
REINVENTING RHETORIC SCHOLARSHIP

Fifty Years of the
Rhetoric Society of America



Edited by Roxanne Mountford, Dave Tell,
& David Blakesley

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Reinventing Rhetoric Scholarship



FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY: LOOKING BACK

RSA AT FIFTY: (RE)INVENTING STORIES

Andrea A. Lunsford

Greetings and happy fiftieth birthday to the Rhetoric Society of America. It is a pleasure and a great privilege to be with you here today in Minneapolis, the city where we first gathered half a century ago, and I am grateful to the University of Minnesota Departments of Writing Studies and Communication Studies as well as to the magnificent Weisman Art Museum and to the conference organizers for this inspiring and challenging program—and for giving me this opportunity to address you on this epideictic occasion.

Now, please take a trip with me back to the year of our founding: 1968, in the heart of the civil rights movement. *The Year that Rocked the World*, *The Year that Shaped a Generation*, *The Year that America Grew Up*—these are just a few of the many books devoted to the twelve momentous months of that year. Even if you were not around in 1968, you know a lot of the story:

January 23: North Korea captures the USS Pueblo

February 27: Walter Cronkite delivers his scathing “Report from Vietnam” speech

March 16: The My Lai Massacre (it was commemorated this year by a brilliant opera performed by Rinde Eckert, singing the role of Hugh Thompson, Jr., who tried to stop the massacre, and the Kronos Quartet)

March 31: Johnson announces he will not run for re-election

April 4: Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated; Mahalia Jackson sings “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” at the funeral

April 11: Civil Rights (Fair Housing) Act is passed

June 5: Robert F. Kennedy is assassinated

August 28: Protests during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago against the Vietnam War and police brutality erupt in riots

October 16: Tommie Smith and John Carlos raise gloved fists in support of human rights at the Summer Olympic Games

October 31: Johnson announces the end of bombing in Vietnam, though “the American War” went on until 1975

November 5: Nixon is elected

December 24: Apollo 8 circles the moon and sends back the now iconic Earthrise photo

In 1968, James Baldwin published *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* along with a series of essays and a famous interview in *Esquire* called “How to Cool It.” The Academy Awards were postponed until April 10th following Dr. King’s murder. That year, *In the Heat of the Night*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *The Graduate* won coveted nominations for best film. *In the Heat of the Night* came away with the prize, as did Rod Steiger for best actor: none for Howard Rollins, the African American actor who played Virgil Gibbs in that movie or for Sidney Poitier, who starred with Katherine Hepburn (best actress) in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. The Grammy award for album of the year went to The Beatles’ *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (record of the year was The 5th Dimension’s *Up, Up and Away*) while the best-selling singles that year were The Beatles’ “Hey, Jude” and Otis Redding’s “Sitting on the Dock of the Bay.” At the Emmys, *Mission Impossible* and *Get Smart* were big winners; the only person of color nominated seems to have been Bill Cosby for his work in *I Spy*. Bill Russell and the Celtics defeated the Lakers in the NBA championship; the Packers beat the Raiders in the second Super Bowl; the Detroit Tigers took down the reigning St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series. The number of baseball players of color made for a pretty short list. And we didn’t get Title IX until 1972. In 1968, there was no WNBA and little support of any kind for women’s sports.

That’s a bit of a stroll down memory lane, and I haven’t even mentioned Timothy Leary, who was arrested in 1968 amid the heyday of experimental drug use. Or Allen Ginsberg, who testified for the defense in the Chicago Conspiracy trial and led crowds of young people chanting on the shores of Lake Michigan. Or ever more counterculture antiwar protests, including those led by Bobbie Seale and the Chicago Seven, the enormous changes brought about by television, or Marshall McLuhan’s cunning assessment of

them in *The Medium is the Massage* (1967) and *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968).

But a mere list of events, awards, and publications from this year, no matter how lengthy, doesn't begin to capture the atmosphere of the time. To me, teaching public high school in Orlando, Florida, after being discouraged from pursuing a PhD ("go home and have babies," my white male professors told me), the very air vibrated with tension and sometimes terror. The Ku Klux Klan was thriving in the South: a September 13, 1968, broadside advertised a "Public Speaking Event" at the Lonesome Pine Rodeo grounds in Blacksburg, Virginia, sponsored by the South Carolina Knights of the Klan and speeches by the Grand Dragon and the Great Titan. I sat in stunned silence as our principal announced Dr. King's assassination and watched with horror the bloody images of Bobby Kennedy's real-life death on live TV. For the first time in my life, I feared for the survival of the country and especially for the country's populations of color.

