

Reconceptualizing Masculinized L/logos, Re(Image)ining the  
Rhetorical Feminine in Composition

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Melanie Lee

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This dissertation titled  
Reconceptualizing Masculinized L/logos, Re(Image)ining the  
Rhetorical Feminine in Composition

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## ABSTRACT

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Reconceptualizing Masculinized L/logos, Re(Image)ining the Rhetorical Feminine in  
Composition

Director of Dissertation: Jennie Nelson

Absence of the rhetorical feminine from our Western tradition is an ideological, *theoretical* problem whose consequences manifest in *material*, practical ways that affect how we teach writing. This dissertation, the first hybrid manuscript of its kind at Ohio University, examines relationships between mythos, logos, and the eikon (icon) in light of ancient rhetorics that depict powerful feminine entities and woman rhetors engaging in public, rhetorical performativity. They suggest our rhetorical origins may be as visual as textual. But the feminine authority ancient rhetorics convey is diminished, masculinized, and resignified in the West through the social construction of masculinized L/logos. As a result, once powerful feminine rhetorics disappear from our rhetorical tradition. I question the rhetorical feminine's absence in light of images that show woman rhetors engaging in deliberative, epideictic, and forensic performativity long before Aristotle taxonomizes these terms. I argue that rhetorical and religious authorities historically entwine through masculinized L/logos and the institutionalization of what I call *patri-theogony*—a blend of sacred and secular patriarchal ideology that custom and laws enforce which coincides with the supposed mythos-to-logos cultural shift—that supports the inception of a masculinized rhetoric. Lasting academic consequences result: feminine

authority is rendered invisible, affecting our discipline, our language, and our entire social order.

For example, feminization of composition follows from masculinization of rhetoric in the structure of masculinized L/logos. Rhetorical inequity between women and men places what Robert Connors calls “feminized” writing faculty in positions of responsibility without authority. In these positions, feminized writing faculty enact what I call the *trope of the schoolmarm*: disempowered authority figures, “mythologized mother-teachers” separated from once powerful rhetorical feminine roots, they practice current traditional pedagogy as a compensatory strategy for coping with overworkloads. In this way, traditional college writing classrooms reflect the structure of masculinized L/logos and suppress the rhetorical feminine. Rhetorical performativity combined with writing faculty overload suppresses feminized writing faculty’s dialogue with students and supports silencing of the rhetorical feminine. Instead of engaging students in conversation about their ideas, overloaded schoolmarms echo masculinized L/logos in correctness-focused, “God/truth voice” (Elbow) comments that discourage revision and maintain rhetoric of distance between dominant, masculinized rhetoric and submissive, feminized composition. Likewise, epistemic inequity between visual and verbal rhetorics follows from masculinization of the word and feminization of the image, subordinating image to word in the making of new knowledge. Yet visual rhetoric from antiquity through modernity depicts *Rhetorike* as a formidable, feminine, linguistic warrior-hero that contests this paradigm. Renegotiating this ideological and material dissonance requires ideological, material re(image)ining.

I claim that the icon is the site where the generative essence mythos and logos share overlap. My dissertation integrates icons of rhetorical feminine authority, blending visual rhetoric with the(a)logy in a hybrid text to re(image)ine and reinscribe the rhetorical feminine in masculinized L/logos, creating a God/Ess L/logos that renegotiates visual-verbal boundaries. I suggest that our rhetorical origins may be as pictorial as textual, our rhetoric and composition is performative, and our visions of rhetorical authority should be androgynous and polymorphic. These reconceptions open new possibilities for the teaching and learning of writing.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

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Change is difficult. Patricia Bizzell calls for “radical” methodology “which violates some of the most cherished conventions of academic research” to reintegrate woman rhetors in our Western tradition, Judith Butler questions the gendering of conventions that exclude them, and Helene Cixous suggests *écriture féminine* (woman’s writing) as “the antilogos weapon” necessary to dephallus-ize masculinized rhetoric. But textual approaches alone seem inadequate for restoring the absent, omitted, invisible rhetorical feminine to the masculinized L/logos of Western rhetoric. Restoring the rhetorical feminine requires ideological, material re(image)ining. Indeed, no conventions exist in the 2008 *MLA Style Manual and Guide* for integrating images in the text of a scholarly manuscript in the way I propose to renegotiate troubled relationships between feminine and masculine, image and word, composition and rhetoric. I had to adapt existing MLA guidelines and invent a citation and documentation convention of my own that allows visual-verbal integration in my project.

That I even thought this possible speaks highly of the people who encouraged and inspired me and to whom I give thanks. I thank Dr. Sherrie L. Gradin for her efforts on my behalf in her negotiations with Thesis and Dissertation Services (TADs) staff, the Graduate College, and the College of Arts and Sciences. Because of her encouragement, her negotiations, and her support of my idea, TADs services recently changed their dissertation format guidelines and now allow two options for graduate students who wish to integrate illustrations within their texts and present their manuscripts in non-traditional formats. I also thank Dr. Gradin for her comments on my early drafts of chapters two

through four, for her initial guidance on my project, and most of all for her continued interest in and support of my work.

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*Ohio University's Thesis and Dissertation (TAD) Guidelines, administered through the Graduate College, follow the most recent MLA Style guidelines in requiring separation of images and words. This rule was underscored to me in a 75-minute long conference call<sup>1</sup> with the Assistant Director and the Director of Thesis and Dissertation Services. The six-page sample of an early chapter draft that I'd sent in order for us to talk about how I might integrate images with text in my project included three images that spoke to ideas discussed in the larger text. I purposefully placed those images to overlap left and right margins and appear within the text of the paragraphs where those ideas were discussed. Contextualizing captions beneath and to the right or left of images appeared as grouped units embedded within the larger discussion of my dissertation text. I did not title or number the images; rather, as much as possible, I treated them like text. I explained the rationale behind integrating images this way and also overlaying them my larger textual discussion, to not only juxtapose but also imbricate the visual and textual, to include hundreds of images that conducted an inter-visual-textual dialogue with text. I was told that integrating images in this way is not allowed.*

*The Graduate College rule and, indeed, MLA Style illustrate how the academy enforces L/logos<sup>2</sup>-centrism, perpetuates textual hegemony, and diminishes the visual's epistemological value. The format in which I was required to submit my dissertation*

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<sup>1</sup> My conference call with Ohio University's Graduate College Thesis and Dissertation Services took place Tuesday, December 14, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> My presentation of the term L/logos signifies unacknowledged blending of religious (Logos) and rhetorical (logos) concepts that cohere in our understandings of this word, an implicit ideological union that occurs even when we do not realize it. Sacred and secular principles that enliven each other in the totality of this term's meaning overlap, and, as I will suggest, cannot be separated.



*preserved Western culture's dominance of word over image. According to Thesis and Dissertation Service administrators, this rule maintains "consistency," "professionalism," and works within "technical" constraints to upload dissertations to ProQuest. I expressed my intent to file a publication delay that would postpone uploading my manuscript to ProQuest until I could publish it and submit a textual abstract to satisfy the Graduate College's dissertation filing requirement. They insisted following format guidelines "just looks more professional." Their ideas of what "looks professional" are, ironically, rhetorical and guided by conventions whose ideology limits visual rhetoric innovation in my discipline.*

*In order to compose a dissertation that questions unquestioned acceptance of these conventions and their ideological, epistemological, and pedagogical effects, in order to renegotiate the relationship between image and word that I believe to be a vital part of the rhetorical feminine's absence, I've chosen to present my dissertation as a hybrid, image and word integrated, multi-media text. The body of the dissertation is [here](#).*

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