

## Depatriarchalizing in Rhetorical Theory: Toward a Feminist Prophetic Tradition

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*Drawing on feminist liberation theology, this essay argues for an expansion of generic formulations of prophetic rhetoric to explicitly include the discursive practices of female rhetors who exhibit the substantive and stylistic characteristics of prophecy codified in James Darsey's (1997) *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*. Contrary to Darsey's view that the prophetic tradition is inherently patriarchal, this essay advances the position that the Hebrew Bible's "prophetic-liberating principle" provides a foundation from which to re-evaluate the a priori exclusion of female radicals from the prophetic genre. Thus, this essay openly resists any suggestion that the prophetic tradition, rooted in the books of the Hebrew Bible, is centered exclusively—or even primarily—around white male elites. In marking out a place for female radicals within the rhetorical canon as exemplars of this distinct tradition, this essay reinforces the generic requirement that candidates for inclusion within the prophetic genre have a legitimate claim to outsider status within their own social and/or political context.*

James Darsey's (1997) acclaimed book, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*,<sup>1</sup> recovers aspects of the ancient Hebraic rhetorical tradition for the purpose of understanding American radical rhetoric in ways unavailable using rhetorical methods derived from Hellenism. Unlike rhetoric operating within the constraints of neo-Aristotelianism, with its emphasis on adaptation of the message to the immediate audience, prophetic rhetoric—rooted in the books of the Hebrew Bible<sup>2</sup>—is characterized by the rhetor's steadfast refusal to

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<sup>1</sup> For this book, Darsey received the Marie Hochmuth Nichols Award for Scholarship in Rhetoric in Public Address as well as the Diamond Anniversary Book Award and the Winans/Wichelns Award from National Communication Association.

<sup>2</sup> This essay regularly employs the term "Hebrew Bible" in an attempt to refer neutrally to scripture common to Jewish and Christian traditions. Rather than privilege either tradition through the use of vocabulary particular to Judaism

adjust the message to meet audience expectations.<sup>3</sup> However, argues Darsey, “a radical genre is not without rules, but its rules, of necessity, are shaped in large part by its significant opposition to the status quo” (p. 6). Fundamentally, the prophet cannot appeal to the audience’s existing value system, for this ordering is the very root of injustice against which the prophet rebels. Instead, the prophet calls for a fundamental *reordering* of the audience’s value system as a means to alleviate social injustice and replicate the natural ordering of creation (Darsey, p. 24).<sup>4</sup>

Although Darsey provides a much-needed theoretical and critical alternative to the Greco-Roman model of communication scholarship, a shortfall of Darsey’s application of the model of prophetic discourse he develops is that it fails to consider discursive sites where Hebraic prophetic discourse manifests itself other than in the rhetorical tradition of white, male elites. Craig (1998) praises Darsey for skillfully providing “an intriguing, well-written, and fascinating treatment of an unexplored dimension of American life” through his case studies linking American radical rhetoric to Hebraic prophecy (p. 635). Yet Craig, criticizing Darsey for unduly limiting his historical study to the rhetorical activities of white males, admonishes:

... if one of the defining characteristics of the biblical prophets is their ceaseless demand for divine justice, then to limit the American radical tradition to Euro-American males does an injustice to the radicality of the very biblical tradition that gives rise to the prophetic voice. One only has to recall the public witness of individuals such as Mother Jones, Ida B.

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or Christianity (i.e., “Tanakh” or “Old Testament,” respectively), this essay emphasizes the shared religious history from which the prophetic rhetorical tradition originates. At the same time, due to various methods of canon formation, I acknowledge that some aspects of this shared history are contested within and/or between Judaism and Christianity and that other aspects are organized differently within the Tanakh and Old Testament. For a more detailed discussion, see Levenson (1993).

<sup>3</sup> As divine instruments, Hebraic prophets could not bend or dilute the message because, as Darsey (1997) notes, “anything short of God’s absolute will as expressed in his Word is a profanation” (p. 22).

<sup>4</sup> The prophet’s oppositional rhetorical stance is akin to “agitation based on lateral deviance” (Bowers, Ochs, & Jensen, 1993, p. 7). With this type of agitation, rather than making an appeal rooted in the existing value structure, rhetors ground their claim for significant social change in the wholesale rejection of this value hierarchy.

