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ABSTRACT

A course was designed around three major questions: (1) what is the relationship between rhetoric and its context; (2) how does the message construct a particular reality for the audience and the rhetor; and (3) what does the rhetorical artifact suggest about the rhetor? Feminist criticism is used as one of the three methods that focus on the first question. The unit involves three steps: analysis of the conception of gender presented in the rhetorical artifact, discovery of the effects of the artifact's conception of gender on the audience, and discussion of how the artifact may be used to improve women's lives. A four-step method is used to cover the unit: a lecture explaining the method, an in-class analysis of two or three rhetorical artifacts, the reading by students of critical essays in which the method has been used, and the writing by students of their own short essays of criticism, analyzing artifacts of their choice, using the method being studied. Two problems encountered when teaching this unit are the students' varying commitments to feminism and whether the teacher is doing students a disservice by teaching them feminist criticism. The inclusion of feminist criticism as a part of the rhetorical criticism course places special and difficult demands on the professor. (Two samples of feminist criticism are attached.) (MG)

Implementing Feminist Pedagogy in the Rhetorical Criticism Course

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Feminist Criticism as a Unit of Rhetorical Criticism

My primary aim in the rhetorical criticism course I teach is to encourage students to become discriminating consumers of symbols, ready to question and investigate the rhetorical phenomena around them. To accomplish this goal, I organize my class around a process of asking questions, where the impetus for criticism is a question the student wants to answer about how rhetoric operates.

I design my course around the three major questions students/critics are likely to ask about rhetoric: (1) What is the relationship between the rhetoric and its context? (2) How does the message construct a particular reality for the audience and the rhetor? and (3) What does the rhetorical artifact suggest about the rhetor? Each question, then, emphasizes a different aspect of the rhetorical process--the context, the message, and the rhetor.

I cover several different approaches to criticism under each question. I see metaphoric criticism as a method that focuses on the message, for example, so we study it as a way of answering the second question. Burke's pentad is a method that helps discover a rhetor's motive and thus is included in the methods covered by the third question concerned with rhetor. I teach feminist criticism as one of three methods that focus on the first question concerned with the relationship between the rhetorical artifact and its context. Neo-Aristotelian criticism is one of these methods; in it, a major step is the reconstruction of the context for the artifact. I also cover generic criticism, with its emphasis on understanding rhetorical practices in different contexts through a discovery of the similarities in those contexts and the rhetorical artifacts constructed in response to them. Feminist criticism is appropriate as a part of this unit because it deals with one particular aspect of context and its relationship to a rhetorical artifact--the construction of gender in the society.

Approach to Teaching Feminist Criticism

Feminist criticism, as I teach it, involves three steps. The first is to analyze the conception of gender presented in the rhetorical artifact. Questions that will help the critic in this analysis include: (1) Does the artifact describe how the world looks and feels to women or men or both? (2) How are femininity and masculinity depicted in the rhetorical artifact? and (3) What does the rhetorical artifact suggest are the behaviors, concerns, issues, values, qualities, and communication patterns of women and men apart from the society's definition of gender?

The second step is discovery of the effects of the artifact's conception of gender on the audience. The critic's concern here is with how the definition of gender associated with an artifact affects the audience for the artifact. The critic may discover, for example, that the artifact affirms the experiences, values, and power of men. It may present men as the standard, universalizing the male perspective, and thus presenting women as the other. Other artifacts may celebrate and affirm the female perspective.

In the third step, the critic discusses how the artifact may be used to improve women's lives. The critic attempts to discover how the analysis of the artifact can be used to alter the denigrating gender role assigned to women and to help them live in new ways. The critic, for example, may point to the artifact as a model for women in resisting patriarchal definitions of

women or suggest ways in which women can apply the strategies revealed in women-identified artifacts to their benefit in male-dominated realms.

Teaching Methods

I use a four-step method to teach the three questions and the methods covered under each. For each critical method, including feminist criticism, I give students a variety of learning activities so that they become comfortable with and confident in their application of that method to answer questions. The first approach is a lecture in which I explain the method. I discuss the question(s) for which its use is appropriate, history, key concepts, and steps involved in using the method. The second step is an in-class analysis of two or three rhetorical artifacts. Together, we formulate a research question to ask about each sample artifact and go through each of the steps in the method, applying them to the artifact. In the third step, I ask students to read critical essays in which the method has been used--essays by both rhetorical scholars and students from my previous criticism courses. We discuss these sample essays in class, and students pick out the steps of the method evident in the essays and identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Each unit culminates with students writing their own short (five or six pages) essays of criticism, analyzing artifacts of their choice, using the method being studied. Students summarize their essays in class so all are exposed to multiple ways in which the method can be employed and to the various insights that can be generated through the use of the method. I have attached two such sample papers where the students used feminist criticism to analyze a work of visual art and a film.

