



The House of My Sojourn: Rhetoric, Women, and the Question of Authority (Albma Rhetoric Cult & Soc Crit)

Jane S. Sutton

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Employing the trope of architecture, Jane Sutton envisions the relationship between women and rhetoric as a house: a structure erected in ancient Greece by men that, historically, has made room for women but has also denied them the authority and agency to speak from within. Sutton's central argument is that all attempts to include women in rhetoric exclude them from meaningful authority in due course, and this exclusion has been built into the foundations of rhetoric.

Drawing on personal experience, the spatial tropes of ancient Greek architecture, and the study of women who attained significant places in the house of rhetoric, Sutton highlights a number of decisive turns where women were able to increase their rhetorical access but were not able to achieve full authority, among them the work of Frances Wright, Lucy Stone, and suffragists Mott, Anthony, and Stanton; a visit to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where the busts that became the Portrait Monument were displayed in the Woman's Building (a sideshow, in essence); and a study of working-class women employed as telephone operators in New York in 1919.

With all the undeniable successes—socially, politically, and financially—of modern women, it appears that women are now populating the house of rhetoric as never before. But getting in the house and having public authority once inside are not the same thing. Sutton argues that women “can only act as far as the house permits.” Sojourn calls for a fundamental change in the very foundations of rhetoric.

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