As Charles Kaiser writes in *1968 in America*, "1968 was the pivotal year of the sixties; the moment when all of a nation's impulses toward violence, idealism, diversity, and disorder peaked to produce the greatest possible hope—and the worst possible despair." He goes on to argue that

Black people are the real heroes of this story. Before everything else that happened in the sixties, it was their rejection of the submissive roles white men had selected for them that legitimized the aspirations of every other victim of oppression. After that, the physically handicapped could insist on equal access to all public facilities—and the students of a college for the deaf could demand a deaf president—because Blacks had resolved at the beginning of the decade to demand the right to be served at every lunch counter in the land. (256)

But while these events, a cacophony of conflicting, contradictory, exhilarating, and terrifying moments were taking place, another less dramatic but potentially important movement began, what we now think of as part of the "the revival of rhetoric" in the sixties. The appearance of Richard M. Weaver's *The Ethics of Rhetoric* in 1953, Daniel Fogarty's *Roots for a New Rhetoric* in 1959, Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* in 1961, Sister Miriam Joseph's *Rhetoric in Shakespeare's Time* in 1962, Karl Wallace's "The Substance of Rhetoric: Good Reasons" in 1963, Edward P. J. Corbett's *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* in 1965, Kenneth Burke's *Language as Symbolic Action* in 1966, Lloyd Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation" in 1968, Perelman and Oldsbrecht-Tyteca's *The New Rhetoric*, written in 1958 and translated into English in 1968, and the founding of one of our field's

major journals, *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, co-edited by Carroll Arnold and Henry Johnstone, are just some of the key texts that helped fuel an interest in rhetoric and a reexamination of its role in education and society. Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that in the spring of 1968, just weeks before Dr. King's death, an invitational workshop on rhetoric was held as part of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) right here in Minneapolis. Organized by J. Carter Rowland, the workshop included Wayne Booth, William Irmscher, Ross Winterowd, John Rycenga, Henry Johnstone, Richard Larson, Corbett, and other (white) men who became members of the Board of Directors and crafted what would become the Rhetoric Society of America's mission statement, printed in the first edition of the *Rhetoric Society Newsletter*:

The first purpose of the Rhetoric Society is to promote communication among those who are concerned with rhetoric . . . and with the use of language between man and man [sic]: rhetoricians, linguists, literary theorists, literary critics, psychologists, sociologists, teachers of English composition, and English editors from textbook publishing houses. The Rhetoric Society's second purpose will be to disseminate knowledge of rhetoric and the powers of rhetoric to those who have been previously unaware of it. In addition the Rhetoric Society will be prepared to stand sponsor to seminars in the MLA, panels and workshops in the CCCC, and to sponsor and provide participants for lectures and panels in the NCTE and for all other occasions. (1)

This beginning, however, didn't bear immediate fruit, and so some members staged an attempt to revive the Society in 1971. Larson drafted a constitution and Winterowd mailed it out to all recorded members (none of color as far as I can determine, and only a very few women, though Janice Lauer was listed), asking for their approval and inviting nominees for an eleven-member Board of Directors. Members duly complied (no dissenting votes) and proposed twenty-four members as candidates for the Board. A ballot with names and vitas of those agreeing to stand for election went out in the fall of 1971. Those elected included Dudley Bailey, Corbett, Larson, and Winterowd from English; Carroll Arnold, Donald Bryant, Leland Griffin, Lawrence Rosenfield, and Karl Wallace from communication; George Yoos from philosophy; and Ellis Page from educational psychology. The minutes note that "No students were elected to the Board because none were nominated." I presume that the same could be said for women and people of color: none were elected because none were nominated.

