AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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In twentieth century America, women continue the age-old struggle for recognition as whole, intelligent individuals, not just an "other," less hearty, less deserving or less capable being than man. Sarah Grimké spoke of the inequalities over 150 years ago during the abolitionist movement when she compiled her major arguments into a series of letters originally published individually in the New England Spectator, then as a volume in 1838 entitled Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman. Grimké gets to the core of the matter and dares to challenge long-standing patriarchal tradition and beliefs.

Feminists have since tried to categorize her ideas into a particular philosophy, giving her credit as the first American feminist. However, the difficulty lies in labeling her from a twentieth century perspective (feminism) when her intent was to be heard as an individual—she wanted to break the barriers which categorizing creates. The strength of the Letters lies in their rhetorical soundness as an art which speaks profoundly to its audience, transcending the boundaries of time.

This study focuses on the rhetorical soundness of the Letters, providing a close analysis, that reveals Sarah Grimké's rhetorical methods, and her reaffirmation of classical notions of rhetoric. The study also contextualizes the letters while answering the critical question: Why should we read the letters now, in the twentieth century when slavery is an issue long since resolved and women have been given the right to
vote and have been assured of equal rights under the equal rights amendment? We must read primary texts, not secondary or interpretive texts, to experience the author's rhetoric and recapture her intentions.
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SARAH GRIMKÉ'S RHETORIC FOR EMPOWERMENT:
HER LIFE AND LETTERS

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

Out of the background of slavery and the work of abolitionists and women's restrictions comes the steady deliberative rhetoric of Sarah Grimké. In her Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women, first published as a collection in 1838, Sarah Grimké expresses her belief, her purpose: A doctrine of human rights which states that men and women have the same moral duties to the cause of slavery and should be allowed to work equally for that cause. She was criticized in her time for speaking out about slavery and women's rights in a most unseemly way—a woman speaking openly in a public forum. Her finest quality—her strength of character—had pulled her into the forefront of the controversy surrounding abolition and woman's suffrage when she stood up to acid criticism.

Strategically using letters addressed to Mary S. Parker, President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society (rather than actual public debate) as her rhetorical vehicle, Sarah Grimké was able to impress the minds of the people with ideas which developed generations later into some of the most important and controversial beliefs in history. It is difficult to know whether she was aware of her rhetorical choices or not, but the powerful effect of her writing invites the reader to come to the conclusion that Sarah Grimké was an expert in rhetorical art.
The Problem

The letters of Sarah Grimké are important works of rhetoric situated within the folds of the abolition movement. Her small, slim volume could easily get lost on a library shelf, but the power of the letters has lasted for over a century and a half. Although references to Sarah Grimké and the Letters occur often in both the histories of abolition, of women, and of the women’s movement, no one has yet read and analyzed these letters for their rhetorical power and their contemporary impact. Her ideas are still relevant—the problems have not yet been solved.

Solution to the Problem

The solution comes through re-vision. In this study I will analyze the primary text, Sarah Grimké’s Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman, and demonstrate the rhetorical significance of the Letters which artfully link women’s rights and abolition. A close reading of the Letters will answer the critical question: Why should we read the letters now, in the twentieth century when slavery is an issue long since resolved and women have been given the right to vote and have been assured of equal rights under the equal rights amendment? These letters are important because they still speak to women and men today, especially in this time of acute awareness of human rights.

Methodology

To answer the question why the Letters should continue to be read, I will examine Sarah Grimké’s set of fifteen letters on the equality of the sexes. Although my main focus will be on the letters themselves, mine is not a New-Critical approach. I will contextualize these letters within Sarah Grimké’s life, geographic location, and social and political situation as I apply rhetorical analy-
sis. The Letters are exciting pieces of literature, but their meaning resonates more clearly within their rhetorical context. I will dig through the layers of time and interpretation with rhetorical tools to look for the original intent and meaning. I will read her words and listen to her voice in my search for the power that has made these words immortal.

Overview of Chapters

In chapter 2, I will give a brief overview of Sarah Grimké’s life, her Letters, and the context of the text. Then, I will review the literature which has been written about her, and discuss the implications of that literature for further study. I will also provide a brief overview of the letters as I describe the application of rhetorical theory which I will use to explicate the Letters. Chapter 3 is an in-depth look at the primary text (Sarah Grimké’s Letters) applying rhetorical theory. The final chapter discusses my findings, my conclusions, and implications for further study, showing the power (and limitation of her letters). The Epilogue is my connection to the Letters. The appendices include a copy of the original title page of Grimké’s book, a list of the letter titles with dates and places of origin, and a biographical sketch of Sarah Grimké’s life to further contextualize her letters.

Conclusion

All of her life Sarah Grimké was working for human rights and for dignity of the individual. When she saw a need, she acted upon it. Sarah Grimké’s story must be told and her Letters be read and analyzed, not labeling her as a feminist, or an abolitionist, or “just a woman,” but as a rhetorician who has a strong belief, a need which concerns others, and who uses rhetorical means artfully to produce change rather than relying on the force of war or legislation. She deserves a place in the mainstream of rhetorical history for her excellent use of resources and
strategies which prove that rhetoric can be empowering.
2. RHETORICAL THEORY AT WORK

Introduction

In twentieth-century America, women continue the struggle for recognition as whole, intelligent individuals, not just an "other," less hearty, less deserving or less capable being than man. The same struggle has been going on for centuries. Sarah Grimké spoke of the inequalities over 150 years ago during the abolitionist movement when she compiled her major arguments into her Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman. Grimké gets at the core of the matter and dares to challenge long-standing tradition and beliefs.

Feminists have since tried to incorporate her ideas into a particular philosophy, giving her credit as the first feminist. However, the strength of the Letters lies in their rhetorical soundness as an art which speaks profoundly to its audience, transcending the boundaries of time. Therefore, while much has been written about Sarah Grimké and her philosophy, a closer analysis of her Letters reveals the rhetorical methods which Sarah Grimké uses to empower her readers.

Review of Literature

Sarah Grimké's name appears in a wide variety of writing, most of which are history books and books of feminist theory and women in America. Historians include her in their discussion of the abolitionist movement in the early nineteenth century, sometimes with a mention of her activity on behalf of the "woman question." Many consider Sarah Grimké the first woman's rights advocate (a.k.a. feminist) and her Letters classic appeals in the movement for women’s rights, but the original text of the letters often remain unread while writers and historians refer to them briefly, building their own theories, without a firsthand analysis of Grimké's rhetoric.
But Grimké's writing is important, not because it fits into a particular feminist theory or historical era, but because its compelling rhetoric touches women on their own terms no matter what century they may inhabit—women who, like Sarah Grimké, have one foot fettered to tradition and the other stepping out courageously with hope for dignity and recognition.

Each historian, feminist, or biographer brings an individual point of view (which we will later examine as a "terministic screen") of her own to the interpretation and presentation, so an examination of several sources is necessary to get a fuller picture of Sarah Grimké. An engaging view of Sarah Grimké comes through letters written by her, to her, and about her. In William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879 (Vol. II 1835-1840) W. L. Garrison, the great abolitionist statesman, writes about first meeting Sarah Grimké and later conversations and encounters, offering powerful praise about this intelligent and committed woman, giving good balance of opinions and perceptions sprinkled throughout his volumes of writing. Although he does not discuss Sarah's published letters directly, he praises her ideas and encourages her to keep writing. Other male points of view come from letters from Weld, John Greenleaf Whittier, her brother Thomas, and others in Gilbert H. Barnes' two-volume collection Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld, and Sarah Grimké, 1822-1844. Within those volumes are also contributions from other women friends (mostly abolitionists and women's rights advocates). The enthusiasm and depth of thought expressed are quite enlightening. Sarah's mother's refusal to correspond with her for so long speaks strongly in that silence. Sarah Grimké had sacrificed tremendously for her beliefs.

Catherine Birney's biography, The Grimké Sisters: Sarah and Angelina Grimké, The First American Women Advocates of Abolition and Woman's Rights, published in 1885, was enthusiastic and lively, perhaps because she had
known Sarah Grimké personally. In fact, she had lived with Sarah for three years. She gives an interesting and full account from the perspective of a woman who lived through most of the same century as Sarah Grimké, giving personal insights into the values and traditions of the time. She was closer to the rhetorical situation and, therefore, had a greater understanding of what the Grimkés were experiencing. When she writes that the community was shocked at certain incidents, she knew from experience that was true. She gives an inside look at some of the other personalities of the time which gives her work validity. It is obvious that Sarah Grimké had made a tremendous impression on her. Birney not only wrote from personal experience, but also read from letters and copious diaries which Sarah kept throughout her life. According to Birney, the journal of one year alone (1821) had over 500 pages. She often quotes from those sources which she obtained from the Grimké family. Her admiration for Sarah Grimké is clear. In fact, Birney herself continued to be active in carrying on the principles which Sarah Grimké had advocated. Although she does not discuss Sarah's Letters extensively, she talks about their importance and their effect on the public at that time. The series of letters began a public discussion of woman's rights. She notes that the lecture halls where Sarah and Angelina were speaking were packed and overflowing with almost two thousand people at times, growing quickly after the letters began appearing in the newspaper. She also discussed Angelina's success, but recognized it was primarily because of Sarah's early teaching and encouragement. She described Sarah's deep sense of justice, including the need to bring the "woman question" to the attention of a wide audience—that when she felt her rights were being invaded, she had to speak out even though her sister, Angelina, removed herself from the issue for quite a while. The chronology of the biography is sometimes hard to follow because she does not often include specific dates; rather, she focuses on the spirit of Sarah Grimké and her contributions and interprets it from
Gerda Lerner's biography *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Rebels against Slavery* is complete and interesting. Though not as personal as Birney's biography, she presents a wide view and seems to have captured the spirit and intent of their lives. Like Birney, she has worked from published and unpublished journals, letters, speeches and historical writings, contemporary to the Grimkés' lives, quoting often from her variety of sources. She recognizes that the woman's rights issue came from Sarah and Angelina's consciousness of their own limitations in education. She presents interesting view of the Grimkés as female abolitionist agents who were patronized and protected by men, given the approval to speak for abolition, but not on equal terms with the male abolitionists. The sisters were idolized by some of the public, and looked upon as freaks by others. Lerner also recognized the Letters and what they did to raise the woman question issue and stir up opposition (including an eventual split within the abolition movement over the inclusion of the woman's question issue). She summarizes the content of the Letters and quotes a few key phrases. Lerner also discusses the public reaction, including the response of the clergy in the "Pastoral Letter" setting the letters nicely in their rhetorical situation. Lerner is considered a leading authority on the Grimkés; most of the writers who include the Grimkés in their work cite the Lerner biography as their source. Ironically, Lerner is in the "bonds of womanhood" herself writing from the 1960s when the limits of sexist language catches up to her. Her use of language such as "dignity of man" (368) loses an otherwise powerful appeal in her conclusion.

Interestingly, the more removed from the primary sources of Grimké's writing, the more generalized the statements become about Sarah Grimké and her contributions to humanity. While Birney worked completely from primary sources including letters, journals, personal contact, manuscripts and interviews,
other writers have been more interested in fitting the woman into a particular philosophy. Most writers who include Grimké in their studies recognize Sarah Grimké as an important name in the history of the feminist movement, a courageous pioneer and spokeswoman who initiated a movement for the freeing of women from the restrictions of society, but the personal connection seems missing.

Katherine DuPre Lumpkin seems to have a particular fondness for the Grimké sisters in *The Emancipation of Angelina Grimké*, focusing her study on Angelina. Lumpkin's perspective as a Southerner is interesting. She reports that her interest in the Grimkés began while writing an autobiographical work, *The Making of a Southerner* in 1947. She also worked from manuscripts and letters, but writes the stories from Angelina's point of view, many times painting a negative picture of Sarah. She challenges Birney's interpretation of facts such as the nature of the forty-year marriage of Angelina with Theodore Weld. It is not clear how she arrived at her interpretation of Angelina's and Sarah's personal reaction to situations since she does not directly analyze or attribute her interpretation to accessible facts. Her book, published in 1974, was completed after Lumpkin's retirement from teaching. Lumpkin and others who give the main credit for work in abolition and for the "woman question" to her sister Angelina, ignore a fact which Birney points out: Sarah reared her and helped shape Angelina's ideas by example and education. Angelina's apparent freedom also came perhaps from not having the old tradition of patriarchy as ingrained as Sarah had.

Although Edith Altbach skips over Sarah Grimké's letters in *Women in America*, she touches on an important point when she acknowledges the problem of perspective when men write about American women. She points out that the problem of distortion similarly exists when professional women write about non-
professional women, or those from cities write about those in the country (v). In other words, one must keep in mind the situation of the person written about. Altbach’s *Women in America* has an interesting focus on the changing roles of women. She has contextualized the history of women in America, using context to learn how women became what they are. Her discussion of the Grimké sisters includes their growing consciousness of woman’s changing roles and the effects of inferior status on working women. She discusses women’s role in abolition and the emerging issue of women’s rights, but she does not mention the *Letters*. An interesting perspective is her discussion of “domestic novels” which were popular in the nineteenth century. She says they were actually a form of women’s rebellion as they dealt with everyday lives of women, sometimes coming close to being handbooks of “how to cope” with a bad male relationship. She makes interesting connections between the nineteenth and twentieth century women, especially viewing the education of women as a measure of their status in America.