Problems in Teaching Feminist Criticism

I have identified two problems that I often encounter in teaching a unit on feminist criticism in a rhetorical criticism course. The first can be captured in the question, "How do I deal with students' varying commitments to feminism?" In the same class, I often have students who are enthusiastic feminists, students who know very little about feminism, and students who are anti-feminist. Yet, I ask all of them, with these varying orientations, to write an essay of criticism that assumes a commitment to feminism and adherence to its goals. This assignment--indeed, the very act of studying feminist criticism--consequently is likely to generate very different responses in class.

A specific example will clarify this problem and how it can be manifest in a class. In one criticism course I taught, most of the students were women, older than the average student, graduate students, and feminists. These women had taken many classes together and had developed a nurturing, supportive, feminist culture. They listened to and valued one another, worked together to generate ideas for course assignments, and read each other's papers; in general, they were feminists in philosophy and practice. Their response to the unit on feminist criticism was appreciation and enthusiasm. They found and brought to class interesting rhetorical artifacts of significance to women; they generated excellent insights into the artifacts we analyzed in class; and they used their feminist communication styles in class, building on each other's comments and affirming the perceptions of each other.

There also were two men in the class who were considerably younger than the women, beginning graduate students, involved in forensics and with the negative aspects of that style clearly in evidence in their communication behaviors. They were not sympathetic to feminism and showed their disapproval in various ways. When we read and discussed sample essays using feminist criticism, they challenged the authors' knowledge of all aspects of the topics. They claimed to have looked up and read all of the sources cited in the footnotes and that the notes

were incorrect or that the authors had not summarized the noted material accurately. They laughed at and trivialized the ideas of the women during class analyses of artifacts and charged us with reading things into artifacts that weren't there. In class, they took up most of the talking time until some women protested, to which they reacted by adopting a strategy of silence. They refused to say anything in class and made sure the other class members were aware that they were being silent by design.

These men even complained to the chair of the department that I was espousing feminism in my course, apparently assuming that such an act alone was sufficient ground for some kind of intervention on his part. (I noted that they did not similarly complain about another faculty member who espoused and taught a strict behaviorist perspective in her classes; perspectives seemed to be acceptable to them as long as these perspectives weren't feminist). Fortunately, the chair chose not to follow up on their complaint and did nothing to interfere with the class.

The problem in such a situation, as I see it, is that I have very different responsibilities to those who are committed to feminism and those who are anti-feminist in such a course. I want to support the feminists or emerging feminists, who are likely to get very little of such support in their other classes. I want to encourage them, to help them find their voices, and to express what is meaningful to them as women. I must do very different things for those who are not feminists or who do not see its value. I want to help them recognize the validity of the feminist perspective, to help them grow out of their defensiveness and arrogance, and to help them learn to listen to and value women. That means I must allow and encourage them to speak so they can see how their talk affects women, but by encouraging them, I give voice to ideas already sufficiently in circulation in our society, I encourage them to hold their viewpoints, and I give less opportunity for feminist ideas and styles of being to be expressed.

I have no guaranteed solutions for dealing with this problem. Fortunately, in the class in which it occurred, I was able to make use of the strong women's culture that existed to solve the problem. The women in the class recognized the problem and felt very strongly that the men and the problems they introduced were interfering with their learning experience. Together, we worked out some strategies to deal with the two men's talkativeness, domination, and challenge. We designated women to sit by them in class to engage them in friendly conversation before the start of class to affirm them as people. These women deliberately touched the men on the hand and arm during class discussions while using "we" and "us" in an effort to include them in the women's perspectives both nonverbally and verbally. Sometimes, they did not respond to the men but instead changed the topic from that initiated by the men to topics in which the women were interested. But most of all, they demonstrated that they took the material seriously and saw it as very important; they did not engage the men in argument about it. They simply assumed it was important, that the men could see its importance, and that the men valued women and feminism.