Wells, Frederick Douglas, and César Chávez, among a host of others, to ask what degree their inclusion might expand our understanding of a distinctive tradition ... (p. 635)

Echoing Craig's concern, Pittenger (1999) questions why Darsey pays "so little attention to Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders ... and to present day advocates of the prophetic such as Cornel West" (p. 180). Taken together, these criticisms suggest that the recovery of the prophetic tradition in American radical discourse, at its current stage, is left wanting by its neglect of some of the *most* radical voices in American public address such as those belonging to female radicals and radicals of color—leaders of some of the most marginalized and disaffected outgroup movements in American history.

Although the reasons for Darsey's inattention to prophets of color are uncertain, the opportunity missed to include women in his theory and criticism of the prophetic tradition seems rather deliberate and, from his perspective, compulsory. For instance, Darsey's decision to use "the generic masculine pronoun when referring to prophets and generally when referring to American radicals" in his study was undertaken ultimately to promote "stylistic clarity and accuracy in representing [his] subject" (Darsey, 1997, p. xi). While, self-admittedly, Darsey is troubled by his selection of the generic masculine pronoun as most correct and precise, he nevertheless accepts the 'maleness' both of Hebraic prophets and American radicals within the prophetic tradition: "Both Old Testament prophecy and the received notion of American virtue that provides the essential motive for the radicals examined [in his book-length study] are products of a patriarchal theology that explicitly holds virtuous action in opposition to 'effeminacy'" (Darsey, p. xi).

Most certainly, Darsey appropriately underscores the patriarchal roots of Hebraic prophecy. For as Ruether (1993) readily concedes: "There is no question that patriarchy is the social context for both the Old and the New Testament and that this social context has been incorporated into religious ideology on many levels" (p. 22). However, even with this recognition, it does not follow that rhetorical theory derived from the Hebrew Bible must instantiate patriarchal interests through *a priori* exclusion of female radicals. On the contrary, feminist biblical hermeneutics, a discipline within the field of theology, challenges this deterministic assumption by "making explicit that the receivers and proclaimers of revelation are not solely men but also women" (Fiorenza, 1995, p. 1). Through its interrogation of the politics of exclusion surrounding the scriptural "canon," feminist biblical

hermeneutics makes way for an understanding of prophecy within rhetorical theory that readily embraces women's roles as both prophets in the Hebrew Bible and inheritors of the prophetic tradition within American reform rhetoric.

Thus, by drawing on feminist liberation theology, this essay develops an argument for depatriarchalizing rhetorical theory to include the rhetorical activities of female prophets who exemplify the distinctive substantive and stylistic characteristics of the prophetic genre. In placing women firmly within prophecy's theoretical ranks, this essay joins the efforts of other feminist scholars working to rewrite women into the history of rhetoric<sup>5</sup> and assists in reversing the disturbing trend of "womanless communication," a type of communication scholarship that renders women invisible within the history of rhetoric and silences a host of voices that would enhance and deepen our understanding of human communication (Spitzak & Carter, 1987). For as Wertheimer (1997) argues, the recovery of women's traditionally marginalized rhetorical activities "enrich[es] our definitions of rhetoric and our knowledge of rhetorical theory" (p. 2). By enabling the recovery of the prophetic voices of women through the depatriarchalizing of rhetorical theory, this essay helps create opportunities for fuller understandings of the prophetic genre within rhetorical studies.

To advance this project, the remainder of this essay provides the case for a feminist prophetic tradition by first employing feminist biblical hermeneutics to suggest that the Hebrew Bible itself contains the resources by which a gender-inclusive theory of the prophetic genre might be sustained. Second, in order to dispel any misapprehension that prophets of the Hebrew Bible are exclusively male figures, evidence of female prophets in the Hebrew Bible is provided. Finally, the fact that female radicals are *already* being studied as exemplars of the prophetic tradition is used to further justify the wholesale inclusion of female radicals who exhibit prophetic traits in theories of prophetic discourse.

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<sup>5</sup> For examples of feminist studies attempting to expand the rhetorical canon to include the traditionally marginalized perspectives of women see: Biesecker (1992); Bizzell (1992, 2003); Blair, Brown, and Baxter (1994); Campbell (1973, 1980, 1986, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1999); Condit (1993); Dow (1995); Foss and Foss (1983, 1991); Gearhart (1979); Griffin (1993, 1994); Jarrett (1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1992); Kramer (1974); Lundsford (1995); Spitzak and Carter (1987); and, Wertheimer (1997).

## Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics

As a liberating theology, feminist biblical hermeneutics holds promise both for depatriarchalizing biblical texts and, importantly for the discipline of rhetorical studies, the rhetorical theories and methods derived from these texts. Amador (1998) summarizes the goals of feminist biblical hermeneutics, noting:

American feminist *biblical* hermeneutics explores the patriarchal ideology not only of androcentric scholarship but within the biblical text itself. Feminist interpretation of the Bible seeks to uncover the structures of exploitation and oppression in the Bible; to bring to central focus the role of women in history, theology, and ethics; and to critique the images of women as portrayed by the writers of the biblical text *and* as explored by its interpreters. Feminist hermeneutics are seeking alternate theories and methods by which “meaning” of the biblical text is generated, and therefrom discuss the relative merits not only of the Bible’s interpretation and application but of the Bible itself. (pp. 40-41)

Thus, in its exploration of patriarchal ideology manifest in biblical scholarship and in biblical texts, feminist biblical hermeneutics explicitly holds that feminist perspectives on biblical texts are necessary for stripping patriarchal theology of its normative character (Ruether, 1993). However, the purpose of feminist biblical hermeneutics is ultimately to *redeem* these texts through feminist readings, not to discard them because their sexism.<sup>6</sup> For example, Tribble (1973) argues that the practice of wholly dismissing scripture on feminist grounds is counterproductive because it requires women to “accept male chauvinistic interpretation and thereby capitulate to the very view they are protesting” (p.31). Instead, Tribble admonishes that women must “reread (not rewrite) the Bible without the blinders of Israelite men or of Paul, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and a host of others” (p. 31). In short, the object of feminist biblical hermeneutics is not to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater, but to instead disentangle scripture from the patriarchy that has shaped its canonization and influenced its interpretations.

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<sup>6</sup> This reformist belief that feminists must find a “usable past” is starkly contrasted by the view, generally held by adherents of postbiblical feminism, that the Bible is “irredeemable for feminists” and must be rejected in its entirety (Fiorenza, 1995, p. 9).

Further making outright rejection of scripture ill-advised and unnecessary, feminist biblical hermeneutics presupposes that the tools for rejecting patriarchal aspects of biblical texts are found within the Hebrew Bible itself (Ruether, 1993). Necessarily, feminist exegesis entails reading scripture with an eye toward uncovering theological support for women's fundamental equality. Feminist hermeneuts do not seek to ignore or apologize for patriarchal aspects of the Bible but rather attempt to use its feminist features to critique and destabilize androcentric biblical readings. One key destabilizing feature with particular relevance to formulations of the prophetic genre within rhetorical theory is what has been termed within feminist theology as the "depatriarchalizing principle" (Trible, 1973)<sup>7</sup> or the "prophetic-liberating principle" (Ruether, 1993). This principle, which feminist hermeneuts locate within the Hebrew Bible itself, is exemplified in the prophet's quest for divine justice. In this pursuit, the prophet characteristically demands a restoration of the Covenant, a return to the natural ordering of creation, in response to a time of crisis typified by oppression and injustice (Bobbitt & Mixon, 1994). Within feminist biblical hermeneutics, therefore, the prophetic-liberating principle is understood to "imply a rejection of every elevation of one social group against others as image and agent of God, every use of God to justify social domination and subjugation" (Ruether, 1993, p. 23).

Thus, the prophetic-liberating principle, with its emphasis on social justice, is thereby turned inward on itself to both critique hierarchies of oppression manifest in Hebraic prophecy and set a normative standard by which other theological texts can be judged (Ruether, 1993). Proposing that feminist theology utilize prophecy as tool of *female* liberation, Ruether (1993) submits:

On another level, feminism goes beyond the letter of the prophetic message to apply the prophetic-liberating principle to *women*. Feminist theology makes explicit what was overlooked in male advocacy of the poor and oppressed: that liberation must start with the oppressed of the oppressed, namely, *women* of the oppressed. This means that the critique of hierarchy must become explicitly a critique of patriarchy. All the liberating prophetic visions must be deepened and transformed to include what was not included: women. (p. 32)

<sup>7</sup> For Trible and other practitioners of feminist biblical hermeneutics, this depatriarchalizing principle "is a hermeneutic operating within Scripture itself. We expose it; we do not impose it" (p. 48).