Blanche Glassman Hersh gets close to the heart of the “woman question” and its close connection to its abolitionist origins even in the title of her book, *The Slavery of Sex: Feminist-Abolitionists in America*. She includes fifty-one women in her study which discusses the development and focus of the woman’s movement. She accurately contextualizes Sarah Grimké’s *Letters* and recognizes the goal and purpose of Sarah’s rhetoric to be the equal moral duty of women and men. Though the discussion of Grimké is but a small part of her book, she carries the central theme throughout her chapters examining women within their contexts.

Elizabeth Ann Bartlett republished and edited Sarah’s *Letters* in Sarah Grimké: *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and Other Essays*. Bartlett has provided Grimké’s text, has added some footnotes which help the modern reader
identify some of the names which Grimké's contemporaries would have readily understood, but she has not explicated it. Bartlett's focus is on feminist philosophy rather than the *Letters*. In her introductory essay she suggests possibilities of where the letters fit into feminist theory. In doing this, she reveals what she considers particular inconsistencies in Sarah Grimké's philosophy during different periods of her life. The problem with this approach is that she has minimized the importance of the rhetorical situation in interpreting a piece of writing such as the *Letters*. If these letters are considered from the rhetorical standpoint, the clarity of purpose, consistency of focus, and empowering views can be appreciated for what they really are: rhetorical tools for the empowerment of human rights.

Jean Fagan Yellin devotes a chapter of her book *Women and Sisters* to Angelina Grimké and her work for the right of women to petition. Yellin discusses Angelina's "Appeal to the Christian Women of the South" and her later "Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States" which hold many of the arguments later developed further by Sarah in her *Letters*. She recognizes that Angelina and Sarah Grimké paved the way for future women's rights advocates. The importance of their work cannot be underestimated, says Yellin. In 1837 alone, the Grimké sisters held 88 meetings which were attended by over 40,000 people. Although she only gives Sarah and her *Letters* two paragraphs, she recognizes their importance and their spirit of elevating woman, giving woman strength to stand upright and courageously free herself from the traditions which have weighted her down.

**Implications of the Overview of Literature**

These writers have written interesting commentaries on the life and times of Sarah Grimké which have given me many insights. But they have not analyzed
her rhetoric. Even those who give Sarah due credit for her part in the development of the woman's movement have overlooked her important contribution to rhetoric which could have strengthened their positions many times over had they followed her rhetorical example: Sarah uses her rhetoric to methodically work at the bonds with the sharp edge of her rhetoric, recognizing that war (the use of force) cannot change belief, but that rhetoric's purpose is to touch humanity's reasoning powers and emotions to move them to action. Sarah Grimké's Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman deserve a close look. I will give readers an opportunity to hear Grimké's words, to become engaged with Grimké herself, to see her methods of discourse, to feel the energy, to be charged with purpose—even in "modern" twentieth century.

Overview of the Letters

Sarah Grimké took a chance of alienating the male population by using what had traditionally been thought of as a masculine way of thinking and arguing—using logic, reasoning, and academics (reserved for men alone in her day). She knew her audience, dared to enter their world, and challenged them in their own terms. Although she consciously avoided using pathos alone as her primary appeal because that would be the "womanly" appeal and, therefore, would not be taken seriously, the energy of the letters is bursting with feeling from the very core of an emotional topic. Her examples give just the right balance of pathos and logos to move her audience to understanding and action.

Grimké was faced with the challenge of how to gain sympathy (acceptance) for her cause—for her very life. She built her ethos on her intelligence and further developed her image with methodical persistence. She increased her credibility by laying out her argument, artfully weaving together logic, academics, and Biblical text. She challenged interpretation of the Bible in a professional
and scholarly manner, translating directly from the Greek rather than accepting traditional interpretation (which had been produced by a patriarchal society filtered through the male point of view for their own purpose, consciously or unconsciously).

An overview of Sarah Grimké’s letters gives us insight into her gift as a rhetorician. Her *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman* begins in Letter I with a clearly presented explanation of “The Original Equality of Woman” concentrating her argument on Biblical evidence from her original translation. In the Letter II she develops her argument that woman is subject only to God (therefore, not submissive to man). Letter III is a direct response to “The Pastoral Letter of the General Association of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts” (which lambasted women for any public display), calling up all her scholarship of Biblical text in woman’s defense. She continues by arguing that denying women the right to enter into discourse with men is “derogatory to [both] men and women, as moral and intelligent beings” (Grimké 22). She devotes the next four letters to a description of the condition of women around the world—speaking from a global perspective, not a personal one. She lifts the ethos of women to an unmistakable level of equality (if not superiority) to men using powerful examples from throughout history (predominantly Europe) showing female heroism, authority, and intellect.

After elevating woman, holding up examples of what could be the norm rather than the exception, Sarah Grimké dares to reveal ways men have historically suppressed and oppressed women including education, dress, laws, and relations between husband and wife. Sarah Grimké is thorough and relentless, but she resists being negative. She is merely presenting the facts—passionately—followed by a proposal of what could be if women were given the opportunity to participate equally: the power of united minds and spirits for a common good.
She focuses on the responsibilities of women if taken seriously, telling women what they must do to elevate their own character if they truly want equality. Sarah Grimké’s strength is, indeed, her methodical use of logos, always backing up assertions with facts and actual examples, not hypothetical ones. But her rhetoric pulsates with the underlying pathos which is driving that accomplished rhetorician to speak out for what she believes, and which drives her readers to respond.

**A Rhetorical Look at the Letters**

We can appreciate Sarah Grimké’s artistic rhetorical skill even more by looking at her letters through the eyes of modern rhetoricians with the advantage of more than a century and a half of perspective. I will use the tools of several rhetoricians including Wayne Booth, Aristotle, Richard Weaver, Kenneth Burke, and I. A. Richards, to examine the power of these letters.

The letters, indeed, take on a three-dimensional life when viewed through Wayne Booth’s rhetorical stance. The meaning is not just on the pages, but is a living balance of ethos, pathos, and logos described by Aristotle so well in his *Rhetoric*. As we have seen, Sarah Grimké’s ethos had been well established by her experience, situation, and reputation by the time she wrote the letters. She began with integrity so she chose to concentrate her appeal using logos, effectively using good reasons supported by facts and examples, which are teeming with pathos. She chooses not to use pure emotion in order to avoid the label of weak, emotional woman. Yet pathos is the pulsating life behind the words, enabling good reasons to become passionate arguments.

If rhetoric is “the art of discovering warrantable beliefs and improving those beliefs in shared discourse” as Booth defines it (13), then Sarah Grimké is indeed an accomplished rhetor. Her commitment to abolition coupled with her
rational capacities exemplify Booth’s ideal rhetoric. She wanted assent, agreement that both women and men had value and purpose, and believed that together they could accomplish their common goal. She used her intellect and scholarship to establish that common ground, then presented her arguments and good reasons. While Sarah Grimké’s experience enabled her to recognize the injustice of inequality, her rhetorical skill gave her the means to achieve her goal.

A look at her Letters will illustrate Booth’s insistence of the importance of finding common ground and using good reasons. Her greatest critics were members of the clergy so she began her challenge on common ground—the Scriptures. Using her expertise in Greek, she used logic to make her point. She focused her arguments on a close reading of the Bible. She demonstrates this when she gets straight to the point in her first letter in the collection: “I shall advance arguments in opposition to a corrupt public opinion, and to the perverted interpretation of Holy Writ” (3). Her scholarship of theology is evident and further promotes her ethos. Her rhetoric clearly lays out facts and examples. In her summary, she makes her stand strong, saving a hint of pathos for her closing: “Thine for the oppressed in the bonds of womanhood, Sarah Grimké” (8).

When she continues with her pronouncement, “I am in search of the truth,” she brings to mind Richard Weaver’s view of rhetoric which he promotes in Rhetoric Is Sermonic. Weaver’s view of rhetoric indeed gives an interesting possibility for analyzing Sarah Grimké’s letters. Not only does she create an ethos which is heralded by Weaver in his very definition of rhetoric, but she also uses rhetoric as a vehicle of order in the true Weaverian sense. Seeking the truth is important to Grimké who wants to expose the “perverted interpretations of Holy Writ” (3). She writes in response to the critics using the common ground of the Scriptures to give good reasons for her belief and values to come to a new order of society—equality. For Sarah Grimké, language was a reality, not just a symbol.
Her earnestness was compelling and could not be ignored. Her language was a vehicle—it was thought, reason, and dialectic in motion.

Sarah had a vision of what ought to be and wanted to explore the options. She stated her beliefs which were based on her knowledge (experience and scholarship). She is the "noble lover" which Weaver describes in "The Phaedrus and the Nature of Rhetoric," wanting what is best for women, for slaves, ultimately for the soul of society, ignoring her own needs and her health. She speaks with authority and passion, not for control or power, but to show what can be possible. She has indeed shown that language is best used for noble causes. In her Christian context, truth is the Word—her commitment and values coupled with good reasons have demonstrated the power of the word in both dimensions.

If we look at Sarah Grimke's letters from Kenneth Burke's view of rhetoric as dramatism, her words come to life. His pentad (the interaction of act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose) provides what is perhaps the most interesting perspective. The act is her speaking out against the bondage of both slaves and women—the victimization and degradation which she felt so intensely. The agent is Sarah Grimke—woman, daughter of slave owners (with all of her terministic screens in place). The agency she chose for her noble work was the Letters to Mary S. Parker, president of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society (whom she addresses in the Letters as "Dear Friend" and "Dear Sister"), published in the New England Spectator. The scene was her situation at the time of the act—the events surrounding the act—the abolitionist movement, the constrained activity of women's involvement in a man's world, the insults of the clergy toward women actively involved in politics and public speaking. Not only is the scene (our contextualizing of her letters) important to our understanding, but was even more useful to Sarah Grimke herself. In analyzing the scene, she found that women could be more sympathetic to the plight of the slave because they
(women) had felt the same fetters of bondage.

It is also easy to see how all of Sarah’s experience growing up, being denied rights as a woman and seeing slaves denied rights, are part of the scene in the drama in Burke’s schema of rhetoric. While her devotion to her sister, Angelina, gave her life immediate purpose (raising her to believe in the privileges Sarah had been denied), Sarah Grimké’s first-hand knowledge that slavery was cruel gave her an additional life-long purpose; she was resolved to remedy the injustices and later verbalized her convictions in the Letters.

Since women were criticized so severely for speaking in public, Sarah soon found what became an excellent avenue to transmit her stance. The agency (the rhetorical form) she chose for her noble work was the Letters written as if to Mary S. Parker, president of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society published first in a newspaper (The New England Spectator) for a wide audience. (The letters were reprinted in another newspaper then revised by Sarah and published as a book a year later.)

Using the letter form as the agency was indeed a great strategy—perhaps one reason they are remembered more than many speeches. First of all, letter writing was the most common form of communication—“acceptable” for females though Sarah was criticized for signing her name to the letters when they were published for the public: “A woman’s name should only appear in print twice in her life—when she marries and in her obituary” (qtd. in Lerner 2). She defended herself saying that she did so because she was proud of her beliefs and would not hide from them. In letters the reader/writer relationship is specific, personal, intimate, and directed (Altman 186). Letters also assume an openness, a continuing communication, an anticipated and expected response, suggesting a dual agent of reader and writer—ideas in motion. Letters invite response; while reading the letters it is easy to forget the addressee is someone else. Because many of
the same ideas are still issues in the twentieth century, Sarah Grimké pulls us into
the discussion, challenging us to shake off the rusty bonds—residuals of long
tradition.

The last part of Burke's pentad, the purpose (as Burke defined it), was the
driving force of Sarah Grimké's letters—to bring a new order to society, the belief
that men and women have the same moral duties and should, therefore, work
equally for justice and should have, side by side, the same rights and responsibili-
ties. When we understand the scene and the purpose, the drama becomes evi-
dent. Rhetoric does something—is drama in action—when seen in the whole
context and interaction of the parts.

The critical combination of scene, agent and agency enabled Sarah Grimké
to act, to share her purpose, her deep beliefs. Rhetoric is an act of conviction and
faith, a constructive force, bringing people together, enabling them to find com-
mon ground. Rhetoric empowers the whole person—body, mind, and spirit
(ethos, logos, pathos)—to strengthen a nation, to heal humanity.

The necessary contextualization of Sarah Grimké's Letters is in actuality a
look at the invention part of her rhetoric which will reveal her perspective, her
values, her point of view—all of which are what Kenneth Burke would call her
terministic screen. Situating the text then gives dimension and substance to our
understanding. We see its beginning from the same source as the author of the
text; we move with her in the same direction toward her purpose. We participate
in the same context. Kenneth Burke's idea of terministic screen is finally an im-
portant concept to understand in order to insure a fair analysis of rhetoric. Burke
explains: "If any given terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a
terminology, it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function
also as a deflection of reality" (45). Our view is not only skewed by our experience
and the context, but also by language and intent. Readers of the text must under-
stand the author then try to put aside their own terministic screens and look at the Letters through the terministic screen of Sarah Grimké. Words reflect reality, but only if we look into her mirror, through her eyes not our own. Otherwise it is our lives in her story which we are seeing—a different drama, same theme.