The group then decided that the Directors needed to meet in person to select officers, and since the CCCC and the Speech Communication Association of the Eastern States were both meeting in Boston in March, they met there, selecting Corbett as Chair of the Board and Larson as secretary; Yoos agreed to serve as Editor of the *Rhetoric Society Newsletter* beginning in the fall of 1972. The 1972 CCCC meeting was chaired by Liz McPherson (at last, a woman!) with the theme of “Reconsidering Roles: What are We About” and by a fairly odd coincidence, I was there too: it was my first conference of any kind, ever, because I had screwed my courage to the sticking point some months earlier and proposed a panel with a colleague and a young African American woman at Hillsborough Community College in Tampa, where I taught for four years. To my surprise and terror, the panel was accepted, and so the three of us drove from Tampa to Boston, straight through, since we couldn’t afford to stay overnight on the way up. I held a BA and MA in English, I was teaching writing when all I knew anything about was British and American literature. But I had received—free from the publisher—a copy of the second edition of Corbett’s *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* in 1971, and found in that volume someone talking seriously about the teaching of writing. I was electrified, practically memorized the book, and applied not only to the CCCC but to Ohio State’s PhD program, in which Corbett taught. I was not admitted right away but put on a “waiting list”—though they eventually got down to me, and I was somewhat grudgingly admitted as a “mature student” in the late spring and given a graduate teaching assistantship. I resigned my job and prepared to move to Columbus in the fall. So while the group of eminent (white male) scholars met to rekindle the Society and to relaunch the *Newsletter*, a hopeful white woman was presenting a workshop with her African American student and trying to hitch her star to rhetoric and composition.

I arrived at Ohio State in the fall of 1972 to find that Corbett didn’t teach any courses on rhetoric; rather he was teaching eighteenth century poetry and the Bible as literature. But I soon found that rhetoric was taught in the speech communication department by James Goldwin, Goodwin Berquist, and others, so I set about auditing all their courses while lobbying Corbett to begin teaching in the field (he eventually taught history of rhetoric and a course on style). And to my great good fortune, Corbett was at the time editing *CCC*, so I got to learn that field by serving as his assistant for four years.

And, of course, I joined the Rhetoric Society of America and subscribed from 1972 on to the *Newsletter*, which Maureen Goggin describes as being “transformed from a practical tool for exchanging news items, descriptions of works-in-progress, and program descriptions to a sophisticated scholarly journal, . . . marked in 1976 when the journal was upgraded and renamed

Rhetoric Society Quarterly” and still edited by Yoos (630). (Goggin goes on to note that it “provides invaluable bibliographies on various topics concerning rhetoric,” including a fairly early publication of my own, the 1986 “A Bibliographic Note on William Edmonstoune Aytoun’s Manuscript: *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres*,” the handwritten copies of which I had read and studied at the National Library of Scotland.) And I was lucky enough to attend some of the early meetings of the RSA, organized by Charles Knepper at the University of Texas at Arlington. The first was held in 1984, with Bitzer giving the keynote on “George Orwell’s Rejection of Tyrannical Rhetoric”; the second in 1986 with Corbett delivering “Where Are the Snows of Yesteryear: Has Rhetoric Come a Long Way in the Last 25 Years?” Thus are the small ironies and coincidences of our lives that, in retrospect, begin to trace the outlines of a life’s work, a life’s story.

What I have been attempting to do in these remarks thus far is to suggest that out of the climactic uproar of the 1960s, a story about rhetoric began to emerge, a “new” rhetoric—one that sought to reclaim principles of classical western rhetoric, establish the role it should play in education and in public discourse, and conceive of writing and speaking as actions rather than as aesthetic artifacts. It was a story I embraced wholeheartedly when I began my graduate studies in the early 1970s.

In retrospect, as Deborah Brandt has taught us, as the cultural capital of writing grew, beginning in the age of the printing press and reaching a crescendo in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the fortunes of rhetoric declined. What counted was not the eloquence of old but what could be put in writing. As a result, colleges had turned away from the “old” rhetorical tradition, which had focused on students composing and performing their own discourses, and increasingly to controlled instruction in correct writing and, primarily, to reading, to hermeneutics, and to the consumption rather than the production of discourse.

So what was also “new” in the 1960s and 1970s revival of rhetoric was, at least in part, an attempt to return to the old tradition, and, a little later, to concentrate on the actual discursive practices and products of student writers. What characterized early programs in rhetoric was not only a recognition that the ancient arts of rhetoric provided a robust theoretical and historical foundation for the teaching of writing and speaking but also a determination to achieve disciplinary status for the field, along with a deep commitment to undergraduate education and access to that education for all students (think Geneva Smitherman and Mina Shaughnessy, whose *Talkin’ and Testifyin’* and *Errors and Expectations* appeared within months of each other in 1977). What is new in this story of the rhetorical tradition, then, is the very self-conscious linking of rhetoric with writing or composition.