Ruether's (1993) insight with respect to the prophetic-liberating principle challenges directly the assumption that the oppressive effects of patriarchal theology are automatic and incontestable. Although Hebraic prophecy is the product of a principally patriarchal theology, a critical understanding of the prophetic tradition can be "deepened and transformed" through an application of the prophetic-liberating principle to women and their marginalized discourses (p. 32). Feminist biblical hermeneutics, in utilizing the depatriarchalizing and/or prophetic-liberating principle, offers rhetorical theory the opportunity to transcend patriarchal theological assumptions which construe Hebraic prophecy as a "males only" rhetorical form and to engage in critical work on behalf of historically marginalized people.

Supporting Ruether's stance of critical advocacy, Fiorenza (1995) rallies against those who take the precarious position of neutrality when confronted with oppression grounded in scriptural interpretation. Arguing for a liberation theology, Fiorenza (1995) explains:

The basic insight of liberation theologies and their methodological starting point is that all theology knowingly or not is by definition always engaged for or against the oppressed. Intellectual neutrality is not possible in a historical world of exploitation and oppression. If this is the case, then theology cannot talk about human existence in general, or about biblical theology in particular, without identifying whose human existence is meant and whose God is found in biblical symbols and texts. (p. 45)

Accepting Fiorenza's claim that all theology is always engaged for or against the oppressed, the rhetorical scholar must interrogate how rhetorical theory derived from this theology functions for or against the oppressed. Moreover, a genre such as prophecy, typified by the messenger's unwavering devotion to social justice and willingness to speak regardless of the personal cost (Darsey, 1997), cannot justify or sustain the exclusion of women's rhetorical practices from its theoretical ranks. The simple yet important lesson that the discipline of rhetorical studies must glean from feminist biblical hermeneutics is that the Bible has power both as an oppressive force *and* as a liberating one. Further, "we cannot avoid the question of the 'canon,' or the criterion that allows us to reject oppressive traditions and to detect liberating traditions within biblical texts and history" (Fiorenza, 1995, p. 58). Holding fast to the prophetic-liberating principle, this essay maintains that the Hebrew Bible itself contains resources for providing alternative formulations of "virtuous action," particularly ones

permitting and even promoting prophetic discourse by women. To advance the goal of recognizing female radicals within a prophetic-liberating tradition further still, the following section foregrounds women of the Hebrew Bible who engaged in prophetic ministry, a move in keeping with Fiorenza's (1995) admonition that scholars adjust their intellectual frameworks "so that women as well as men become the subjects of intellectual inquiry" (p. 107).

### Female Prophets of the Hebrew Bible

The Hebraic prophets that Darsey (1997) draws from in developing his theory of the prophetic genre are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Micah, and Malachi. These six figures, selected by Darsey to illustrate the distinctive substance and style of prophecy, are among the many male prophets that have been canonized within Judaism and Christianity.<sup>8</sup> By all appearances, the role of Hebraic prophet was one reserved for men whom Yahweh selected to serve as instruments of his divine Word. However, this perception is misleading. In the Hebrew Bible, prophetic ministry was carried out by women as well as men. In fact, several scriptural women are directly labeled as "prophet" or "prophetess," including Miriam (Exod. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), and Isaiah's wife (Isa. 8:3). Moreover, other biblical women are ascribed prophetic qualities or are reported to engage in prophesying such as Sarah (Gen. 21:10-12), Hannah (1 Sam. 1:1 – 2:21), and Abigail (1 Sam. 25: 28-31).

These female prophets of the Hebrew Bible should not be discounted or ignored, especially given that their abilities as prophets often matched and sometimes even surpassed those of their male counterparts. Sarah, for one, is identified as a greater prophet than her husband Abraham, who is instructed by God to heed his wife's wisdom (Gen. 21:10-12). Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth, secures Israel's victory by delivering God's word to Israel's leader, Barak (Judg. 4:4-14). Deborah's status as "mother in Israel" (Judg. 5:7) suggests that

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<sup>8</sup> Within Judaism, 48 male prophets are recognized. Within Christianity, three of these men have the designation "major prophet" (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) and 12 have the designation "minor prophet" (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). These designations refer primarily to the length of the prophecies, not necessarily their relative importance within Judeo-Christian thought.



Deborah “is much more than a professional seer” (Sawyer, 1993, p. 73). As Sawyer (1993) submits: “According to the celebrated ‘Song of Deborah’ in Judges 5, [Deborah] represents the essence of Mosaic religion: she rouses the disunited tribes of Israel, reminds them of the Sinai events, and praises their leaders for offering themselves willingly” (p. 73).