Whether Sarah Grimké studied classical rhetoric is uncertain, but with the library of her father and brothers available she most likely had the opportunity. We do know that she refers to Quintilian and Cicero in an historical way. Analyzing her rhetoric in terms of Aristotle’s principles shows consistent skill according the his five canons of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory. I have already shown how Sarah Grimké’s background is an important part of her invention from which she formulated her major idea and her arguments. She was faced with the challenge of how to gain sympathy (acceptance) for her cause—for her very life.

Grimké has used two forms of proofs in her Letters. The first kind are the external (or inartistic) proofs which include testimony (examples of the treatment of women around the world) and documents (the Biblical text). She also creates internal (artistic) proofs as a rhetor. She builds her ethos (her character as a speaker). She is already well-known to many, but must overcome the stigma of being “just a woman.” She builds rapport and goodwill with her audience by treating them with the dignity and respect she expects for herself. She builds her ethos with her calm and steady use of her scholarship demonstrating her intelligence. She increases her credibility by laying out her argument, artfully weaving together logic, academics, and Biblical example. Her knowledge of the Bible certainly helps sustain the high moral character important in a speaker. In fact, her whole contention of dignity for all humanity raises the image of the writer.

Sarah Grimké also knew gaining understanding meant making connections. The effective rhetorical tool that she used to achieve her goal was metaphor.
Although Aristotle, Cicero, and other classical rhetoricians considered metaphors embellishments or ornamentation (as was usual in Grimké's day as well), Sarah Grimké effectively used metaphor as a substantial part of her argument, at the heart of her rhetoric. It was not an extra flavor, but the essential ingredient to let people taste the inequities, to draw them to her cause. According to I. A. Richards, to experience the metaphor and have others experience it is the true art of rhetoric—the metaphor actually becomes an argument, not an embellishment. Women are slaves in bondage. Sarah could effectively use this metaphor because her very life was a metaphor of the bondage she felt. Her life embodied the tension between the two worlds (traditional patriarchy, and equality and freedom) with both subtlety and directness. She knew her audience—mostly Northerners who were sympathetic to the slave in their cruel bondage. She wanted people to feel the plight of women in the same way. Many women were mistreated physically. Most women, treated as property, lost all autonomous rights when they married, were not allowed to own their own property, or make transactions on their own. Woman's further education or intellectual stimulation was not considered important. So women as slaves became her metaphor.

Grimké's likening the plight of woman to that of the slave was a skillful technique, not of coloratura, but of giving clarity to a reality. She uses what I. A. Richards later calls "a borrowing of . . . thoughts put into surprising . . . contexts" (94). Sarah Grimké's choice of metaphor was brilliant yet seemed quite natural. The abolitionist movement was intense. Injustice and inhumanity to human[kind] was on everyone's mind. According to Catherine Birney, few conversations could go on long before mention of the abolitionist cause crept into the talk. Sarah Grimké knew her audience well. She knew that everyone could understand her parallels of diction and example.

Grimké's Letters are filled with metaphors of bondage. One particularly
strong use of metaphor occurs in Letters IV and V which sets forth the condition of women as slaves by detailing historical information which lingers on—that women "have either been made slaves" or have been "dressed like dolls and [have been] used . . . as toys to amuse their [men’s] hours of recreation" (27). Women are viewed as chattel. More examples of Grimke’s use of metaphor can easily be seen in the closer reading of the Letters in the next chapter where we will also take a look at her methodical and logical explanations of her argument.

Conclusion

We must go directly to the primary text, Sarah Grimke’s Letters, and put them into context. Looking at those letters from her perspective, re-creating her terministic screen, we can see that they were powerful in her day. But we can also use the distance of time as a tool of advantage. She did not know when she wrote them how true her assertions would become. We can see that her later life dramatized the truth of her Letters: Denied the right to publicly speak out for abolition, she took over the endless, unheralded work of caring for the family of her sister, who had been weakened by childbirth, enduring hardships of a Spartan existence and isolation from the work which had been her passion. Sarah died long before her noble goal was achieved. We can see her life, her rhetorical situation through generations, her life as an artistic proof of the truth of her words—an actual telescoping of the rhetorical situation. In those letters we see a mind shaped by her actual situation, finding the need for a rhetorical outlet. Her noble purpose—her drive—was fueled by pathos but was delivered with a steady logos equal to any rhetorician in history.
Introduction

Sarah Grimké’s *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman* first appeared in the *New England Spectator* as a series of letters from July to October 1837. Grimké wrote those letters at the invitation of the publisher who wanted to bolster circulation of that non-abolitionist newspaper. Sarah Grimké seemed to know that the use of letters would be an effective method to convey her concerns. Even though she was ostensibly writing to Mary Parker, President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society and began each letter “Dear Friend” or My Dear Sister,” most readers understood that she was really writing to all women. And since she had been so harshly criticized by men for speaking in public, and for combining the “woman question” with abolition, the letters offered an acceptable mode for the transmission of her ideas.

The letter form also gave Grimké an opportunity to carefully formulate her ideas, selecting words and phrases for calculated effect. Words on the page can endure long after a speaker’s voice has faded. The letters can be read and reread unlike a speech which depends on the audience’s memory. The avenue of letters lent a permanency to her words. The strategy of using letters was quite wise in another way. Grimké packs the letters so full of information and good sense that lengthy discussions would no doubt follow each one. The form provided the opportunity for the letters to be read several times in order for the reader to appreciate the depth and thought and the clear rational logic of the arguments. She alternately admonishes, encourages, gives examples to emulate, and challenges women with her contagious energy.

An interesting relationship exists between Grimké’s topic and her method
of delivery. Since she had been criticized for speaking in public, her turning to letters actually proved to be an even more effective means of spreading her message. The newly felt denial of rights prompted her stronger emphasis on women's rights than on abolition. Had she had continued to speak in public for abolition, she might not have felt so driven to pursue the "woman question." The circumstance became rhetorical irony—her letters provided the central arguments which were carried through the next 150 years.

Sarah Grimké's well-chosen words create a vivid description of the condition of women. She knew the question was really larger than race or gender—it was a question of human rights and dignity—inalienable rights which should not have to be (in fact, could not be) legislated or won by war. To be granted rights by another (by men) suggests that one is subservient to the other and, therefore, must get permission to be equal. Sarah Grimké knew true belief and attitudes can only be changed by rhetoric—power of reason, conviction, and truth. She would help facilitate that change.

**Letter I. "The Original Equality of Woman"**

Sarah Grimké's well-chosen words create a vivid description of the condition of women in her *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women* which begins with a clearly presented explanation of "The Original Equality of Woman" July 11, 1837. From Amesbury she writes "My Dear Friend" immediately establishing goodwill and common ground, setting up a tone of intimacy:

> In attempting to comply with thy request to give my views on the Province of Woman, I feel that I am venturing on nearly untrodden ground, and that I shall advance arguments in opposition to a corrupt public opinion, and to the perverted interpretation of Holy Writ, which has so universally obtained. But I am in search of truth; and no obstacle shall prevent
my prosecuting that search, because I believe the
welfare of the world will be materially advanced by
every new discovery we make of the designs of
Jehovah in the creation of woman (Grimké 3). [All
quotes in this chapter are from Grimké, using the
original 1838 version (reprinted in 1970). Italics,
punctuation, and spelling are hers unless otherwise
indicated.]

She is responding to an earlier request—it is a correspondence already in motion
just as the “woman question” has been going on for centuries. She is determined
to use all means at her disposal to find the truth, to clear up the misunderstand-
ings that have gone on for too many generations. Her statement of purpose is
clear, her purpose noble:

It is impossible that we can answer the purpose of
our being, unless we understand that purpose. It is
impossible that we should fulfil our duties, unless
we comprehend them; or live up to our privileges,
unless we know what they are (3).

She is writing not just for herself, but for all women. She also tells the reader that
she is going to give arguments to show that the Biblical interpretations concern-
ing the equality of man and woman have been “perverted.” This important aspect
of Grimké’s Letters, her insistence on finding and explicating the truth, is ex-
plained:

I shall depend solely on the Bible to designate the
sphere of woman, because I believe almost every
thing that has been written on this subject, has been
the result of a misconception of the simple truths . . .
I therefore claim the original as my standard,
believing that to have been inspired (4).

Traditionally, Scriptures have been viewed as The Truth, but Sarah dares suggest
that the Scriptures are colored by the view (terministic screen) of the patriarchal
society, the men who translated the Scripture. She therefore returns to a Greek
translation and uses her scholarship to explicate the original intent. She backs up her right to interpret for herself using the protestant belief that each person may read and interpret for herself:

I also claim to judge for myself what is the meaning of the inspired writers, because I believe it to be the solemn duty of every individual to search the Scriptures for themselves, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, and not be governed by the view of any man, or set of men (4).

She meticulously explicates the story of creation of both woman and man in the image of God and God's granting dominion to both female and male over fish, fowl, cattle, earth, and every creeping thing, but not over each other. They were "created in perfect equality." She explains God's creating woman:

It was to give him [man] a companion, in all respects his equal; one who was like himself a free agent, gifted with intellect and endowed with immortality; not a partaker merely of his animal gratifications, but able to enter into all his feelings as a moral and responsible being (5).

This important argument is woven throughout her letters, from various viewpoints, supported by scholarly example.

She beautifully weaves scholarship and logic throughout the explication of Biblical text. The story of the serpent's temptation provided evidence to prove man's lack of superiority:

Had Adam tenderly reproved his wife, and endeavored to lead her to repentance instead of sharing in her guilt, I should be much more ready to accord to man that superiority which he claims; but as the facts stand disclosed by the sacred historian, it appears to me that to say the least, there was as much weakness exhibited by Adam as by Eve. They both fell from innocence, and consequently from happiness, but not from equality (7).
She is gradually freeing woman from centuries of ignorance imposed by men.

Her scholarship is brilliant as she exposes other mistranslation of words such as in the passage most often used by patriarchal Christians to “prove” man’s superiority and God-given place as master: “Thou wilt be subject unto thy husband.” Grimké explains that it was really a prophecy rather than a command, supporting her statements with detailed explanation of the language and the original intent, concluding with an attempt at an explanation of the possible origin of the error by translators who had “been accustomed to exercise lordship over their wives . . . seeing only through the medium of a perverted judgment, very naturally, though I think not very learnedly or very kindly” (Grimké 7). It is no wonder that women stood up with cheers and applause while the clergy sought her banishment. She has opened a subject long staid in tradition:

Here then I plant myself. God created us equal;—he created us free agents;—he is our Lawgiver, our King and our Judge, and to him alone is woman bound to be in subjection, and to him alone is she accountable for the use of those talents with which her Heavenly Father had entrusted her. One is her Master even Christ (8).

Not only has she challenged tradition, but she dared suggest the severity of the problem using her metaphor of slavery here at the end of Letter I. Her strategy is indeed sound. Since she knows her audience is sympathetic to the slave, she carries the metaphor throughout her letters, enlightening through facts, and then emphasizing with metaphor. Grimké ties the metaphor of the slave to the reality of the condition of women, skillfully and deliberately using specific words to enhance the image: “God created us equal . . . free agents” in contrast to “bound to be in subjugation” (emphasis mine). Christ is her only Master: Lawgiver, King, Judge. These carefully selected words reinforce the condition of woman which she continues to reveal through her arguments in her fourteen subsequent letters.
This final paragraph, with its metaphor of slavery, brings her closing refrain, “Thine for the oppressed in the bonds of womanhood” (emphasis mine) into purposeful focus. It is not as Bartlett and other feminist writers have suggested, an affirmation of a special tie of sisterhood or sorority, but is the repeated metaphor of slavery reflecting the patriarchal limitations imposed on women—bondage: a restriction rather than a sorority. Her closing is, indeed, a strong statement of the condition of women in general, a plea to be released from the fetters of bondage—a definite parallel to that of the slave bound to the master for life. By reading the primary source from the standpoint of its purpose, we can feel with Grimké the view that womanhood is an imposed state of bondage, rather than a voluntary or preferred state. The strength of her resolve rings out clearly in her words as she closes the letter with “Thine for the oppressed in the bonds of womanhood. Sarah M. Grimké.”

Theoretically, the response to Grimké’s letters would come from her “Dear Friend,” or “Dear Sister” (Mary Parker, her “sister” in faith and work) whom she addressed. But, in fact, the tone is so personal that the reader is drawn in with the urgency of the message. Grimké does widen the audience occasionally, seeming to forget that she is supposedly addressing Mary Parker—the subject cannot be so contained. At times she inserts the plea, “O, dear sisters,” into the text as if opening her arms to all women, not just one. The overwhelming response did come, of course, from women and men around the nation caught in the flood of this rhetorical tsunami.