I reinforced these strategies when the men came to see me in my office after class to announce they no longer would speak in class. I responded in a way that assumed they were motivated by support for the feminist perspective. Rather than pleading with them to continue talking in class and to express their viewpoints so we could benefit from their wisdom, which I suspect they expected me to say, I thanked them for their willingness to adopt a stance that enabled them to listen to and learn from women. I suggested that the whole class would be very appreciative of their strategy.

Only the strong women's culture that existed in the class, then, allowed me to handle this problem effectively. Our strategies enabled one of the two men to remain in the class and become an appropriate participant--even speaking a bit from time to time. They did not work for the other, however, who dropped the class. Thanks to a group of wonderful women, a class I enjoy teaching and which I believe I teach well was not ruined by the differing levels of commitment to feminism.

A second problem with which I deal in a feminist unit on rhetorical criticism can be summarized in the question, "Am I doing students a disservice by teaching them feminist criticism?" I treat feminist criticism as something normal and legitimate. I treat it as one of many approaches to criticism, a method of equal status with the others. It comes early in the class, so I don't imply that it is an afterthought, marginal, or something you can do in criticism that isn't really like other methods. In all the units--whatever the method of criticism we're studying--I bring to class artifacts significant to women's lives--artifacts from women's symbolic forms of expression--and treat them as typical and mainstream artifacts. I support the students' use of their findings in their critical essays to reconceptualize and reformulate rhetorical theory, and we come up with all sorts of new ways to regard classical notions such as ethos, for example, on the basis of our feminist criticism.

But I know that how I present feminist criticism in my class is not how it is regarded in the speech communication field generally. It is not considered legitimate by many people; it is seen as soft, weird, inappropriate, not central to the discipline, or even wrong. To get a job or to get published with a specialty or interest in feminist criticism is very difficult. The scholars who have built their careers on the study and construction of traditional notions tend not to be supportive of feminist work. They don't want to know Mary Daly's rhetorical theory, for example, because it is very much at odds with the rhetorical theory they know and value that assigns power to men.[2] They don't want to hear that women don't begin a relationship with an assumption of separateness, which they then bridge through various "coming together" stages but rather start with an assumption of connectedness.[3] They don't want to hear that protest rhetoric, as we have defined and studied it, constitutes protest as men do it and that the study of women's artifacts--such as quilts--suggests very different protest strategies.

So the problem is this. The way I approach feminist criticism can be quite dysfunctional for my students; it could constitute, in Burke's terms, a form of trained incapacity for them. They become very interested in and very good at doing feminist criticism and want to use it to study and question many aspects of rhetorical theory, only to discover that such study can be used against them and can serve as a barrier to the attainment of their goals. It can keep them from securing positions they want, from publishing in our journals, and from earning tenure and promotion in their later careers. These are excellent students, students I cherish, and I want them to succeed. What should I do about their great interest in feminist work? How do I deal with the fact that feminist scholarship feels right to these students and gives them joy? Do I encourage them or discourage them from pursuing feminist work? How much do I tell them about where it may--or may not--lead? Frankly, these are questions to which I don't know the answers. I rationalize what I'm doing in teaching feminist criticism by saying that the field is changing and becoming more receptive to such work, but I know these women face enormous difficulties ahead if they continue to do it. All I really know how to do is hope they will end up in departments where someone with some power supports their work, and this isn't much of a solution for them or of much comfort to me.

The inclusion of feminist criticism as a part of the rhetorical criticism course places special--and difficult--demands on the professor. It requires great flexibility and adaptability on the part of the professor, who must respond to very different needs and interests of various students. It requires that the professor enact the commitment to pluralism that feminism embodies--no easy task. Finally, it requires a constant balancing of her desire to encourage good students to join her in work she loves with the knowledge that the invitation may be dangerous to their academic health.

Notes

[1] For more information on the approach to criticism I have outlined here, see: Sonja K. Foss, "Rhetorical Criticism as the Asking of Questions," Communication Education, 38 (July 1989), 191-96; and Sonja K. Foss, Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland, 1989.

[2] See, for example: Cindy L. Griffin, "Mary Daly's Rhetorical Theory: Hagography as Mistake." Thesis Univ. of Oregon 1989.

[3] This is one conclusion reached by Judith Bowker-Larsen in her dissertation, "Women's Images of Intimacy: Personal Voices." Diss. Univ. of Oregon, 1989.

[4] This is the topic of a dissertation in progress by Mary Rose Williams, Department of Speech, University of Oregon.

