these theories, they all assume a rhetorical dimension by negotiating or deferring meaning with(in) language. It is in this process of negotiating or deferring contingent truths that materialist-feminist challenges to hermeneutic theories emerge. Given the focus of this article, the challenge emerges as a question: what might happen to hermeneutics if we listen to Cassandra?

To begin, we would have to articulate a materialist-feminist hermeneutics.¹⁰ As I am using the term, *materialist feminism* emerges as a radical hermeneutic. It assumes that we cannot escape the materiality of our bodies, our language, or our cultures but that we can alter our experiences with and of such modes of materiality, even enveloped as we are by conflicting ideologies and desires. Materialist feminism criticizes those poststructuralist theories that posit language as the only game in town on the grounds that they ignore other material components of the real; however, it acknowledges that these other components may be conceptualized only with(in) language. To this end, materialist feminism employs the textuality of poststructural theory in its analysis of partial and situated experiences, but it complicates this textuality with the material positionality of gender and other cultural categories. At the same time, it does not accept such categories as monolithic givens, nor does it accept the marxist claim that “the woman question” will be answered once class equality is attained.

These assumptions undergird a materialist-feminist standpoint theory, which emerges as identity politics grounded in women’s experiences. According to Sandra Harding, a materialist-feminist standpoint would be not a “perspective” but rather an “achievement”: “To achieve a feminist standpoint one must engage in the intellectual and political struggle necessary to see nature and social life from the point of view of that disdained activity which produces women’s social experiences” (“Conclusion” 185).¹¹ Not surprisingly, different readings of this theoretical position sometimes engender fierce debate. When the possibility of *speaking* only from and about one’s own experiences is privileged above other possible strategies, standpoint theory will result in a static identity politics in which women and men, Latinos and Native Americans, upper and lower classes, cannot speak to or about one another. Obviously, such a narrow interpretation of identity politics would severely limit the possibilities of standpoint theory. Such a narrow interpretation has been criticized for reducing the complexity of experience, for privileging noncontextual experience, for reifying cultural categories, for reasserting the primacy of the individual knower, for

destroying the concepts of community and Woman, and for starting us on the apolitical slippery slide to the end of feminism.¹² After all, the argument goes, if every identity is particular, there can be no concept Woman around which to rally a feminist theory and politics.

But when the rhetorical possibilities of *listening to* and *listening within* discourses are juxtaposed with a materialist-feminist hermeneutics, standpoint theory may be valued quite differently. Such a new reading would echo Heidegger's claim that interpreting within *Dasein* means that "[h]earing and keeping silent [*Schweigen*] are also possibilities belonging to discursive speech" (234). If we read Heidegger's claim in conjunction with Cassandra's revised myth, then being-in-the-world must include a gendered listening-in-the-world, i.e., a gendered listening that is complicated by other cultural categories. Joanne Braxton describes such a process when explaining how her personal history and her intellectual passion for autobiography merged:

There began my fascination with autobiography, at my grandmother's knees, where I sat completely enthralled by her stories, which described a way of life I would never know. And yet I sensed my connection with this knowledge, which I had not yet found in books. My consciousness was ready shaped for the study of slave narrative. I had learned to *listen*. (4-5)

Listening-in-the-world becomes a way to challenge any narrow interpretation of standpoint theory that privileges persons speaking from or about only one subject position. Within the logic of listening-in-the-world, standpoints emerge as mutable, complex, overlapping subject positions that include both spaces of commonality and spaces of difference. In both kinds of spaces, the possibility for a fusion of horizons emerges; such rhetorical identification is based not only on common ways of life but also on respect for ways of lives that we will never live.

By grounding standpoints in a listening-in-the-world both prior to and subsequent to speaking and writing, materialist feminism opens the back door to flux. Of course, along with such flux come both difficulties and responsibilities. Our own standpoints must be not only continually articulated but also continually negotiated in relation to other standpoints. Sandra Cisneros reminds us that such negotiation is sure to be complicated by cultural positionality:

... I don't feel an alliance with upper-class white women. I don't. I can listen to them and on some level as a human being I can feel great compassion and friendships; but they have to move from their territory to mine because I know their world. But they don't know mine. (461)

Cisneros's claim exposes the possibilities of knowing multiple centers and negotiating shifting centers. Just as importantly, it places the responsibility of articulating the existence of and the effects of class and ethnicity and other

cultural categories not just on minorities but also on dominant groups, who have historically enjoyed the leisure to choose whether or not to acknowledge and address such issues. Audre Lorde echoed Cisneros's claim when she wrote the following statement to Mary Daly:

This letter attempts to break a silence I had imposed upon myself. . . . I had decided never again to speak to white women about racism. I felt it was wasted energy because of destructive guilt and defensiveness, and because whatever I had to say might be better said by white women to one another at far less emotional cost to the speaker, and probably with a better hearing. (70-71)

Lorde reminds us that listening-in-the-world is both gendered and racialized in ways that complicate interpretation and communication. She also reminds us that listening-in-the-world sometimes occurs both prior to and subsequent to an act of silence as well as to an act of speaking. Most importantly, Lorde asks us to consider whether, when we resist most loudly, we may actually be unconsciously defending our own sexism and racism. Such sobering reminders challenge both women and men not only to articulate our positions but also to negotiate our positions. Such negotiations foreground not only the rhetorical flux of life but also the gendered rhetoricity of language.