Letter II. “Woman Subject Only to God”

Sarah continued a week later, July 17, 1837, generating the second wave, this time from Newburyport. She begins calmly, “My Dear Sister,” quickly reviewing the subject of her previous letter—the fall of men and women from
purity—with a reminder that they still had “high moral responsibilities, intellectual powers, and immortal souls” standing “side by side acknowledging no superior but their God” (9)—a skillful transition to this second letter whose subject is “Woman Subject only to God.”

To remind the reader that man claimed superiority without reason or right, Sarah points out that “more true nobility would be manifested by endeavoring to raise the fallen and invigorate the weak, than by keeping woman in subjugation” (10). She quickly points out that she is not surrendering her claim to equality by asking permission (as to a superior) to be treated as an equal, but only that they quit acting as masters and “take their feet from off our necks and permit us to stand upright on that ground which God designed us to occupy” (10), strengthening her argument with metaphor in that image of being held down by force.

She continues saying, the “lust of dominion” extends first over women, then over other men—“slavery which sprang up immediately after the fall [in Eden], and has spread its pestilential branches over the whole face of the known world” (11). She continues the metaphor quite pointedly using words which parallel those used in talking about the black slave: “He [man] has done all he could to debase and enslave her mind; and now he looks triumphantly on the ruin he has wrought, and says, the being he has thus deeply injured is his inferior” (11 emphasis mine). Just like the slaves, women were denied education then men said, see how true it is that women are ignorant and inferior. (The myth continues.)

Her logic continues clear and unwavering—since she finds no place in Scripture that shows when God took equality away from women, the original equality still exists. She explains further using examples which “demonstrate no supremacy was granted to man.” It was usurped.
Telling the story of Noah and God's renewed grant to give dominion over beasts, fish, fowl, and creature, but not over woman, Sarah explains:

Jehovah could not surrender his authority to govern his own immortal creatures into the hands of a being, whom he knew, and whom his whole history proved, to be unworthy of a trust so sacred and important. God could not do it, because it is a direct contravention of his law, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (11).

Man wanted woman to serve him, not God; that was inconsistent with the Scriptural commandments. Grimké points out that those commands are the same today as they always were. More examples follow to prove man's unworthiness: Cain and Abel, Nemrod, and the enslaving of nations and the using of women.

Sarah refers to her contemporary situation of the oppression of women, leading to a discussion of patriarchy through the ages: Sarah and Abraham, Rebecca and Isaac, and Solomon's description of the perfect woman (stories her contemporaries would have been familiar with). In all instances, no respect was offered to women—they were treated like slaves, property, decoration to show off man's prowess. She asks: How can patriarchal tradition be proof of superiority?

That Grimké again uses metaphor as substantial argument for the right of women to speak in public for the freeing of slaves is evident in her concluding arguments of Letter II that men regard woman as property, and hence we find them sold to those, who wished to marry them, as far as appears, without any regard to those sacred rights which belong to woman, as well as to man in the choice of a companion (13).

The tradition began in the Old Testament and continued throughout history by law and traditional dowry. Once again (as she does in all her letters) Grimké
closes with "Thine in the bonds of womanhood," a resounding refrain which captures her whole message in metaphor. Between these refrains the argument focuses on restrictions of women, using metaphoric verbs and nouns, continually reminding the reader of the underlying message.

**Letter III. "The Pastoral Letter of the General Association of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts"**

In July 1837 in Haverhill, Sarah interrupts her description of the Condition of Woman using Letter III to respond to charges of the "Pastoral Letter of the General Association of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts." The Pastoral Letter, which was distributed to all churches and clergy, lambasted women for public display (speaking to a mixed audience in public) and was circulated to discredit the Grimké sisters. Sarah and Angelina had become well-established agents for abolition. They had begun speaking only to women in private parlours, but when their popularity grew, the audiences were so large they had to speak in churches and public meeting halls. They worked well as a team: Angelina was an animated speaker who concentrated on the political aspects of abolition, while Sarah spoke more on the moral and theological view. Eventually Sarah left the speaking to her more vivacious sister and concentrated on writing. To keep the message strong even as she pauses to answer the attack of the Pastoral Letter, Sarah incorporates other words which support and enhance the metaphor of women enslaved. She writes at the beginning of Letter III setting the tone for the rest of her letter:

I am persuaded that when the minds of men and women become emancipated from the thraldom of superstition and "traditions of men," the sentiments contained in the Pastoral Letter will be recurred to with as much astonishment as the opinions of Cotton Mather and other distinguished men of his day, on the subject of witchcraft (14, emphasis added).
Using word which pulsate with the injustice of slavery, Sarah is anticipating the release from that bondage of tradition.

Sarah turns the negative attack of the Pastoral Letter into a positive opportunity to make yet another point for women. She quotes the Pastoral Letter as she submits that "the dangers which at present seem to threaten the FEMALE CHARACTER with wide-spread and permanent injury" is not because of women speaking in public but

from those who, having long held the reins of usurped authority, are unwilling to permit us to fill that sphere which God created us to move in, and who have entered into league to crush the immortal mind of women (15).

This skillful turn of the direction leads her straight into her main point:

I am persuaded that the rights of woman, like the rights of slaves, need only be examined to be understood and asserted, even by some of those, who are now endeavoring to smother the irrepressible desire for mental and spiritual freedom which glows in the breast of many, who hardly dare to speak their sentiments (15).

This letter holds the kernels of ideas which are later expanded—that woman was created to responsibly fulfill duties given by God. She uses her scholarship of Biblical text in woman's defense to protest "against the false translation of some passages by the MEN who did that work, and against the perverted interpretation by the MEN who undertook to write commentaries thereon" (16). Women must have opportunity for education so they can translate for themselves and know what their duties are. Her words might have been considered heresy, but she was ahead of her time. She bravely asserts: "I am inclined to think, when we [women] are admitted to the honor of studying Greek and Hebrew, we shall produce some various readings of the Bible a little different from those we now
have” (16). But education was continually denied women. We now know how true her words were.

Sarah knew from experience that education was denied females. Although her father was well-educated and her brothers were sent to the finest schools to study whatever they wanted, Sarah had had to secretly study her brother Thomas’ books. Even though she showed great ability, she had been denied permission to study languages and law, or anything else beyond what was traditional for a young lady. It is not surprising that she returns to this theme of the necessity for equal education for women throughout the letters. (For a biographical sketch of Sarah Grimké, see Appendix C.)

Another common, yet important, theme that almost becomes a chorus here in Letter III and is found throughout the letters is that the commands by God are to both women and men and that no distinction is made by God. “Men and women were CREATED EQUAL; they are both moral and accountable being, and whatever is right for man to do, it right for woman” (16). She accuses the Association of being contradictory in wanting to silence women. Woman is told that she is secondary to her husband; being passive will make her great in the eyes of God and man. She challenges the clergy in strong terms on common ground, using the Biblical metaphor of light and the candle under the bushel to show the contradiction. She explains that God commanded both women and men in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Men have “quenched her light” (17) rather than let women “let [their] light shine” as God commanded.

Sarah sounds outraged when she continues unveiling man’s scheme in response to the Pastoral Letter. As she continues her discussion of dominion, her use of metaphor is strong, explaining that man has:

laid aside the whip as a means to keep her [woman]
in subjugation. The war he [man] has waged against her mind, her heart, her soul, has been no less destructive to her as a moral being. How monstrous, how anti-Christian, is the doctrine that woman is to be dependent on man! Where, in all the sacred Scriptures, is this taught? Alas! She has too well learned the lesson which MAN has labored to teach her (17, emphasis added).

These words reverberate with the injustices to slaves and to women.

Sarah continues, admonishing women saying:

She has surrendered her dearest RIGHTS, and been satisfied with the privileges which man has assumed to grant her. . . . He has adorned the creature whom God gave him as a companion, with baubles and gewgaws, turned her attention to personal attractions, offered incense to her vanity, and made her the instrument of his selfish gratification, a plaything to please his eye and amuse his hours of leisure (17, emphasis added).

She is challenging women to be strong and recognize and resist man's subtle means of dominion. She continues exposing society for its contradictions and hypocrisy which teaches women:

"Rule by obedience and by submission sway," or in other words, study to be a hypocrite, pretend to submit, but gain your point, has been the code of household morality which woman has been taught. The poet has sung, in sickly strains, the loveliness of woman's dependence upon man, and now we find it re-echoed by those who profess to teach the religion of the Bible (17).

Woman's submission is like the obedient slave who will be granted "protection" and privilege if he is obedient. But that protection is really "dominion . . . exercised over them" (21). Sarah is bringing the focus to the text of the Bible, not the teachings of the clergy and men:

God says, "Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?" Man
says, depend upon me. God says, "HE will teach us of his ways." Man says, believe it not, I am to be your teacher (18).

She wants to make sure her point is clear:

This doctrine of dependence upon man is utterly at variance with the doctrine of the Bible. In that book I find nothing like the softness of woman, nor the sternness of man: both are equally commanded to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, love, meekness, gentleness, &c" (18).

She again shows that God commands all, not just man. And man does not command woman. Women are commanded to learn directly from Christ, not any other mediator, man. She gives specific reasons that woman should not depend on men to know her rights, answering the points made in the Pastoral Letter:

We are told, "the power of woman is in her dependence, flowing from a consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection." If physical weakness is alluded to, I cheerfully concede the superiority; if brute force is what my brethren are claiming, I am willing to let them have all the honor they desire; but if they mean to intimate, that mental or moral weakness belongs to woman, more than to man, I utterly disclaim the charge. Our powers of mind have been crushed, as far as man could do it, our sense of morality has been impaired by his interpretation of our duties; but nowhere does God say that he made any distinction between us, as moral and intelligent beings (18).

Typically, she packs the letter full of information, challenging every assertion made in that Pastoral Letter. She supports the right of women to public prayer and preaching with Biblical examples. She says that women should not have to lead women to the pastors for instruction. To do so

is assuming that all pastors are better qualified to give instruction than woman. This I utterly deny. I have suffered too keenly from the teaching of man, to lead any one to him for instruction. The Lord Jesus
says,—"Come unto me and learn of me." He points
his followers to no man. . . More souls have
probably been lost by going down to Egypt for help,
and by trusting in man in the early stages of
religious experience, than by any other error. . . . The
business of men and women . . . is to lead souls to
Christ, and not to Pastors for instruction (19).

She meets every challenge put to her and builds example upon example.

Her last plea of the letter emphasizes what she considers the deceptive
nature of the clergy who have drawn a distinction between the duties of men and
women which is supposed to protect women from harm:

Ah! how many of my sex feel in the dominion, thus
unrighteously exercised over them, under the gentle
appellation of protection, that what they have leaned
upon has proved a broken reed at best, and oft a
spear (21).

Protection is really a guise for dominion of man over woman. The notion of
protection as dominion becomes even more clear as Sarah Grimké develops her
metaphor of woman as slave. She had felt the restrictions throughout her life and
knew other women would feel it too.

Letter IV, "Social Intercourse of the Sexes"

She continues in Letter IV, "Social Intercourse of the Sexes" July 27, 1837
from Andover. Typically, she begins with a key word from the previous letter to
remind readers of what preceded this text and ties it in with what is to come, in
this case "the oppression which woman has suffered in every age and country
from her protector, man" (22). Rarely are a woman's talents held up for praise, but
man "addresses himself to the weakness of woman. By flattery, by an appeal to
her passions, he seeks access to her heart" (23). Sarah gives the literal translation
of helpmeet as "a helper like unto himself" and logically explains that there is no
way the relationship can be such until the artificial distinction between female
and male is lifted. Furthermore, she argues, denying women the right to enter into discussion with men is "derogatory to [both] men and women, as moral and intelligent beings" (22).

So many characteristics of women have been prescribed by tradition, Grimké explains. If woman is given respect of equality, she will be better fit to nurture her children in the ways God intended rather than continuing to pass on the false traditions of men. Women must refuse to accept that inferior role and must "claim those sacred inalienable rights, as a moral and responsible being, with which her Creator has invested her" (24). For the good of the children and future generations, Woman must be protected less and be given opportunity more.

Letter V. "Condition in Asia and Africa"

Sarah Grimké's basic arguments and Biblical proof have been set forth in these first four letters. She now continues the overall rhetorical argument with specific examples and anecdotes which show the world-wide scope of the problem of women's oppression. Focusing first on the "Condition in Asia and Africa" for Letter V, she continues with her proofs (as Aristotle called his examples), guiding the reader to note that men have taken two major avenues in usurping dominion:

They have either made slaves of the creatures whom God designed to be their companions and their coadjutors in every moral and intellectual improvement, or they have dressed them like dolls, and used them as toys to amuse their hours of recreation (27).