Sample Feminist Criticism

Egg/Her

Cindy Griffin

In this paper, I will describe and assess an artifact from a feminist perspective. This artifact presents a reality for women that is not often presented in art work, that of birth and nurturing. The artifact is a part of a work done by Judy Chicago, titled The Birth Project, in which she examines the birth process as a metaphor for creation. Judy Chicago designed and painted the pieces in this project and then gave numerous women skilled in needlework the pieces to stitch. The project began in 1980 and took five years to finish.

The image I have selected is called Egg/Her. This image offers a new insight into the persuasive abilities of visual rhetorical artifacts when traditional, positive images are presented in combination with non-traditional, potentially negative images. What follows is a description of the artifact, a discussion of the construction of gender through the artifact, an analysis of the impact of the artifact on the audience, as well as the contribution of the artifact to the improvement of women's lives. Finally, I offer an explanation of the artifact's contribution to rhetorical theory.

Description of the Artifact

Egg/Her is a work of embroidery and paint on antelope skin and measures 21" x 23". The embroidery work on this piece is stitched so finely and is fused so well with the paint that at first glance, the stitching is not noticeable. Egg/Her depicts a woman birthing an egg. A small person is hatching from the egg and is attached to the woman's nipple, mouth open wide, as if nursing. The woman is supporting the egg as well as the emerging person with one of her arms, while the person seems to claw at her breast with one hand and pull at her arm with the other. The egg is cracked in half with a jagged tear, and the predominant color here is a deep dark red, the color of blood or muscle.

From her other breast flows a blue stream of water containing amoeba-like creatures and fish. These creatures appear to be swimming out of her body from her nipple and into the surrounding environment. Her arm is encircling a patch of sky and land and a tree, while a small horse-like creature drinks from the stream that flows from her nipple. Her hand is connected to the earth and at the same time clawing at the earth while small creatures emerge, as though growing out of her.

The woman exists within an egg-like web of green and grey. Her body, like the paint and the embroidery, is bonded and blended with her environment. Some of the lines of her body are part of the web; yet, she is also separate from the web. The woman's body is not complete; she has no head and only one leg. Because of this, she seems to be only partially represented, and her positioning within the artifact creates the feeling that she is attempting to leave or escape her environment and her responsibilities.

Finally, there is a deep red umbilical cord running from the egg, through the person's body and out of the mouth and attached to the woman's breast at her nipple. This deep red, in combination with the downward, jagged lines in the break of the egg, suggests a flow from the woman into the person, with this flow disappearing into the center of the artifact.

Analysis of Gender in the Artifact

Two perspectives are presented of women in this artifact. An image of woman that conforms to our traditional perspective of woman as nurturer is one. A second is a non-traditional perspective of woman as creator of the universe and woman as incomplete when limited to this role alone. These characteristics are portrayed for us in the birth of the egg from the woman's body, the stream flowing from her body, and the support and encircling protection for the creatures she is offering with her arms.

In the more traditional construction of gender, a woman gives birth to life. She is the supporter of life and nurturer of life, and these are, indeed, traditional roles and traditional expectations. Less traditional is the presentation of the image of woman as creator of the universe and sustainer of life. This concept is constructed for the viewer through the flow of the stream of life from one breast, the protection she offers to the creatures with her arms, and the hatching of a person from the center of her body in the center of the image. While our traditional Christian myth suggests that a man gave birth to the world and nurtured its existence and while many still hold men to be the more powerful sex, Egg/Her suggests that a woman played the role of creator and that women are, indeed, a powerful sex.

A second non-traditional gender construction in this image is the presentation of the demands and difficulties of the responsibilities of birth and nurturance. Although these responsibilities are traditional ones for women, they are portrayed in Egg/Her from a woman's perspective and seen as a possible drain on women. The demands and difficulties of these responsibilities are shown to us through the life-giving, nurturing energy and sustinance that flows from this woman's breasts. They are portrayed also through her protecting, supporting arms and through the web of her environment representing her existence.

The web represents another experience that is typically a woman's experience. This woman is within a web, representing the interconnectedness of life. We see her connected to this web in that she shares some of the same lines as the web does. She is tangled, attached to this web, and as in a real life web, each strand connects, touches, and has an impact on all other strands. As such, this woman's life and role connect, touch, and have an impact on all others in her environment. A web, however, also can represent confusion. For the woman in Egg/Her, the confusion seems to be in which role to play, which task to perform, and which part of herself to ignore or deny while she continues to assume the role of nurturer.