Hermeneutics has long assumed the rhetoricity of language. Within philosophical and radical hermeneutics, language has been conceived as more than a linguistic or logical system. It functions much as Plato in the *Republic* feared poetry would function, i. e., as a "honeyed muse . . . [invoking] pleasure and pain [that] will usurp the sovereignty of law and then the principles always recognized by common consent as the best" (339). Philosophic hermeneutics rejects Plato's fear and asks what would happen to philosophy and the world at large if "instead of banishing the poet or making her write philosophical novels, you just linger in her company?" (Bruns 241). Radical hermeneutics not only rejects Plato's fear but also rejects the question of philosophical hermeneutics for its idealized tendency to linger in presence. By contrast, materialist-feminist hermeneutics, while also rejecting Plato's fear, exposes the rhetoricity of language by offering different interpretations of the "honeyed muse" than do philosophical or radical hermeneutics. Inspired by Mary Oliver's poem "August," for example, Patricia Yaeger posits honey-mad women as the main trope for a feminist theory of language play, a theory that "combines the archaeological know-how of American feminists—with . . . the plenitude, the emancipatory pleasure, the redemptive language games French feminists have begun to play" (20; 1-34). Yaeger's theory conceptualizes strategies that "are neither random, nor . . . promise the 'erasure' of other systems" (252). The latter strategy allows feminist language play both to exist in the presence of patriarchy and to alter it. Diane Glancy, however, reminds us that such gendered play is further complicated by other cultural categories such as ethnicity and race:

The word is important in [Cherokee] tradition. You speak the path on which you walk. Your words make the trail. You have to be careful with words. They can shape the future. For instance, when a brave hunted a bear, he first drew the bear with his arrow in it, then when he went hunting, the hunt was merely a result of what he'd already done in his drawing. (360)

Such complications in materialist-feminist hermeneutics restore the difficulty to life and to language play.

Materialist-feminist hermeneutics also foregrounds the rhetoricity of language by questioning how Plato's "common consent" functions rhetorically to establish authority. Such hermeneutics demonstrate that "common consent" is ideologically situated so that it reflects and reinforces the privilege of those who have the power to define it. Moreover, bell hooks notes that such authority is too often manifested as mastery over others. She argues that redefinitions of this authority must include a change "in habits of being, including styles of writing as well as chosen subjects" (25). Such new habits would result in our becoming critical subjects who, while not autonomous, would define authority not simply as an authority based on our own lived experiences but as a much broader authority based on our listening-in-the-world. Such authority would offer marginalized groups the possibility of moving to the established center while foregrounding the problematics of doing so. Perhaps more importantly, this authority would also offer marginalized groups the possibility of redefining their commonly perceived margins as viable centers. Likewise, this authority would challenge dominant groups to expose or reveal their own assumptions about where the center is located and to critique how this location constructs possibilities and limitations. *Both personal and cultural! Such gendered listening-in-the-world can help each of us to articulate and negotiate our own cultural positions with others, to recognize the kinds of truths that must be challenged, and to remember that such processes are on-going.* As such, it exposes the metonymic materiality of experience and discourse as well as their flux. By emphasizing the gendered rhetoricity of language, materialist-feminist hermeneutics exposes the mutual need that characterize the relation between rhetoric and hermeneutics.

In Medias Res

When we reconsider Ovid's line "till the Greek victors grabbed them" in terms of rhetoric and hermeneutics, we should ask: "who" is speaking and "who" is listening? We also should ask: who or what is this putative "them"? The ancient images? The country's gods? The Trojan women? Some of "them"? All of "them"? The slipperiness or rhetoricity of language enables us to make arguments for each hermeneutic possibility; that is, it allows us to construct different rhetorical frames from which to build different interpretations, all of which are ideologically grounded in the material locations from which they emerge. If we read "them" as including Cassandra herself, then we could argue that when the

Greek victors seized her, they subsumed her rhetoric to theirs just as they subsumed her prophetic hermeneutics. By re-versing her myth to determine ways that rhetoric and hermeneutics may be redefined and their relation exposed, I have attempted to listen to this wise woman within the overlapping yet competing discourses of rhetoric and hermeneutics, of patriarchy and materialist feminism. Of course, listening to Cassandra is not the only means of interpreting and/or understanding rhetoric and hermeneutics, nor is it a negation of all other means. Still, after all this time, perhaps it is only poetic justice that a materialist-feminist re-versing of the Cassandra myth should position Cassandra in the middle of things.