Sarah describes in detail how women are sold as property in many places around the world. Again, the parallel to women as slaves is obvious. In some countries
women are auctioned as wives; Sarah comments: “Two things may here be noticed; first, the value set upon personal charms, just as a handsome horse commands a high price; and second, the utter disregard which is manifested towards the feelings of woman” (28). She gives interesting examples from abroad to try to lift up women by arguing that the physical strength necessary to do the work which they are assigned proves woman’s greatness. She uses more examples of the work of women in Asia and Africa to show that “women are capable of acquiring as great physical power as men, and . . . that they have been more or less the victims of oppression and contempt” (29).

Tying in her examples with her first argument of man’s misinterpretation of the Scriptures, she says:

In looking over the condition of woman as delineated in this letter, how amply do we find the prophecy of Jehovah to Eve fulfilled, “Thy husband will rule over thee.” And yet we perceive that where the physical strength of woman is called into exercise, there is no inferiority even in this respect; she performs the labor, while man enjoys what are termed the pleasures of life (30).

Closing her letter of “proofs of my assertion, that men have always in some way regarded women as mere instruments of selfish gratification” she expresses to “My Dear Sister” (Mary Parker or any woman) “hope this sorrowful detail of the wrongs of woman will not be tedious to thee” (31). The “bonds of womanhood” in her usual closing are fastened tightly in tradition.

**Letter VI. “Women in Asia and Africa”**

Letter VI also sent from Groton, written August 15, 1837, continues to her “Dear Friend” (actually all women) about “Women in Asia and Africa.” This time she concentrates on examples of women who are found “filling the throne, and exercising the functions of royalty” (32). She lifts the ethos of women to an unmis-
takable level of equality (if not superiority) to men by using compelling examples (which her readers would know) from throughout history (predominantly in Europe) showing female heroism, authority, and intellect: Semiramis who built the city of Babylon, Nieciris who managed affairs of her husband, Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, and more. Her point is that “there is no natural inferiority in women.” It is bestowed by man. Given the opportunity Woman is equally as capable as man to achieve greatness. She explains:

Intellect is not sexed; and doubtless if woman had not almost universally been depressed and degraded, the page of history would have exhibited as many eminent statesmen and politicians among women as men (33).

She wants women to have the chance to be whatever they choose. Her own father once commented that if Sarah had been born a male, she would have made the finest juror in the land.

After elevating woman, holding up examples of what could be the norm rather than the exception, Sarah Grimke dares to reveal ways men have historically suppressed and oppressed women especially in education. To strengthen the impact she emphasizes the similarity of women to slaves:

We are much in the situation of the slave. Man has asserted and assumed authority over us. He has, by virtue of his power, deprived us of the advantages of improvement which he has lavishly bestowed upon himself, and then, after having done all he can to take from us the means of proving our equality, and our capability of mental cultivation, he throws upon us the burden of proof that God created man and woman equal, and endowed them, without any reference to sex, with intelligence and responsibilities, as rational and accountable beings (34).

She knows that most women have not had even the limited opportunities she has
had, and wants women everywhere to understand the cycle of oppression and
dominion.

She continues with fascinating examples that capture the imagination and
vividly make her point that lack of education is a major cause of oppression: "The
Mohammedan law forbids pigs, dogs, women and other impure animals to enter
a mosque; and the hour of prayers must not be proclaimed by a female, a mad-
man, a drunkard, or a decrepit person" (qtd. in Grimké 34). Sarah was quick to
see the message associated with such grouping of women with the other creatures
listed, and she wants women to see the connection with their situation. Her
metaphor becomes an argument when her facts show the parallel with slaves.
Man's usurping superiority manifests itself in the need for women around the
world from Siberia to Persia, China, and Israel to ask permission for every act
(which should actually just be her right and responsibility). She sights marriage
laws which allow divorce for the slightest provocation:

Among the Druses... a wife is often divorced on the
slightest pretext. If she ask her husband's permission
to go out and he says,—"Go," without adding "but
come back again," she is divorced... in Siberia, it is
considered a wife's duty to obey the most capricious
and unreasonable demands of her husband, without
one word of expostulation or inquiry. If her master
be dissatisfied with the most trifling particular in her
conduct, he tears the cap or veil from her head, and
this constitutes a divorce... A Persian woman,
under the dominion of the kindest master, is treated
much in the same manner as a favorite animal (35).

The result of the mistreatment is clear to Grimké. She explains:

Regarded as instruments of pleasure, they have been
degraded into mere animals, and have found their
own gratification principally in the indulgence of
personal vanity, because their external charms
procured for them, at least a temporary ascendency
over those, who held in their hands the reins of
government (36).
As meaningful life is taken away from women, their only opportunity for pleasure is ornamentation and frivolities. Her usual closing "Thine in the bonds of womanhood" has taken on a universal tone.

**Letter VII. "Condition in Some Parts of Europe and America"**

To awaken women even more to the universal degradation of women, Sarah uses Letter VII (August 22, 1837) to explore the "Condition in some parts of Europe and America." Writing from Brookline she admits the problem in America is not as bad as parts of the East, yet "We shall find little in her history which can yield us satisfaction, when we regard the high station she was designed to occupy as a moral and intellectual being" (38). But women are still considered a lower order, defined only as they are compared to husbands. She shows women how this is an outdated notion by quoting the Greek Eustathius who says "Women should be kept within doors, and there talk" (qtd. in Grimké 38). She refers to him and Thucydides as "heathen philosophers," emphasizing her original argument that the dominion over woman is not based in the Scriptures:

> We find our clerical brethren of the present day re-echoing these pagan sentiments, and endeavoring to drive woman from the field or moral labor and intellectual culture, to occupy her talents in the pursuit of those employments which will enable her to regale the palate of her lord with the delicacies of the table, and in every possible way minister to his animal comfort and gratification (38).

Woman's inferiority is merely a pagan myth. She focuses on the responsibilities of women if taken serious, telling women what they must do to elevate their own character if they truly want equality. She tells women they must also perform domestic duties along with moral duties as part of equally supporting the family with the husband:
And now that her attention is solicited to the subject of her rights, her privileges and her duties, I would entreat her to double her diligence in the performance of all her obligations as a wife, a mother, a sister, and a daughter. Let us remember that our claim to stand on perfect equality with our brethren, can only be substantiated by a scrupulous attention to our domestic duties, as well as by aiding in the great work of moral reformation (39).

Sarah wants to reach all women, not just the ones who have felt the bonds. She tells women who are content (who have good husbands, homes, and happy children) not to be complacent; it is their duty as moral beings to help others. She uses the technique of asking a direct question to make women think:

Did he [God] give her those blessings to steel her heart to the sufferings of her fellow creatures? Did he grant her the possession of husband and children, to dry up the fountains of feeling for those who know not the consolations of tenderness and reciprocal affection? Ah no! for every such blessing, God demands a grateful hear; and woman just be recreant to her duty, if she can quietly sit down in the enjoyments of her own domestic circle, and not exert herself to procure the same happiness for others (41).

Sarah Grimké is relentless but is not negative. She is merely presenting the facts—passionately—followed by a proposal of what could be if women were given the opportunity to participate equally: the power of united minds and spirits for a common good. She calls out to her “sisters”: “Assert your privileges, and to perform your duties as moral beings. Be not dismayed at the ridicule of man; it is a weapon worthy only of little minds” (42).

She does not forget the importance of pathos to move her audience and shows her skill by reporting the “noble” overworking of women, concluding: “The page of history teems with woman’s wrongs, and it is wet with woman’s tears” (45). Then she ends her letter with her strongest call to women to step out
of complacency to action:

For the sake of my degraded sex everywhere, and for the sake of my brethren, who suffer just in proportion as they place woman lower in the scale of creation than man, lower than her Creator placed her, I entreat my sisters to arise in all the majesty of moral power, in all the dignity of immortal beings, and plant themselves side by side, on the platform of human rights, with man, to whom they were designed to be companions, equals and helpers in every good word and work (45).

That strong ending calls her readers from all over the country to purpose. She tells them what she wants them to do, all the while repeating her argument of rightful equality to work for the good of all humanity. Her energy empowers her readers to stand up and fling off "the bonds of womanhood."

Letter VIII. "On the Condition of Women in the United States"

In Letter VIII (simply dated Brookline 1837) Sarah's strategy of making women aware of their universal condition becomes clearer as she brings the discussion closer to home by writing "On the Condition of Women in the United States." She brings out some of her major arguments in ways that cannot be ignored. Her first point, not surprisingly, is that the education of women, particularly of the "fashionable" class. She had grown up in that elite society, had been offered the opportunity to learn needlework, painting, singing, and enough reading and arithmetic to run a household. She was intimately acquainted with the education of women which she describes as miserably deficient; that they are taught to regard marriage as one thing needful, the only avenue to distinction; hence to attract the notice and win the attentions of men, by their external charms, is the chief business of fashionable girls (46).

She wants women to understand the subtleties of tradition which put women in a
position of submission and at the same time wants them to understand the complexities and self-perpetuating nature of the problem. Women are taught that their only goal should be marriage and are not encouraged to use their intellect. She continues:

They seldom think that men will be allured by intellectual acquirements, because they find, that where any mental superiority exists, a woman is generally shunned and regarded as stepping out of the "appropriate sphere," which, in their view, is to dress, to dance, to set out to the best possible advantage her person, to read the novels which inundate the press, and which do more to destroy her character as a rational creature, than any thing else (47).

In other classes of society in the United States, she explains "marriage is a kind of preferment" where women feel their only good use is to keep house for the husband and take care of his needs. Women continue to define themselves in terms of "the other" rather than to cultivate their minds so that they can be good companions to their husbands as God intended.

To encourage women, she quotes her brother Thomas' writing (referring to him as "A late American writer") about the importance of education for women:

Give me a host of educated, pious mothers and sisters, and I will do more to revolutionize a country, in moral and religious taste, in manners and in social virtues and intellectual cultivation, than I can possibly do in double or treble the time, with a similar host of educated men" (qtd. in Grimké 50).

Another strong confirmation of the capabilities of woman to help her "sisters" believe in themselves. Sarah also targets the inequities in wages, writing:

There is another way in which the general opinion, that women are inferior to men, is manifested, that bears with tremendous effect on the laboring class, and indeed on almost all who are obliged to earn a subsistence, whether it be by mental or physical
exertion—I allude to the disproportionate value set on the time and labor of men and women (50).

She cites examples of male earning higher pay than female teachers with the same job. She continues:

It is so with every occupation in which the sexes engage indiscriminately. As for example, in tailoring, a man has twice, or three times as much for making a waistcoat or pantaloons as a woman, although the work done by each may be equally good. In those employments which are peculiar to women, their time is estimated at only half the value of that of men. A woman who goes out to wash, works as hard in proportion as a wood sawyer, or a coal heaver, but she is not generally able to make more than half as much by a day’s work (51).

She explains the implications and results of this misguided tradition:

All these things evince the low estimation in which woman is held. There is yet another and more disastrous consequence arising from this unscriptural notion—women being educated, from earliest childhood, to regard themselves as inferior creatures, have not that self-respect which conscious equality would engender (51).

She is trying to educate women, meeting them in their own terms with examples they can readily relate to.

Sarah includes the injustices and the horrible degradation of female slaves.

She suggests that men could elevate themselves by treating men and women of all races as equal—equals would surely be more valuable to men than inferiors.

She explains how that is true:

Many women are now supported, in idleness and extravagance, by the industry of their husbands, fathers, or brothers, who are compelled to toil out their existence, at the counting house, or in the printing office, or some other laborious occupation, while the wife and daughters and sisters take no part in the support of the family, and appear to think that their sole business is to spend the hard bought
earnings of their male friends. I deeply regret such a state of things, because I believe that if women felt their responsibility, for the support of themselves, or their families, it would add strength and dignity to their characters, and teach them more true sympathy for their husbands, than is now generally manifested,—a sympathy which would be exhibited by actions as well as words (55).

Sarah is being fair and logical which gives men equal opportunity to agree with her arguments. After all she is looking out for their well-being along with that of women. She is working for the cause of all humanity as she first decreed. But tradition is hard to break and Sarah knows that. She explains further:

Our brethren may reject my doctrine, because it runs counter to common opinions, and because it wounds their pride; but I believe they would be "partakers of the benefit: resulting from the Equality of the Sexes, and would find that woman, as their equal, was unspeakable more valuable than woman as their inferior, both as a moral and an intellectual being (55).

She speaks to men—they can be beneficiaries. She tells women how they can help. Women need to take responsibility and show their value as equals. The "bonds of womanhood" seem to be getting tighter.

Letter IX. "Heroism of Women—Women in Authority"

To contrast the examples of inequity, Sarah's next letter, Letter IX from Brookline, August 25, 1837, entitled "Heroism of Women—Women in Authority," gives examples of courageous women who rose above the prescribed limits of their traditional roles to demonstrate what could be. In rebellion against the mores of society, Sarah herself had taken the courageous step of teaching a slave girl to read in spite of stiff penalties for doing so. She can, therefore, speak with greater conviction. She is a captivating storyteller. Sarah writes:

Philippa, wife of Edward III., was the principal cause
of the victory gained over the Scots at Neville Cross. In the absence of her husband, she rode among the troops, and exhorted them to "be of good courage." Jane, Countess of Mountfort, and a contemporary of Philippa, likewise possessed a great share of physical courage. The history of Joan of Arc is too familiar to need repetition. During the reign of James II. a singular instance of female intrepidity occurred in Scotland. Sir John Cochrane being condemned to be hung, his daughter twice disguised herself, and robbed the mail that brought his death warrant. In the mean time, his pardon was obtained from the King (65).