We see in this image the suggestion that perhaps she would like to leave her position, her status, and her responsibilities behind. Through the incompleteness of the woman's body, we are reminded that woman is not only a nurturer, a supporter, and a creator of life. She is more than we typically allow her to be, more than we see, more than we are shown in this artifact. While we celebrate the power of her body, we do not see the power of her mind. The viewer does not see the intellectual side of this woman, and this is representative of our traditional views of women.

Egg/Her presents a paradox for many women. We know, as the title suggests, the egg is her, and she is part of humanity. The woman in Egg/Her seems to know that in order to sustain herself, she must continue in some way to carry out these roles of creator and nurturer. She knows she can celebrate this part of her identity. Yet, she is also trying to escape these roles because they are draining and pulling energy out of her. We see that in order to maintain life, we must create, nurture, and sustain life; yet, this act denies our other needs and abilities and drains our energy. This act is not our totality, is not all of who we are. These images conform to society's expectations of women yet violate them by presenting the power of woman's role, the difficulty and importance of this role, and the paradox of the expectation of continuous nurturance without the balance of intellect or assistance. This image presents the paradox in the need to separate herself in some way from the egg and to continue to be connected to the egg.

Effects of the Artifact on the Audience

For many, the image of Egg/Her celebrates and affirms the experience of being a woman. The traditional role of woman is presented, and in this work of art, we see her value and contribution. This birth image is empowering for women in another way, as it presents a woman's perspective of her role in life and not a traditional male perspective of what birth and nurturing are like. Egg/Her celebrates women's roles as creators and as nurturers by placing the woman in the center of the artifact, by showing her physical and emotional strength, and by allowing us to see the immense and multiple responsibilities a woman carries out in her life.

Judy Chicago legitimizes women's experiences by empowering the roles of mother, creator, and nurturer. She also legitimizes these experiences by showing us the draining of life forces a woman can experience in assuming these roles. In the absence of men in the artifact, Chicago portrays the difficulties women face in maintaining these roles alone and further legitimizes women's experience by showing us the need for relief, assistance, and the need for growth of other parts of women.

As an artifact, Egg/Her challenges our notions of women as self-sacrificing mothers. In seeing the woman in this artifact attempt to escape her web of responsibilities, this image suggests that while celebrating the power in her traditional roles, a woman may want to step out of these traditional roles with their traditional expectations and develop other parts of herself. The life-sustaining role that this image presents for women further suggests that there is another side to women--a side of nurturing and creating that is powerful and strong, a side that gives birth to and maintains life for this planet, a side of women that the audience sees in this artifact that is not typically affirmed for women.

Use of the Artifact to Improve Women's Lives

This analysis of Egg/Her can help to alter the denigrating role of self-sacrificing earth mother that some women experience. Egg/Her can be used as a model to examine women's traditional roles and to examine one alternative to these traditional roles. In using the symbols Chicago uses--the woman as the center, the woman nursing or feeding the emerging human with the flow of energy down into her center, the stream of life-giving and life-sustaining water pouring from the woman's body, and the woman protecting the creatures emerging from her--Chicago shows us the side of nurturing that is not as we typically think. This artifact makes an appeal to us on an emotional, experiential level. We see the strength, the multiplicity of responsibilities, and the power in creation. We see the life-giving and life-draining aspects of nurturing. We see that, while attempting to free herself from the position of nurturer that woman holds in our society, she is tangled in the web of birth and existence, and she is part of the web.

As a model and as an image, Egg/Her depicts the responsibilities women hold in our society. This depiction can be used to understand and grapple with the issues women are raising today and have raised in the past--issues that challenge the status quo of male power, issues that question male authority and the traditional male definition of reality that does not encompass us all.

Explanation of Artifact's Impact on Rhetorical Theory

In Egg/Her, we see the power a rhetorical artifact holds in altering reality for a viewer. Egg/Her is an example of the power a visual rhetorical artifact holds to create a model for looking at women's position in society and the ability of this model to alter our views of women's position in

society. Extending beyond the scope of women's position, this model can be used to alter other traditional views of groups or proceses.