As I noted earlier, this revival of classical rhetoric was something I took to heart: my very first publication, in fact, was a short essay titled “Let’s Get Back to the Classics.” So I more or less bought the story of western rhetoric’s origins and powers wholesale—the golden age of Greek and Roman rhetoric, which laid down principles and theories and practices that could be taught and learned and that could guide a life worth living. Everyone here knows that story well. And everyone here knows that, eventually, some—both inside and outside the RSA—began to question it. I was teaching at the University of British Columbia in the mid-1980s when my students and I began to ask, “Where are the women? Where are people of color?” The story of western rhetoric, so crisply and elegantly told in the second edition of Corbett’s *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* still held power, but its omissions became more and more noticeable. As the redoubtable Kathleen Welch has pointed out repeatedly, “We in comp/rhet face a problem that confronts all our colleagues. Curricula, students, and faculty remain so white that we appear to be a blizzard” (168). Indeed, our group still seems to be predominantly blizzardish in complexion: and while seven of our eighteen presidents have been women (Win Horner was the first in 1988), no person of color has led RSA—until this year, when we are being led, brilliantly, by Kirt Wilson.

But thanks to scholars like Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (whose keynote at the 4th biennial RSA conference is the now-classic “Genre and Culture: The Test Case of Women’s Rhetoric”), and Cheris Kramer and Sally Miller Gearhart in the 1970s, and Shirley Wilson Logan, Elizabeth Flynn, Sonja and Karen Foss, Cindy Griffin, Barbara Biesecker, Pat Bizzell, Jackie Royster, Susan Jarratt and many others in the 1980s and 1990s (and I could go on and on, including many feminist scholars in this room today), women began to insert themselves into the story of rhetoric. Their efforts were echoed by other African American, Latinx, Anglo, Chinese, and Indigenous writers, speakers, and rhetors.

Shortly after the turn of the new century, RSA helped spearhead an effort to bring scholars from ten organizations together to talk about forming an Alliance of Rhetoric Societies (the American Forensic Association, American Society for the History of Rhetoric, Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric, Canadian Society for the History of Rhetoric, CCCC, International Society for the History of Rhetoric, International Society for the Study of Argumentation, Kenneth Burke Society, National Communication Association, and RSA). Out of these meetings came plans for a working conference, which the late, much-missed Michael Leff and I co-chaired, held at Northwestern University in the fall of 2003. Those who wanted to participate submitted statements in response to one of the following questions, which I’m paraphrasing here:

1. How ought we to understand the concept of rhetorical agency?
2. Do we have a “rhetorical tradition”? Are we better advised to think of traditions rather than a single tradition? If we do recognize a tradition or several traditions, how do we identify and characterize it (or them)?
3. What should be the institutional and social goals for academic rhetoric in the twenty-first century? How can rhetoric best contribute to the social, political, and cultural environments that extend the University?
4. What does it mean to teach rhetoric? What does it mean to teach composition and performance seriously? What is the relationship between rhetoric and composition? Should they be distinguished?

(For more, see the interview with Leff and me in *Kairos*.) Plenary speakers Jerzy Axer, Royster, Karl Campbell, and Steven Mailloux, and respondents Booth, Jim Aune, Sharon Crowley, and Jeffrey Walker set us up for the major work of the conference: small group discussions of the four major questions, with each group reporting out at the end. Though the group was still predominantly white and male, white women and women of color were present, along with some scholars from beyond our shores, lending at least a bit of international perspective to the deliberations. As Leff wrote in an essay we published following the event, “At the ARS conference, the working group on tradition began with what Pat Bizzell and Susan Jarratt describe as ‘a plea from one of the conference organizers to accept the pluralization of rhetoric’s tradition.’ They are referring, of course, to Andrea Lunsford” (6).