She continues with one more example closer to home as a proof of female courage, to inspire women to believe in their own value:

During the revolutionary war, the women shared in the patriotism and bravery of the men. Several individuals carried their enthusiasm so far as to enter the army, where they faced all the perils and fatigues of the camp, until the close of the war (57).

Sarah puts her reading of history books to good use (showing the importance of education for women in doing so) by telling more stories of women’s feats of great strength, intelligence, morality and leadership: the Sabine women, Hersilia, Portia, Hortensia, and many others from English and European histories. She writes,

In the wars of the Guelphs and the Ghibbelines, the emperor Conrad refused all terms of capitulation to the garrison of Winnisberg, but he granted the request of the women to pass out in safety with such of their effects as they could carry themselves. Accordingly, they issued from the besieged city, each bearing on her shoulders a husband, son, father, or brother. They passed unmolested through the enemy’s camp, which rung with acclamations of applause (58).

These testimonies resound with the cleverness and resourcefulness of woman’s
intellect. If she can inspire women with examples to follow, maybe they will start believing in themselves and in the possibilities for using their talents. She write of women in English history who previously had held important government positions which were denied them by law in Grimké's time.

She continues by reminding the readers of Elizabeth of England, Maria Theresa of Germany, Catharine of Russia, and Isabella of Spain in order "to prove that women are capable of swaying the sceptre of royalty" (59). Giving more examples she declares forthrightly:

The page of history proves incontestibly, not only that they are as well qualified to do so as men, but that there has been a comparatively greater proportion of good queens, than of good kings; women who have purchased their celebrity by individual strength of character (59).

She summarizes explaining that these examples further prove:

intellect is not sexed; that strength of mind is not sexed; and that our views about the duties of men and the duties of women, the sphere of man and the sphere of women, are mere arbitrary opinions, differing in different ages and countries, and dependant solely on the will and judgment of erring mortals (60).

Again she repeats her theme that women and men were created equal and have God-given duties and responsibilities which are not assigned by gender. They must help and support each other: "These duties and responsibilities do not attach to them as men and as women, but as parents, husbands, and wives" (60). Her conclusion opens the benefits of equality to men, and though her ending is the same refrain she has used throughout her Letters, one gets the sense that the "bonds of womanhood" can be broken.
Letter X. "Intellect of Women"

Sarah's letters get more specific suggesting that the problems shown are really the manifestations of a deeper problem. She continues her search for the truth. Again from Brookline that same August, she writes Letter X. Sarah probes the "Intellect of Woman" beginning, "It will scarcely be denied, I presume, that, as a general rule, men do not desire the improvement of women." She seems almost mocking as she continues, "There are few instances of men who are magnanimous enough to be entirely willing that women should know more than themselves." Sarah explains the reason:

As they have determined that Jehovah has placed woman on a lower platform than man, they of course wish to keep her there; and hence the noble faculties of our minds are crushed, and our reasoning powers are almost wholly uncultivated (61).

Using their minds is necessary for growth and a "cultivated" mind will make women more interesting companions for men. She faults the male writers who perpetuate the demeaning picture of women. She quotes an unnamed writer "in the time of Charles I" who wrote, "She who knoweth how to compound a pudding, is more desirable than she who skilfully compounded a poem." Then Grimké continues with her observations:

Within the last century, it has been gravely asserted that, "chemistry enough to keep the pot boiling, and geography enough to know the location of the different rooms in her house, is learning sufficient for a woman." Byron, who was too sensual to conceive of a pure and perfect companionship between the sexes, would limit a woman's library to a Bible and cookery book. I have myself heard men, who knew for themselves the value of intellectual culture, say they cared very little for a wife who could not make a pudding, and smile with contempt at the ardent thirst for knowledge exhibited by some women. (62)
Her metaphor again surfaces as a direct comparison of men’s attitudes toward women and slaves as she continues:

But all this is miserable wit and worse philosophy. It exhibits that passion for the gratification of a pampered appetite, which is beneath those who claim to be so far above us, and may justly be placed on a par with the policy of the slaveholder, who says that men will be better slaves, if they are not permitted to learn to read (62).

Sarah wants women to believe in the importance of education. She has continually built her own ethos by using her knowledge as a tool to work for the good of others. Sarah wants woman to be moved to action. When her commentary reveals the oppressive treatment of women, she is getting women to ask themselves how that can continue when women have proved over and over again that they have “talents equal to their brethren.” Women responded to these letters by packing the meeting houses where the Grimké sisters were lecturing, hoping to hear more. Women became more active in public affairs. New Female Anti-Slavery Societies began in cities throughout New England. Her words and examples were empowering women and giving them purpose and hope.

She punctuates her statement by citing other females who have been praised and have distinguished themselves for their intellect and character, not only building her own ethos by exhibiting her expansive knowledge, but lifting all woman:

Cornelia, the daughter of Scipio Africanus, was distinguished for virtue, learning and good sense. She wrote and spoke with uncommon elegance and purity. Cicero and Quinctilian [sic] bestow high praise upon her letters, and the eloquence of her children was attributed to her careful superintendence (62).

Women would not hoard their knowledge, but would gladly share it, and both
women and men would be the beneficiaries:

If the wealth of latent intellect among women was fully evolved and improved, they would rejoice to communicate to their sons all their own knowledge, and inspire them with desires to drink from the fountain of literature (63).

Getting more specific about the nature of women and knowledge she writes:

I pass over many interesting proofs of the intellectual powers of women; but I must not omit glancing at the age of chivalry, which has been compared to a golden thread running through the dark ages. During this remarkable era; women who, before this period, had been subject to every species of oppression and neglect, were suddenly elevated into deities, and worshipped with a mad fanaticism (63).

She is quick to point out that is not the kind of behavior she wants for women and gets on with her point:

It is not improbable, however, that even the absurdities of chivalry were beneficial to women, as it raised them from that extreme degradation to which they had been condemned, and prepared the way for them to be permitted to enjoy some scattered rays from the sun of science and literature. As the age of knight-errantry declined, men began to take pride in learning and women shared the advantages which this change produced (63).

Sarah tries to inspire women by using more examples from the age of chivalry to support her argument that women have special intellectual powers:

Women preached in public, supported controversies, published and defended theses, filled the chairs of philosophy and law, harangued the popes in Latin, wrote Greek and read Hebrew. Nuns wrote poetry, women of rank became divines, and young girls publicly exhorted Christian princes to take up arms for the recovery of the holy sepulchre (63).

Sarah does not just speak in generalities. She gets specific:
Hypatia, daughter of Theon of Alexandria, succeeded her father in the government of the Platonic school, and filled with reputation a seat, where many celebrated philosophers had taught. The people regarded her as an oracle, and magistrates consulted her in all important cases. No reproach was ever uttered against the perfect purity of her manners. She was unembarrassed in large assemblies of men, because their admiration was tempered with the most scrupulous respect (64).

Sarah continued, knowing that the power of her argument lay not only in her logos, but in the pathos of her inspired examples:

In the 13th century, a young lady of Bologna pronounced a Latin oration at the age of twenty-three. At twenty-six, she took the degree of doctor of laws, and began publicly to expound Justinian. At thirty, she was elevated to a professor’s chair, and taught the law to a crowd of scholars from all nations (64).

She lists others including Victoria Colonna, Isabella of Rosera, Lady Jane Grey, and Harriet Martineau—the list goes on, all stories of women who wanted to learn and used their minds. She keeps the interest of her readers by citing one more story that would inspire women everywhere to rise above their limitations:

There is a contemporary of Harriet Martineau, who has recently rendered valuable services to her country. She presented a memorial to Parliament, stating the dangerous parts of the coast, where lighthouses were needed, and at her suggestion, several were erected. She keeps a life-boat and sailors in her pay, and has been the means of saving many lives. Although she has been deprived of the use of her limbs since early childhood, yet even when the storm is unusually severe, she goes herself on the beach in her carriage, that she may be sure her men perform their duty. She understands several languages, and is now engaged in writing a work on the Northern languages of Europe (65).
Her stories engage women with real life stories and possibilities that are infinitely more exciting than those which appeared in the popular “domestic novels” of her day. She is challenging women to ask: Could the lack of more heroines in the 19th century be anything other than the result of the constraints of tradition?

Continuing in Letter X, Grimké asks what it is that makes women generally more effective when given the opportunity. In all of her examples she suggests that women have a sensitivity to the needs of others, a sharing nature, that makes them achieve greater heights than their counterparts when given the opportunity. They are not so concerned with their image, but with what they are trying to accomplish.

After telling of intellectual women in Europe and the United States, Sarah reports,

Women, even in this free republic, do not enjoy all the intellectual advantages of men, although there is a perceptible improvement within the last ten or twenty years (65).

The real enemy to truth and right is complacency—when women feel comfortable and see no need for change or improvement. She continues with a challenge to women:

I trust there is a desire awakened in my sisters for solid acquirements, which will elevate them to their “appropriate sphere,” and enable them to “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (65).

Grimké wanted to awaken women to the possibilities they have if only they will believe in their God-given right. They must first recognize their restrictions then act on their convictions in order to break out of “the bonds of womanhood.”

Letter XI. “Dress of Women”

To help awaken women to the subtleties of their oppression, Grimké
tackles the subject of the "Dress of Women" in Letter XI. She begins:

I mourn the she [woman] has lived so far below her privileges and her obligations, as a rational and accountable creature; and I ardently long to behold her occupying that sphere in which I believe her Creator designed her to move. (67)

Grimké reminds her readers that woman has been scoffed at and have not been taken seriously, and when woman tries to improve her mind, she is accused of being a pedant and is pushed out of literary and scientific arenas. Then she continues her commentary:

if she yielded to the pressure of circumstances, and sought relief from the monotony of existence by resorting to the theatre and the ball-room, by ornamenting her person with flowers and with jewels, while her mind was empty and her heart desolate; she was still the mark at which wit and satire and cruelty levelled their arrows" (67).

Women were caught in a bind if they insisted on depending on men's approval for their feeling of worth. Sarah wanted to make it clear to women how they could free themselves from such bonds. She would empower them to act. While traditional men insist on having the power and monopolizing education, lowering women in order to elevate themselves, Sarah entreats women to stop allowing themselves to be put into that bondage. She adds from her own observation:

I am constrained to believe that the passion for dress which so generally characterizes them, is one cause why there so is little of that solid improvement and weight of character which might be acquired under almost any circumstances, if the mind were not occupied by the love of admiration and the desire to gratify personal vanity (67).

Love of dress stands in the way of improvement of character according to Grimké. She follows this observation with examples from other Christian coun-
tries to back up her contention. She explains that simple dress was an important Christian belief and that the love of ornamentation was part of pagan tradition creeping in.

When the fashion of dress becomes the "all-absorbing object of interest" (69), women do seem brainless. They do not have to succumb to circumstance. She points out the contradictions which plague a woman's predicament:

Many a woman will ply her needle with ceaseless industry, to obtain money to forward a favorite benevolent scheme, while at the same time she will expend on useless articles of dress, more than treble the sum which she procures by the employment of her needle, and which she might throw into the Lord's treasury, and leave herself leisure to cultivate her mind, and to mingle among the poor and the afflicted more than she can possibly do now (70).

If women would spend more time and energy to improve their minds and do good for others they could do a great deal to elevate themselves. Putting their labor, patience, industry, and fortitude into causes ("moral enterprises") would remove much of the obstacle to equality.

Personal vanity is not a trifling subject, Grimké says; it only aids the oppression. Vanity is an obstacle of equality, moral dignity, and intellectual improvement. Sarah gets specific and admonishes women for choosing weakness, saying: "If we indulge our fancy in the chameleon caprices of fashion, or in wearing ornamental an extravagant apparel, the mind must be in no small degree engaged in the gratification of personal vanity" (70). She continues in Letter XI saying she is not against fashion if it is simple and convenient, but

I do believe one of the chief obstacles in the way of woman's elevation to the same platform of human rights, and moral dignity, and intellectual improvement, with her brother, on which God placed her, and where he designed her to act her part as an immortal creature, is her love of dress (71).
Sarah contends further that men actually encourage vanity in women as a way of keeping them oppressed. Women take on a passive role when working for acceptance by men, defining their worth in terms of the approval of men. Grimké explains:

They know that so long as we submit to be dressed like dolls, we never can rise to the stations of duty and usefulness from which they desire to exclude us; and they are willing to grant us paltry indulgences, which forward their own design of keeping us out of our appropriate sphere, while they deprive us of essential rights (71).

She has repeated key words to keep the focus on her main point of equality rather than domination and of earlier examples to bring to the foreground her belief that it is "beneath the dignity of woman to bedeck herself . . . to gratify the eye of man" (71). Women have a higher moral calling than to just please man.