In Egg/Her, an image of women is created out of traditional women's art (needlework), in combination with a traditional experience for women (birth and nurturing). Alternative images of women are presented (woman as center, woman as drained by her traditional roles, and woman as incomplete with only her traditional roles). In this juxtapositioning of elements, there is power to create acceptance of views not previously held. Egg/Her presents familiar, positive symbols for women. The viewer attaches positive meaning to these symbols. These traditional, positive symbols are offered in combination with alternative, non-traditional perspectives. The viewer carries over the positive associations from the familiar symbols to these new symbols and is disposed to see these new symbols as favorable and to accept alternative images in a positive light.

When a viewer is presented with a traditional image that she or he views positively, the image creates a favorable impression. When, in this same rhetorical artifact, non-traditional images are presented that do not conform to the viewer's predisposed attitudes or feelings and the viewer may be inclined to see these images as negative, the viewer carries over the positive feelings obtained from the traditional images and encompasses the non-traditional images into this viewpoint. In effect, the viewer buys into the new image because of the influence of the old, safer image.

In this way, potentially unacceptable, non-traditional images are encompassed into a positive framework, and the viewer accepts a new perspective that he or she otherwise may have rejected. In this artifact, an alternative perspective for the position of women is created and made acceptable to those who may not feel inclined to support women in this way.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have described an image that presents both a traditional, acceptable image of women and a non-traditional, less acceptable image of women. I have described how this image constructs gender, affirms our positive views of women in the traditional role, affirms women's experiences from a woman's perspective, and offers alternative aspects to women's traditional role. The artifact, Egg/Her, serves as a model for the process of influencing viewers by using both positive traditional views with less positive non-traditional views. Finally, I have examined how a rhetorical artifact can alter a person's perception of reality in a way that might not happen with the presentation of only non-traditional images.

Sample Feminist Criticism

The Warrior as Woman in Aliens

Mary T. Sutton

Within the boundaries of the film medium, war is a traditionally male arena. From the black-and-white days of cowboy-and-Indian skirmishes on horseback in the untamed West to depictions of two world-wide wars to violently gruesome portrayals of guerilla warfare in Vietnam, men load the cannons, men throw the grenades, men map out maneuvers during military meetings. Outer space--the last frontier to be fought over--is no exception. Although, as befitting the modern era of media, female characters are given considerable spunk and even an occasional military rank, today's audience still sees an overwhelming proportion of men in space-fighter cockpits and men wielding space-age laser guns. And in that most sacred realm of male battle--the one-on-one conflict--the tradition begun by two armored knights slicing at one another with medieval swords and kept alive by the shoot-out at high noon between sheriff and outlaw continues in the ballet-like parry and thrust of space warriors' light saber battles.

Throughout much of film's history, a man's enemy has been another man. The narrative and active spaces within a film's framework are traditionally constructed to be male spaces and are thus spaces occupied by male characters. These unwritten terms, when applied to confrontation, hold true by and large in even outer-space films: the evil creatures against which a human hero wages war are necessarily male evil creatures--and besides, no honorable space hero would strike a female space creature with his deadly laser gun because no matter how ugly or evil she may be, chivalry is yet alive and thriving in future centuries.

Rare is the space movie that features more than one human female as a successful warrior. Rare is the film, set in outer space, that portrays a battle waged between female warriors. And rarer still is the space movie that portrays female combatants as dominant clashing forces, as warriors who re-work the terms and occupied spaces of war to construct a battlefield significantly female. Aliens, a Twentieth-Century Fox film set in outer space, is representative of the latter category. Its title, perceived by sophisticated movie goers of the 1980s as preparation for the latest parade of stomach-turning monsters born of Hollywood make-up artists, designates creatures that satisfy the customers: the "aliens" have concentrated acid for blood and make their screen debuts, after gestating in human hosts, by bursting out of their hosts' chests.

However, the title, Aliens, carries a submerged meaning. In the movie, the final and most crucial battles are waged by the female warrior (Ripley) against the female Alien Mother who, minus a male partner, has produced the film's battalion of aliens. The terms of battle are unique. Its combatants cannot linguistically communicate. Each is alone, in a setting unfamiliar to human audiences. Each is viewed by the audience as appropriately "feminine," due to her portrayal as either a physically nurturing female (the Alien Mother) or an emotionally nurturing female (Ripley befriends and protects the little girl who is the last survivor of the colonial settlers). Finally, each commands her own sphere of expertise.