In spite of Leff’s plug, I was certainly not the only one arguing for pluralization, for a retelling of the story of rhetoric. But there were also plenty of others arguing that we should hold to the tried and true old story of western rhetoric. Indeed, the discussions were lively, to say the very least, as we struggled over the story we would tell about rhetoric and its tradition or traditions, about who is allowed in and who is not allowed into the circle of rhetoric. Those conference discussions and struggles were directly related to a project in its inception: an anthology of rhetoric and writing that hoped to embody a much more inclusive story of rhetoric. In the early years of this century, colleagues Jarratt, Royster, Robert Hariman, Lu Ming Mao, Thomas P. Miller, Jody Enders and I proposed *The Norton Anthology of Rhetoric and Writing*, with the heady and, as it turned out, completely ridiculous idea that we could produce such a text quickly. But while it was relatively easy to come to agreement on principles (listed below), elaborating these principles,

deciding on themes or what we call “throughlines” to bring coherence to the volume, choosing selections, and writing introductions, headnotes, glosses—was daunting and often paralyzing:

- To demonstrate the multivocal, multifocal, multiethnic, multimedia nature of rhetoric
- To reunite reading, writing, speaking, listening, and performing
- To honor practice as well as theory
- To define rhetoric as a global phenomenon.

Like Elizabeth Warren, however, we persevered, adding Kirt Wilson to our group of editors and, at long last, submitting the general introduction and first several parts of the anthology to Norton in recent months. We hope that the manuscript will soon be complete and that this attempt at a more inclusive and multiplicitous story of rhetoric and writing will be published with the next two years.

Why is it important to me to think of rhetorical traditions, and of the work we do as rhetoricians and rhetors, in terms of narrative, of story? In the most simple terms, because story is the universal genre (we know of no culture on earth that does not have stories), because stories lie at the base of all cultures, because our lives are attempts to tell particular stories that can guide us, because, in Anne Haas Dyson and Celia Genishi’s telling book title, we have *A Need for Story*. Walter Fisher, defining people as *homo narrans*, argues that “In the beginning was the word or, more accurately, the logos. And in the beginning logos meant story” (74). Fisher goes on to posit a new perspective that “sees people as storytellers—authors and co-authors who creatively read and evaluate the texts of life” and elaborates this in what he calls the “narrative paradigm” (86).

In “Life as Narrative,” Jerome Bruner argues that “the culturally-shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very events of a life.” (694). And very recently, in her brilliant exploration of how writing and reading about love can help students come to voice and achieve agency, Bronwyn LaMay demonstrates how stories—the ones they tell and the ones they read—literally shape who these young people can become. LaMay’s analysis, based on her two-year ethnographic study of students of color in a very tough California high school coming together (unwillingly at first) to discuss the plots and counterplots of their life stories through an intimate encounter with Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, shows the students’ growing awareness of how they are living out ingrained stories about who they are and what they will

become, stories created and told by a society (and even a school system) that isn't interested in hearing their voices. But it also shows some of them challenging these ingrained stories and beginning to resist and to retell them.

In a book published recently, journalist and author Steve Almond presents *Bad Stories: What the Hell Just Happened to Our Country*, in which each of the seventeen chapters tells a "bad story," from "The United States is a Representative Democracy" to "What Amuses Us Can't Hurt Us," to "Give Us Your Tired, Your Poor, Your Huddled Masses." Throughout, Almond is at pains to show how these bad stories shape and limit our ability literally to "think straight" about our country and our culture, much less to "strike through the mask" of these stories and create new ones that embody the values we want to claim. Almond quotes Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, who in *A Brief History of Humankind* argues that "our species came to dominate the world because we learned to cooperate flexibly in large numbers. This capacity stems from our ability to believe in the imagined, to tell stories that extend our bonds beyond clan loyalties" (6).

I've been belaboring an emphasis on story throughout these remarks because I want to argue not only that it is important to understand, challenge, explore, and remake the stories we tell about rhetoric, its origins, principles, uses, and practices—but also because it is important to take on the *responsibility* for story, for narrative, and for the way stories shape our experience of the world. Along with Lyotard and scholars in many other disciplines, we have interrogated, challenged, and rejected master narratives, master stories that have held enormous power over our lives. We know in our bones what Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls "The Danger of a Single Story," when whole groups of richly complex people are reduced to a single narrative. In her remarkable 2009 TED talk of that title, Adichie tells about her life as a child in Nigeria, growing up reading British and American stories and writing her own stories with characters that all had "fair hair and blue eyes." That was a single story that shaped her way of reading and writing. In her talk, she says it's fairly simple to create a single story: just "show people as one thing and one thing only, over and over again, and that is what they will become." Adichie notes that stories are enmeshed in structures of power, that "how they are told, when they are told, how many are told are all dependent on power, and the ultimate power is to tell the story of another person—but to make it THE definitive story of that person." Or that people. Or that culture. Perhaps all times have been defined by struggles over stories, who gets to tell them, who has the power to create and reify them. But certainly our own time is rife with the struggle over stories, over narratives. In the spring of this year, even military officials in this country were talking about a "war of narratives." And almost hourly, we can witness attempts to create a "single

story” of supposed past American greatness and the draconian steps that are “necessary” to recapture it.