Grimké again weaves secular example and Biblical reference to build her argument. She reminds women that God commanded them in Isaiah 3:16-26 "not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of her mind, that she may know what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (72). Sarah closes the letter using the power of Scripture to inspire her readers to action: "We are bound to be 'a chosen generation . . . that we should show forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light' " (73). Women have a choice. They can accept the oppression of man or use their minds to loose the "bonds of womanhood."

**Letter XII. “Legal Disabilities of Women”**

Letter XII is especially powerful because of its complexity in skillfully weaving in many effective rhetorical methods. Sarah Grimké gets down to solid reality in this letter entitled “Legal Disabilities of Women.” She provides a force-
ful transition from the subtleties of oppression to laws which render women even more helpless. To direct attention to her topic, the laws, Sarah begins:

There are few things which present greater obstacles to the improvement and elevation of woman to her appropriate sphere of usefulness and duty, than the laws which have been enacted to destroy her independence, and crush her individuality; laws which, although they are framed for her government, she has had no voice in establishing, and which rob her of some of her essential rights (74).

She has made her point clearly. Laws destroy and crush women and they have no recourse. She wants women to wake up to the reality of their condition. If women are not convinced that they are degraded (because they live a comfortable existence and are, therefore, complacent), then maybe the facts of the laws regarding women might get them to think more seriously about the inequalities and injustices. Grimké states the truth; no one can argue with her facts—the laws are solid evidence. She quotes those laws and actual incidents as examples. She points out:

Women have no political existence. With the single exception of presenting a petition to the legislative body, she is a cipher in the nation; or, of not actually so in representative governments, she is only counted, like the slaves of the South to swell the number of law-makers who form decrees for her government, with little reference to her benefit, except so far as her good may promote their own (74).

Her metaphor remains clear as she has once again sifted through the layers of patriarchal edicts to expose women as invisible individuals who count only when convenient to the whim of man. She is not alone in her assertions. She keeps her credibility high by using recognized sources. She quotes from an essay “The Cause of Freedom in our Country” written by Charles Theodore Christian Follen, a professor at Harvard University, who says, “Women, thought fully possessed of
that rational and moral nature which is the foundation of all rights, enjoys amongst us fewer legal rights than under the civil law of continental Europe” (qtd. in Grimké 75), suggesting that the United States is more backward than the lands of the ancestors (most likely a sore point to most). But Sarah says she will confine her examples to the laws in the United States since they are more pertinent.

Grimké has researched the laws and finds “these laws bear with particular rigor on married women” (75). Her proofs are specific laws. She quotes from Sir William Blackstone’s Commentaries on the Laws of England an authoritative explication of laws. In the chapter entitled “Of husband and wife” in which he says,

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being, or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything (qtd. in Grimké 76).

Sarah’s reaction is clear and her metaphor of women as slaves becomes a powerful argument as she demonstrates the similarities of the laws regarding women and those of slaves. After the Blackstone example, she directs her readers’ interpretation explaining, “Here now, the very being of a woman, like that of a slave, is absorbed in her master. All contracts made with her, like those made with slaves by their owners, are a mere nullity.” The ironic edge comes through sharply as she continues saying, “Our kind defenders have legislated away almost all our legal rights, and in the true spirit of such injustice and oppression, have kept us in ignorance of those very laws by which we are governed” (75). We hear threads of her other arguments as she skillfully layers the injustices heaped on women generation after generation until she is buried by the tradition of men.
She continues, revealing men’s manipulation and oppression of women from another angle:

They have persuaded us, that we have no right to investigate the laws, and that, if we did, we could not comprehend them; they alone are capable of understanding the mysteries of Blackstone &c (75).

Sarah Grimké has proved them wrong. Although denied permission to enter law school, Sarah studied the books of her father and brothers, demonstrating her knowledge and grasp of the subject throughout this letter. She continues to show how man uses that power for his own good, not hers. She is emphasizing her earlier point that women have been denied education and continue to be told of their mental inferiority.

Sarah explains the laws that require the husband to pay for the necessities of the wife, but nothing beyond. She describes the laws which allow the husband to spend the wife’s property (which he acquired by marriage) any way he pleases without consulting her, and follows with situations with which many women can identify:

A man may spend the property he has acquired by marriage at the ale-house, the gambling table, or in any other way that he pleases. Many instances of this kind have come to my knowledge; and women, who have brought their husbands handsome fortunes, have been left, in consequence of the wasteful and dissolute habits of their husbands, in straitened circumstances, and compelled to toil for the support of their families (76).

With this illustration of the laws and others like it which point to many instances in which the wife has been left destitute by the irresponsible actions of her husband, Grimké weaves pathos into the logos of her argument strengthening her rhetorical stance.

Sarah Grimké keeps her focus and makes it clear that she is not lifting the
responsibility from women. She believes it is as unfair for the husband to be forced to pay debts which the wife incurred before marrying as it is for the wife's property (which she brings to the marriage) to be used to pay off the husband's debts. She makes her point for equal responsibility even more clear as she continues with more examples. She quotes Blackstone again: "If the wife be injured in her person or property, she can bring no action for redress without her husband’s concurrence . . . : neither can she be sued, without making her husband a defendant" (quoted in Grimké 76). Sarah responds with a startling comparison:

This law that "a wife can bring no action," &c., is similar to the law respecting slaves. "A slave cannot bring a suit against his master, or any other person, for an injury—his master, must bring it." So if any damages are recovered for an injury committed on a wife, the husband pockets it; in the case of the slave, the master does the same (76).

Her metaphor is again solid argument, not merely embellishment. The law treats women as slaves. Sarah Grimké's voice is stronger than ever, trying to get women to listen, to understand, to react.

But Grimké is not just criticizing laws which seem to take advantage of women, but also those which take responsibility away from women. Women need to be accountable for their own actions (both good and bad). She makes legislative inequality clear when citing the law which states,

In criminal prosecutions, the wife may be indicted and punished separately, unless there be evidence of coercion from the fact that the offence was committed in the presence or by the command of her husband (qtd. in Grimké 76).

Her contempt for such laws is obvious when she continues,

It would be difficult to frame a law better calculated to destroy the responsibility of woman as moral being, or a free agent. Her husband is supposed to possess unlimited control over her; and if she can
offer the flimsy excuse that he bade her steal, she may break the eighth commandment with impunity, as far as human laws are concerned (76).

The law shows little respect for woman as an being capable of responsibility. It is ludicrous that by law women are not responsible for their own actions. She does not want women to be protected or controlled. She sees those two forces working together against women to rob her of her dignity. She wants them to be accepted as equal responsible intelligent beings, capable of making decisions and strong enough to take the consequences.

Sarah Grimké consistently drives forth her central theme which she started at the beginning of her series: Woman is equal to man—equally accountable to God for her actions and equally charged with duties to fulfill. Her purpose in giving these laws in depth is to show how laws run counter to God’s creation of equal moral beings. Grimké knows morality cannot be legislated—neither can attitudes and values. These can only be changed through rhetorical means when there is a meeting of the minds with two parties working for the common good of humankind.

Grimké continues presenting her good reasons, pointing out that the laws are not consistent. She quotes Blackstone again: “Our law, in general, considers man and wife as one person; yet there are some instances in which she is separately considered, as inferior to him and acting by his compulsion” (qtd. in Grimké 77). Again she quickly gets to the heart of the matter saying, “Such a law speaks volumes of the abuse of that power which men have vested in their own hands” (77). Men have not only usurped the power and dominion, but continue making themselves powerful by making laws which encourage inequality and the dependence of women.

Grimké wants women to take more pride in themselves, by recognizing
themselves as worthy of equality. She gives examples of abuses of that man-made power and admonishes:

   Women should certainly know the laws by which they are governed, and from which they frequently suffer; yet they are kept in ignorance, nearly as profound, of the legal rights, and of the legislative enactments which are to regulate their actions, as slaves (78).

She makes particular note of some laws which have been changed concerning domestic chastisement, pointing out that though the law had been changed, the acts are still carried on with women being controlled by men, for example,

   women are not infrequently restrained of the liberty of going to places of worship by irreligious husbands, and of doing many other things about which, as moral and responsible beings, they should be the sole judges (78).

She is getting back to her original argument once again that women be recognized as equal in their duty to God.

   Grimké emphasizes the degrading nature of the laws by relating an anecdote about a children’s meeting in which

   the lecturer told them [the children] that God had created four orders of beings with which he had made us acquainted through the Bible. The first was angels, the second was man, the third beasts; and now, children, what is the fourth: After a pause, several girls replied, “WOMEN” (79).

What a sad commentary on life, on what girls were taught (or what they gained as simple truth from observation and experience). Either way, women it seems were considered the lowest order of beings. Sarah Grimké wanted to change that, to empower women.

   The appropriateness of Grimké’s letter title “Legal Disabilities” becomes apparent. Being born female is a defect, a handicap, a disability. She emphasizes
the reality of this condition with further examples. Again quoting from
Blackstone, she cites another law: "A woman's personal property by marriage
becomes absolutely [h]er husband's, which, at his death, he may leave entirely
away from her" (qtd. in Grimké 79). The woman has no control over her own life;
she becomes an inferior with no rights. Sarah knows of instances where the truth
of that is painfully real, including the experience of her own mother. Sarah might
even have had her mother's situation in mind when she wrote this, being re-
mined that at the time of her father's death, all property was given to the sons
(automatically excluding Sarah and her sisters), with the use of the house and
furnishings available to her mother as long as she needed them.

She continues the commentary further explaining the realities: Any earn-
ings a wife has from her own initiative and hard work is automatically her
husband's, including property or furnishings. Grimké gives interesting examples
of cases which show the abuse of power by men, laws which essentially affirm
that a woman is nothing; her rights as a person are taken away.

Sarah Grimké wants woman to be aware of the laws which control her life,
especially those dealing with marriage. She has seen strong women surprised by
laws and left helpless when they had worked hard for "a pittance" of their own,
which were appropriated completely by the husband. Grimké wants to see hus-
bands and wives more equal, not one controlled by the other. She says almost
with resignation,

The relation of husband and wife is too near and
sacred to admit of secrecy about money matters,
unless positive necessity demands it; and I can see no
excuse for any woman entering into a marriage
engagement with a design to keep her husband
ignorant that she was possessed of property. If she
was unwilling to give up her property to his
disposal, she had infinitely better have remained
single (90).
By explicating these laws, Sarah has been trying to explain that a marriage relationship should be based on trust, not defined by laws which support abuses, just as equality must be a change in belief and attitude; it cannot be forcibly changed by legislation. Eight months after this letter, when Angelina married Theodore Weld, Angelina surrendered her small inheritance to help support Weld's political career. When Sarah moved in with them, she voluntarily turned over her portion toward the common good.

Sarah Grimké is relentless and particularly thorough in her research of the domestic laws which parallel slave laws, creating living metaphor as fact. Again quoting from Blackstone, she cites the following entry: "All that a slave possesses belongs to his master; he possesses nothing of his own, except what his master chooses he should possess" (qtd. in Grimké 80). She follows that with more of Blackstone's explication:

The husband is absolutely master of the profits of the wife's lands during the coverture [marriage], and if he has had a living child, and survives the wife, he retains the whole of those lands, if they are estates of inheritance, during his life; but the wife is entitled only to one third if she survives, out of the husband's estates of inheritance (qtd. in Grimké 80).

The parallels are unmistakable. Her metaphor is once again grounded in truth. Sarah wants women to feel the injustice and oppression of legislation which affords women few rights. By describing a variety of circumstances, Grimké allows women multiple opportunities to identify with the plight of other women. They are not alone and do not need to hide in shame of the injustices they might feel.

Grimké concludes with an interesting addition to the property laws which was sure to catch attention with an all too familiar echo. She reports from Blackstone: "With regard to the property of women, there is taxation without
representation; for they pay taxes without having the liberty of voting for representatives” (qtd. in Grimké 80), followed by a reminder that that very issue was a cause of the Revolutionary War,

\[
\text{a grievance so heavy, that it was thought necessary to purchase exemption from it at an immense expense of blood and treasure, yet the daughters of New England, as well as of all the other States of this free Republic, are suffering a similar injustice (81).}
\]

This powerful reminder of injustice, packed with pathos, is evidence of Grimké’s craft as a rhetor. She brings up these varied points as if to insure that she touch most of her readers in some way, to make them react, finally to act.

In summary of her letter “Legal Disabilities of Women,” she points out that the laws vary slightly in different states (some actually giving half the property to the wife), but that

\[
\text{the laws which have generally been adopted in the United States, for the government of women, have been framed almost entirely for the exclusive benefit of men, and with a design to oppress women, by depriving them of all control over their property, is too manifest to be denied (81).}
\]

Grimké is not putting down all men, conceding that some are “liberal and enlightened” and have shown great generosity above the law. But she points out that is more the exception saying,

\[
\text{I have known more instances of “the friend and helper of many years, being portioned off like a salaried domestic” instead of having a comfortable independence secured to her, while the children [sons] were amply provided for (82).}
\]

Sarah Grimké will not sit back and let these injustices continue. She urges the repeal of “these unjust and unequal laws” and for men to “restore to women those rights which have been wrested from her” (82). Again her powerful rhetori-
Such laws approximate too nearly to the laws enacted by slaveholders for the government of their slaves, and must tend to debase and depress the mind of that being, whom God created as a help meet for man, or "helper like unto himself," and designed to be his equal and his companion (Grimké 82).