Part of the team of Marines and technicians whose mission is to destroy the human-consuming aliens, Ripley is intrinsic to the mission in that she alone possesses first-hand knowledge of aliens' habits and biological traits. The aliens are foreign to everyone but Ripley; her judgment is thus deferred to by the males in the team. But as the human fighters first encounter the aliens and are rapidly killed one by one, Ripley becomes more than the woman who first fought aliens. She takes charge of the confusion created by the sergeant's death and verbally designates the Marine named Hicks as next in military command--to which decision everyone complies. In a

scene reminiscent of war movies' smoky strategic rooms, filled with generals poring over maps. Ripley is clearly in intellectual control of the strategic planning (over complex floor plans) verbally completed by herself and Hicks.

Hicks, a type of supportive Watson to Ripley's Sherlock Holmes, shows her at one point how to use a huge, heavy type of machine gun. With their physical proximity and shared communication, the scene easily could have been transformed into a romantic scene--complete with traditional roles--by the writers or the actors themselves. However, Hicks balks when she asks about the grenade-launching device; he doesn't want her to "mess" with it. In characteristic no-nonsense fashion, Ripley accuses him, "You started this!" and concludes by demanding, "Show me everything!" The camera then cuts to the next scene: of Ripley walking into the medlab, the gun swinging comfortably on her arm.

Finally, Hicks, last surviving member of the original rescue team, is badly injured by the acidic blood from a dying alien and is half carried to their space vehicle by Ripley. She is alone now in the fight and, arming herself with ammunition, rushes back to the aliens' stronghold to find Newt (the little girl), from whom she has been separated. With little time to spare before the power reactors on the planet explode, she locates the child, finds her entryway blocked, and backtracks . . . straight into the reproductive realm of the Alien Mother.

The music hushes. Ripley stops, discovering herself surrounded by alien eggs on the floor. Slowly, deliberately, Ripley allows Newt to move out of her arms to stand beside Ripley while, in awe, the audience follows the heroine's gaze--up the gigantic trunk of a Falloplan tube-like structure discharging eggs to a bulbous uterine structure cradling the body of the hitherto-unseen Alien Mother. The Mother's spider arms unfold; her awful head slowly extends; her jaws open and she hisses at the female intruders. The combatants have recognized each other--as female warriors. This is distinctly female territory; it is the Mother's ground-nest. It is territory inhabited and trespassed only by females. It is battle territory (and the audience, seeing everywhere only female symbols, feels this fact acutely) where males are excluded and do not exist.

After their battle in the reproductive nest (in which Ripley sets fires to the eggs and the Alien Mother, screaming, tears herself from her reproductive outer sac), the Alien Mother surprises an exhausted Ripley by confronting the woman and little girl on Ripley's own turf: the loading platform next to her spaceship. Ripley scrambles for cover and when she re-emerges to assume battle stance, she is encased in a mechanical, space-age loader apparatus akin to a male suit of armor.

With the raw, defiant threat: "Get away from her, you bitch!" Ripley issues the challenge to fight. The audience shouts in approval; the furious Alien Mother screams in answer. All watching know that this will be a fight to the death: a fight on female terms of power, a fight fought over each other's "children," a modern movie fight built unlike any in traditional battle scenes. And, as befitting the terms of their female confrontation, Ripley wins the conflict by virtue of superior physical and mental strength.

Revolutionary in their clarity, the messages conveyed to viewers, female and male, by the structure of Aliens, is strong. The combatants named in the movie's title are new to audiences in that they appropriate what is traditionally a male territory for their own, unequivocally female experiences. Aliens not only challenges the assumptions behind male confrontation; it in one fell swoop dismisses them--and the patriarchal system into which they fit--and plunges viewers into new spaces of once-male, now all-female narration and action.

The future in space, female viewers are shown, can be a place of female authority, initiative, and success. It is a place where women single handedly can save the day, and the men must trust in their power to do so. Rhetorically, traditional male spaces in the film are now

occupied and revised by female characters. Female-occupied territory in this one film adds new dimensions of female potency and female struggle to the construct of conflict that years of movie making were unable to portray. Thus, traditional standards of applicable criticism, when applied to this film, are not only problematic--they simply are not sufficient. What is needed for the rhetorical future, clearly, are new and expanded standards of other-than-male criticism. As if, in the movie's conclusion, to emphasize this need, rhetorical reverberations are evident in the final frame: though Hicks and the male android have survived their contact with the aliens and are safely tucked by Ripley into sleeping chambers, the camera focuses instead on a still shot of the faces of the two sleeping female characters.