The rhetorical activities of Sarah, Deborah, and other female prophets are all the more remarkable considering the patriarchal culture from which their prophetic voices arose. As Ruether (1985) writes:

Women were restricted from established institutional roles. Nevertheless, the communities of biblical faith never denied that God’s Spirit might empower whoever it wills and that this might include women. Prophecy represents the power of freedom and newness of life in which God’s word breaks to speak in judgment on established modes of life and to open up new possibilities. It is significant, therefore, that the power of authentic prophecy was the one ministry never denied in theory to women, although any particular woman claiming this power might be vilified and rejected. (p. 176)

As we then see, despite the institutional barriers to female leadership in Israel that made the role of prophet an exceptionally radical and risky one for women, this role was assumed by several courageous women. Due to their marginal location within the established order, these women—perhaps even more than their male counterparts—exemplified the prophetic *ethos*, a defining characteristic of prophecy in which the rhetor delivers Yahweh’s divine judgment regardless of the personal cost (Pauley, 1998). For any prophet, the danger in speaking is the risk of martyrdom (Darsey, 1997). But, for women who engaged in prophetic ministry, the threat of martyrdom was especially great given their propensity for being “vilified and rejected” simply for being women who assumed an authoritative position of leadership (Ruether, 1985, p. 176).

In summary, despite suggestions to the contrary, the Hebraic tradition of prophecy most certainly included the rhetorical activities of women. These women not only matched or exceeded their male equivalents in prophetic ability, but they also displayed an unwavering commitment to the divine *logos* by their willingness to deliver God’s message knowing that they would more than likely “encounter hostility at the hands of God’s enemies” (Pauley, 1998, p. 519). By virtue of their ability and fortitude in relaying a divine message in a patriarchal context unsupportive of female leadership, these women ought to be

made *more* interesting to rhetorical theorists, not less so. Although Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and other male figures have provided rhetorical theory with valuable information about the distinct substance and style of prophecy, the female prophets of Hebrew Bible, such as Sarah, Deborah, and Esther, are also compelling sources of information about the prophetic genre. Simply put, to exclude female prophets of the Hebrew Bible in the process of building a theory of prophetic discourse both ignores evidence that women indeed assumed the prophetic role and provides an incomplete rhetorical theory.

### Female Radicals in the Prophetic Tradition

Even *if* we accept the primacy of male prophets within the Hebrew Bible, there is no convincing rationale for restricting the study of the “continuing influence of the Bible on social action” (Darsey, 1997, p. 7) to the rhetoric of male radicals. In fact, female participation in a prophetic tradition inherited from the Hebraic prophets, though decidedly marginalized, has already been documented by several scholars.<sup>9</sup> While Darsey deftly demonstrates the cultural manifestations of the prophetic tradition within the discourses of the American Revolution, Wendell Phillip’s abolitionist rhetoric, and Eugene Debs’ “vision of industrial unionism” (p. 107), his criticism of these rhetorics of radical reform, though incisive and compelling, fails to acknowledge directly the role of women in rhetorical history, their contributions to radicalism in America, and the connections between their rhetorical practices and Hebraic prophecy.

For example, Darsey overlooks entirely Japp’s (1985) study of the abolitionist-feminist rhetoric of Angelina Grimké, which identifies strains of Hebraic prophecy in Grimké’s 1838 Pennsylvania Hall Address. Japp argues that, in Philadelphia, Grimké “is a prophet, assuming the role of an Old Testament Isaiah” (p. 336) and “fulfill[ing] the requirements of that role by delivering a message from God to the community of abolitionists and to the unbelievers as well” (pp. 342-343). As one of the earliest women public speakers in America, Grimké was indeed a radical and “realized she would be heard primarily as a woman speaker and only secondarily as an abolitionist orator” (p. 337). To add legitimacy to her groundbreaking role as a female abolitionist orator, Grimké found it necessary to turn to the Bible for “arguments, analogies, and examples” (p. 337).

<sup>9</sup> For examples, see Casey (2000), Japp (1985), Ruether (1985, 1993), Smith (2004), Watt (1997), Woodyard (2008), & Zaeske (2000).