On a more hopeful note, of course, we have only to think of #OccupyWallSt, #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, #TimesUp, #enoughisenough, #neveragain, #indigenousandwomenrise, #lagenteunida—and many others, to see efforts to create narratives that can displace a single story about groups of people and cultures. In a recent issue of *Anthropology News*, Anna Babel uses speech act theory to analyze the discourse of #MeToo, tracing the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary forces deployed in this discourse and showing how they work to create a story that has had effects internationally. She writes,

#MeToo does not *create* a community; it opens an existing community to public discussion. The #MeToo hashtag asks people to open their eyes and ears to stories they may have once been able to ignore. It might be easy to ignore or dismiss one woman, but can you discount the stories of nearly every woman you know? The widespread use of #MeToo exposes or educates members of society who may not have been conscious of the ubiquity of sexual harassment and assault—precisely because whisper networks are closed or among friends, following informal channels. . . .

Whisper networks educate, [she goes on] but they also confine. They make only some of us responsible for our stories. One of the difficult things about the Larry Nassar case and other recent sexual abuse scandals is the long list of people who could have, should have, were in a position to know what was going on and chose not to know. Telling a secret in public means it is no longer a secret. With that authority comes responsibility; when we all know the stories, we can’t claim “I didn’t know.” The use of the #MeToo hashtag, then, not only opens up the closed community of whisper networks to public view, it asks the public to take responsibility for the stories they hear, to see things they may not want to see. (69-70)

As I think about the past and the future of RSA, I want our group to take on the project not only of examining and challenging narratives and stories that crush dreams, choke freedoms, and leave people voiceless but also to work hard at creating and maintaining stories that are worthy of our best vision of ourselves, our discipline, our cultures, our planet. What I want is for us to pursue what I am calling *narrative justice*. Because I don’t see how we can ever achieve social justice, for example, when the narratives in which people are trapped, silenced, and harmed simply will not allow for it. Hence

the need for *just narratives*, which can then lay the groundwork for and make possible social justice.

When I look at this year's RSA Program, put together by our president-elect Kirt Wilson along with Roxanne Mountford, Bill Keith, and Christa Olson, I see evidence that the work I am calling for is under way: as they say in their welcome, "RSA scholars are pursuing research into international and decolonialized forms of rhetoric, paths which represent well our collective future." I see ASHR sponsoring an entire day of discussions of "Diversity and Rhetorical Traditions." I see sessions on reinventing stories of wilderness preservation, on understanding how comics help to invent and reinvent just narratives, more just stories about indigeneity, about what's "acceptable" in academic discourse, about the meaning of "refugee" and "immigrant" and "literacy" and even "the people," about reshaping public memory, the discourse of HIV/AIDS, of (dis)ability, of the second amendment. Just narratives of "queer life," queer worldmaking, and global feminism; a close look at the stories embedded in our "key terms"; the use of textiles to create just narratives, and so much more on reinventing—our pedagogies, our journals, our methods, our discipline.

I believe this conference can stand as testimony and signpost to the future of the RSA, one in which scholars and teachers and practitioners of rhetoric will continue to broaden and deepen the scope of rhetoric and link hands and stories with rhetors around the globe to resist the dangerous and harmful single stories reiterated daily on radical right-wing media: "only guns can keep us safe," "immigrants are rapists and animals," "mainstream media delivers only 'fake' news," "historically black colleges and universities are 'pioneers of choice,'" "climate change is a hoax." Such stories, as I've argued, hold tremendous power if they go unchecked. Against them, we are already at work creating inclusive, respectful, and lovingly playful stories that reflect our best selves, our best values.

We have the tools. We have the ability. We have the strategies, from classical tropes and schemes to the powerful patterns of African American vernacular traditions. We have the methods, from Ratcliffe's rhetorical listening, to Lather's ethical ethnography, to Royster and Kirsch's critical imagination, strategic contemplation, social circulation, and globalizing perspectives.

Now I ask—do we have the WILL to use the tools and abilities and strategies and methods at our disposal to create and sustain stories that promise narrative justice for all. That's my birthday wish for RSA at Fifty—and well beyond.

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