NOTES

¹ According to Mary Daly, *re-versing* does not imply simply reversing the binary functions within patriarchal logic; nor does it merely imply returning to an a priori truth that existed before patriarchy; rather, it implies a feminist re-writing and re-reading. As such, it makes possible the presence of feminism within the presence of patriarchy. Such re-versings provide us a space from which to imagine how Cassandra's myth might be read if her position were considered a center of power (Daly, *Gyn/Ecology* 8).

² For an extended definition of materialist feminism, see Newton and Rosenfelt: "What a materialist feminist criticism tends to mean . . . is more focus on material realities than in most feminist criticism, and more power granted to ideas, language, and culture than in much more traditional Marxist criticism . . . before the 1970s" ("Introduction" xix). For competing definitions, see the other articles in the collection of essays edited by Newton and Rosenfelt.

³ For other research on intersections of rhetoric/composition with hermeneutics, see Crusius, Kinneavy, Schildgen, and Worsham. Also, see Berthoff, Dillon, Gleason, Halden-Sullivan, Mailloux, and Spelmeyer.

⁴ For a comprehensive history of rhetoric, see Barilli.

⁵ For discussions concerning how grounding feminism in women's experiences may actually limit rhetoric and composition theory and pedagogy, see Kirsch and Ritchie (10-13) and Ritchie (255).

⁶ For a more comprehensive history of hermeneutics, see Mueller-Vollmer (1-53). Also see Bleicher, who classifies hermeneutics by its three "capacities": one, hermeneutic theory, which aims to construct a "general theory of interpretation as the methodology for the human sciences," its goal being the discovery of objective knowledge, e. g., philology, biblical exegesis, and jurisdiction (1); two, hermeneutic philosophy, which rejects the idea of a general method for obtaining objective knowledge and celebrates instead the "explication and phenomenological description of human *Dasein* in its temporality and historicity" (2); and, three, critical hermeneutics, which questions the "idealist assumptions" underpinning the former classification as well as their "neglect to consider extra-linguistic factors which also help to constitute the context of thought and action, i. e., work and domination" (3).

Crusius offers a more diverse classification:

1. *Naive or natural hermeneutics*, the spontaneous, everyday, mostly unreflective interpretations necessary when intersubjective understanding breaks down
2. *Normative hermeneutics*, the art of text interpretation as a deliberate and deliberating discipline for a "priestly" caste of specialists
3. *Scientific hermeneutics*, conceived as the foundational discipline of the human or historical sciences

4. *Philosophical or ontological hermeneutics*, a general philosophy of human existence, which holds that interpreting is not so much what humans beings or some class of human beings do, but rather what all human beings are, namely, interpreters.

5. *Negative or depth hermeneutics*, the hermeneutics of distrust or suspicion, a continuation of the Enlightenment's effort to liberate us from the dogma, error, and superstition of the past. It is called "negative" because of its undermining intent and is sometimes styled "depth hermeneutics" because it purports to probe beneath linguistic surfaces into the unconscious (Freud) or the economic-political conditions, the regimes of power, that control human communication (Marx, Nietzsche, Foucault). (Crusius 5-6)

⁷For critical discussions of classical hermeneutics, see Bleicher (11-26) and Bruns (21-138).

⁸For critical discussions of philosophical hermeneutics, see Bruns (139-212) and Crusius (3-50).

⁹For critical discussions of negative hermeneutics, see Caputo (95-208) and Bruns (213-28).

¹⁰Scholars in different disciplines have tried, from a variety of theoretical positions, to define a feminist hermeneutics. From religious studies, see Koontz and Swartley for feminist strategies of Biblical interpretation. From philosophy, see Warnke for a feminist hermeneutics which rescues the subject from postmodern theories (81). From film studies, see Staskowski for a feminist hermeneutics or theory of the subject based on experience (109, 154-56). From literary studies, see Weir for a feminist hermeneutics defined as an articulation of disaster or the opposite of Roland Barthes' bliss (69); also, see Meyers for a strategy of exposing sexual differences in the interpretive process (50) and Hagen for a feminist hermeneutics based on the Wife of Bath's readings of scripture, one which assumes that rhetoric offers more possibilities than dialectic for an experience-based hermeneutics (108, 111).

¹¹For discussions of how standpoint theory evolved from Marxist thought to feminist theory, see Harstock (159-64) and Harding (184-86).

¹²For feminist critiques of standpoint theory (and its possible slippery slide into a static identity politics), see Anzuldúa, Green and Curry, Lugones, and Mohanty.

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