Moreover, Zaeske (2000) examines the continuing influence of Esther on the rhetorical actions of women abolitionists Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, and Angelina Grimké. In so doing, Zaeske works to revise traditional rhetorical theory by reading “the Book of Esther as a rhetoric of exile and empowerment that, for millennia, has notably shaped the discourse of marginalized peoples such as Jews, women, African Americans, and lesbians” (p. 194). In Zaeske’s examination of the continuing influence of Esther on the rhetorical actions of Stewart, Truth, and Grimké, Zaeske sees promise for moving “beyond a unitary, male-dominated history of rhetorical theory through the recovery and recognition of work that does not announce itself as rhetorical theory, but has operated as such” (p. 194). Esther, as one of several female Hebraic prophets, offers one avenue for revising rhetorical theory to be more diverse and inclusive. As Zaeske (2000) writes:

Because the Book of Esther addresses the condition of exiled people—female and male—and because it has been appropriated as a rhetorical model by rhetors from groups as disparate as medieval queens, former black slaves, and twentieth-century lesbians, it holds out the opportunity to revise rhetorical theory with an eye toward the exigencies of oppression based on race, class, religion, gender, and sexual preference. (p. 196)

Thus, if rhetorical scholars engage the project of building our theoretical understanding of prophecy to mirror the prophetic-liberating principle inherent in the Hebrew Bible, we will more fully come to terms with the “exigencies of oppression” confronting not only women but every disaffected group or class. By drawing more fully on the rhetorical theory offered us by Esther and other female prophets, we can avoid reifying patriarchal interests in rhetorical scholarship. On the one hand, Darsey’s identification and elaboration of a Hebraic rhetorical tradition *in extremis* explains radical rhetorical action in ways unaccounted for by rhetorical theory within the Greco-Roman tradition. However, on the other hand, even in marking out this alternate tradition, Darsey perpetuates a familiar male-dominated history of rhetoric and falls short of providing a theory of radical prophetic discourse that fully comes to terms with the exigencies of oppression against which the Hebrew prophets themselves fiercely railed against.

In summary, this essay provides a three-pronged rationale for the wholesale inclusion of female radicals within the prophetic genre. First, and foremost, the identification of the “prophetic-liberating” or “depatriarchalizing” principle within the Hebrew Bible by feminist biblical hermeneuts compels rhetorical theorists to reject configurations of prophecy that exclude the rhetorical activities of women or other marginalized groups. Because prophecy is centrally concerned with rectifying unjust social hierarchies, its principle of liberation can and must be used not only to depatriarchalize the Hebrew Bible itself but also the rhetorical theories and methods derived from it. Second, this essay offers evidence of female prophets in the Hebrew Bible who are worthy of scholarly attention for the sheer fact that they, like men, were participants in the Hebraic tradition of prophecy. Moreover, these women are particularly impressive exemplars of that tradition given that they successfully engaged in prophetic ministry in a patriarchal social context in which female leadership was an especially risky endeavor. Given female participation in prophetic ministry, rhetorical theorists must look to prophets such as Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Hannah, Esther, and others for a fuller, richer understanding of the prophetic genre. Finally, the fact that some scholars have already begun to examine the rhetorical practices of female American radicals who present themselves as inheritors of the Hebraic prophetic tradition further suggests that female radicals have a *bona fide* place within the rhetorical theory and criticism of prophecy.

Undoubtedly, Darsey offers an important contribution to rhetorical theory by identifying a radical tradition grounded in Hebraism that is distinct from the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition. However, as this essay illustrates, this Hebraic tradition need not be recovered to exclude women. If the prophetic tradition is a truly radical one as Darsey suggests, then it surely must transcend the binaries within traditional rhetorical history that have essentially held rhetorical action in opposition to effeminacy for the last two thousand years. Any tradition “characterized by a steadfast refusal to adapt itself to the perspectives of its audience” (Darsey, 1997, pp. 5-6) invites and *encourages* female participation, especially in social contexts in which women are compelled to rebel against oppressive institutions. A configuration of the prophetic tradition as ‘male-owned and operated’ seems paradoxically radical *within limits*, whereas this essay proposes that prophecy is radical *without end*.

Further, in marking out a place for female radicals within the rhetorical canon as exemplars of this distinct tradition, this essay reinforces the generic requirement that those rhetors that would be

included within the prophetic tradition have a legitimate claim to outsider status within their own social or political context. For prophecy not only includes the most marginalized of voices, but this genre is typified by the rhetorical practices of these disaffected groups. As Pauley (1998) writes, “full appropriation of the prophet persona relies on the individual’s position, at least to some degree, as an outsider” (p. 517). Because the outsider status of the would-be prophet makes radical rhetorical action both possible and necessary, women, as well as other historically marginalized peoples, are perhaps *better* positioned to assume the prophetic role, a realm of rhetorical action often inaccessible to those privileged by, and centered within, existing social systems.

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