The intent of her last citation cannot be mistaken and she continues her assault on inequities in law. Quoting Louisiana civil code, she writes, "A slave . . . is one who is in the power of a master, to whom he belongs. He can possess nothing, nor acquire anything, but what must belong to his master" (quoted in Grimké 82). She says she is not presuming to claim that free women suffer as much as the slave, but the result of the laws of each make both slave and women inferior by law, and this leaves its scars. Men make the laws and execute them while women and slaves remain powerless.

Her closing remarks in which she voices hope for reformation, that "women may be relieved from some of their legal disabilities" (83) reminds the reader that any feeling of being a lesser individual or not quite whole, in fact, disabled, is only artificially imposed by law, not a God-given birthright, which tie all females "in the bonds of womanhood."

Letter XIII. "Relation of Husband and Wife"

After detailing the relationship of men and women in the law in Letter XII, Grimké takes the arguments one step further in her next letter. The discussion in Letter XIII, "Relation of Husband and Wife," focuses on roles according to Biblical text. Sarah does not claim to be an expert and recognizes that some may question her qualifications since she is single, but she keeps her ethos strong by bring-
ing to the discussion her knowledge of the Bible and of human nature, and her observation about the dominion of man over woman.

Once again starting on common ground, a point of agreement, Sarah begins with a clear, firm statement of belief that God "instituted marriage as part of paradisaical happiness: it was divine ordination, not a civil contract" (84). She reaffirms her stand of equality which she had developed early in this series of letters. Eve was also in God’s image

\[
\text{crowned with glory and honor, and placed in her hand, as well as in his, the sceptre of dominion over the whole lower creation. Where there was perfect equality, and the same ability to receive and comprehend divine truth, and to obey divine injunctions, there could be no superiority” (85)}
\]

crowned with glory and honor, and placed in her hand, as well as in his, the sceptre of dominion over the whole lower creation. Where there was perfect equality, and the same ability to receive and comprehend divine truth, and to obey divine injunctions, there could be no superiority” (85)

thus emphasizing the Biblical foundation of equality. Her well-chosen words evoke imagery which elevate women to royal stature, deserving of equal status with men.

Continuing her contrast to the previous legislative analysis of equality, she refers again to the usual argument of man’s dominion over woman and reminds the reader how misinterpretations probable occurred, repeating the main point she made in Letter II. She also reminds readers of her previous examples of man’s “unlimited and brutal power” (85), reminiscent of the man/slave relationship of her continuing metaphor.

Sarah demonstrates the corruption of the intent of marriage “which was designed by God to increase the happiness of woman as well as man, often proves the means of lessening her comfort, and degrading her into the mere machine of another’s convenience and pleasure” (86). The reality is quite different from that original intent. She continues:

Women, instead of being elevated by her union with man, which might be expected from an alliance with a superior being, is in reality lowered. She generally
loses her individuality, her independent character, her moral being. She becomes absorbed into him, and henceforth is looked at, and acts through the medium of her husband (86).

Women are not made whole or equal by the union with man; they become less than they were—a shadow of their husbands at best.

Grimké moves to specific examples demonstrating further that the problem is not always visible in the wealthy classes where the women are comfortable, but “there is a vast amount of secret suffering endured, from the forced submission of women to the opinions and whims of their husbands” (86). Women are taught to be deceptive—to submit so they will eventually get their own way (a practice she described in detail in a previous chapter). She lets women know she understands—she was taught the same when she was young. But Grimké warns women not to let their husbands make decisions for them; they must think and act for themselves, especially in moral and religious subjects. Grimké firmly states her primary contention that men and women “are standing on the same platform of human rights, are equally under the government of God, and accountable to him, and him alone” (87). As a matter of fact, she is “astonished and grieved at the servitude of women” (87). She has noticed innumerable times when wives refuse to get involved with a cause because their husbands disapproves. She admonishes them for using their husbands as “a savior and king” over Christ as her “Ruler and Redeemer,” using their husband’s disapproval as a “convenient pretext to shield themselves from the performance of duty; but there are others, who, under a mistaken view of their obligations as wives, submit consciously to this species of oppression” (88, emphasis added). She wants all women to understand and lets no one off the hook.

The elite are not the only ones affected. All women are bound in the same predicament. Grimké unites women even more when she includes all classes of
women in her arguments. She reveals the conditions of the poorer classes—women who are deprived of the means of intellectual culture, and of the opportunity of exercising their judgment, on many moral subjects of deep interest and of vital importance. . . But women, among the lowest classes of society, so far as my observation has extended, suffer intensely from the brutality of their husbands” (88).

The problem is intellectual and physical. She describes the conditions she saw during her work to help the poor:

Duty as well as inclination has led me, for many years, into the abodes of poverty and sorrow, and I have been amazed at the treatment which women receive at the hands of those, who arrogate to themselves the epithet of protectors. Brute force, the law of violence, rules to a great extent in the poor man’s domicil; and woman is little more than his drudge. (88)

She wants women to feel their common condition and get of complacency by caring about the plight of others (their responsibility as moral beings). Using examples is an effective means of letting women feel their common plight. In both cases, wealthy or poor, Sarah explains firmly that in spite of all the other evils, the real cause of woman’s degradation and suffering in married life is to be found in the erroneous notion of her inferiority to man; and never will she be rightly regarded by herself, or others, until this opinion, so derogatory to the wisdom and mercy of God, is exploded (89).

Sarah Grimké wants women to see the truth and does her best to explode the old myths. She reveals the facts of the situation and argues until her audience must believe that they have the power to change the way things are—that they must change because the tradition of man’s domination is not just false, it is an affront
to God. As she continues, her vivid words are charged with energy and conviction that change will occur when “woman arises in all the majesty of her womanhood, to claim those rights which are inseparable from her existence as an immortal, intelligent and responsible being” (89). In the echoes of the original argument, Sarah is empowering women to claim their birthright of “immortal, intellectual and responsible being[s]” (89).

Having secured her audience’s attention, she presses on with proofs of God’s intention of equality of woman and man. She cites the Ten Commandments which include “Honor thy father and thy mother . . . but no direction was given to woman to obey her husband: both are commanded to have no other God but Jehovah, and not to bow down, or serve any other” (89). As she does in each letter, Grimké packs Letter XIII full of examples. She includes secular examples to contrast with the “truth” she has extracted from the Scriptures, telling about a belief told her by a married man:

“In my opinion,” said he, “the greatest excellence to which a married woman can attain, is to worship her husband.” He was a professor of religion—his wife a lovely and intelligent woman. He only spoke our what thousands think and act (90).

She explains another way the mistaken notion of man’s dominions became firmly fixed in tradition. Sarah’s opinion of John Milton is clear as she continues with a possible explanation of the man’s assertion:

Women are indebted to Milton for giving to this false notion, “confirmation strong as proof of holy writ.” His Eve is embellished with every personal grace, to gratify the eye of her admiring husband; but he seems to have furnished the mother of mankind with just intelligence enough to comprehend her supposed inferiority to Adam, and to yield unresisting submission to her lord and master” (90, emphasis added).
She chooses her words carefully and addresses major arguments of her day. She wants women to know they need to think for themselves. They cannot just accept what man says. She presents the words of Milton’s Eve to Adam:

My author and disposer, what thou bidst,  
Unargued I obey; so God ordains—  
God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more,  
Is woman’s happiest knowledge and her praise. (qtd. in Grimké 90).

After this passage, Sarah immediately states her strong disclaimer: “This much admired sentimental nonsense is fraught with absurdity and wickedness. If it were true, the commandment of Jehovah should have run thus: Man shall have no other gods before ME, and woman shall have no other Gods before MAN” (90) Sarah knows her literature and her Bible and uses both strategically well. Even if her audience is not as familiar with her texts as she is, her ethos encourages trust and acceptance. She is intelligent, and she recognizes their needs.

Sarah next looks to the New Testament passages, explaining:

The principal support of the dogma of woman’s inferiority, and consequent submission to her husband, is found in some passages of Paul’s epistles. I shall proceed to examine those passages, premising 1st, that the antiquity of the opinions based on the false construction of those passages, has no weight with me; They are the opinions of interested judges, and I have no particular reverence for them, merely because they have been regarded with veneration from generation to generation (91).

Man’s interpretation perpetuated the idea of inferiority. She points out that even some men unintentionally speak of women as inferior. But the harm is still as great. Tradition is no reason to perpetuate myths. She continues:

So far from this being the case, I examine any opinions of centuries standing, with as much freedom, and investigate them with as much care, as if they were of yesterday. I was educated to think for
myself, and it is a privilege I shall always claim to exercise (91).

She wants her readers to know they should think and reason too, not just accept what others tell them. As usual, Grimké gets specific in her arguments. She points out passages which are often used to show that a wife should be subservient; she explains how these are taken out of context and shows how that warps the intent and meaning. Husbands and wives are equally charged with duty to one another (another echo of her main argument). She deals with understanding the intent of the scripture in keeping with her broader theme of dignity of all individuals, female or male, black or white.

Sarah’s explanation in opposition of the claim that man was actually meant to govern his wife as Christ governs the church gets bogged down in a series of syllogisms, tangled and complicated, but she winds her way out with a final explanation which ties her logic to her original argument of equal responsibility:

Now if God ordained man the governor of woman, he must be able to save her, and to answer in her stead for all those sins which she commits by his direction. Awful responsibility. Do husbands feel able and willing to bear it? And what becomes of the solemn affirmation of Jehovah? “Hear this, all ye people, give ear all ye inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor.” “None can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him, for the redemption of the soul is precious, and man cannot accomplish it”—French Bible (97).

It has been difficult and complicated to wade through the arguments and implications of the generations of tradition, like a web entangling an innocent creature. The “bonds of womanhood” of her closing seem covered with the sticky goop of tradition.

Letter XIV. “Ministry of Women”
While Letter XIII dealt mostly with the bonds which held woman down, Letter XIV, "Ministry of Women" (also written in September 1837) focuses on woman's positive nature, elevating woman, empowering her with courage to do the good work which God intended. She repeats her main principle that man and woman were created equal, and endowed by their beneficent Creator with the same intellectual powers and the same moral responsibilities, and that consequently whatever is morally right for a man to do, is morally right for a woman to do (98).

Then she makes the empowering connection, the point of this letter: "It follows as a necessary corollary, that if it is the duty of man to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, it is the duty also of woman" (98). Strategically, she acknowledges that her ideas have opposition from both sexes. She also recognizes that some Christian denominations permit women to preach, but, she says, "I know of no religious body, who entertain the Scripture doctrine of the perfect equality of man and woman, which is the fundamental principle of my argument in favor of the ministry of women" (98). Permitting women to perform selected duties is not true equality; it merely placates women and diverts attention from the inequalities. It implies a superior granting permission to a subordinate or to an inferior being.

Truth will prevail, Grimké says, tying all her arguments together. She voices her conviction:

I am persuaded that woman is not filling the high and holy station which God allotted to her, and that in consequence of her having been driven from her "appropriate sphere," both herself and her brethren have suffered an infinity of evils (99).

It is to the benefit of both women and men to remedy the condition of inequality.

By examining Old Testament passages, Grimké differentiates between
priests and priestesses, and prophetesses and prophets, in order to prove woman's traditional predicament:

If Christian ministers are, as I apprehend, successors of the prophets, and not of the priests, then of course, women are now called to that office as well as men, because God has no where withdrawn from them the privilege of doing what is the great business of preachers, viz. to point the penitent sinner to the Redeemer (102).

She anticipates the opposition who ask, if women are ordained by God, why are not more women visible in the scripture? To this query she responds:

I do not intend to assign a reason, but I think one may readily be found in the fact, that from the days of Eve to the present time, the aim of man has been to crush her. He has accomplished this work in various ways; sometimes by brute force, sometimes by making her subservient to his worst passions, sometimes by treating her as a doll, and while he excluded from her mind the light of knowledge, decked her person with gewgaws and frippery which he scorned for himself, thus endeavoring to render her like unto a painted sepulchre (102).

A strong pronouncement. Here she has summarized her main points of the oppression of women, but the power of the last line cannot be ignored. Her strong words "to render her like unto a painted sepulchre" create a powerful image. Woman is decorated, a container void of life. She has been entombed by the generations of oppression.

Woman has not been allowed to carry out the work which is her responsibility. Many women have felt the call (to the ministry), Grimké reports, "but have not dared to open their lips, and have endured all the intensity of suffering, produced by disobedience to God, rather than encounter heartless ridicule and injurious suspicions" (103). To give them courage, Grimké extolls women, suggesting their superiority: "I rejoice that we have been the oppressed, rather than
the oppressors" (103). She continues with reasons for her unusual stand. Woman should not let the oppression be a defeat, but a strengthening experience. Sarah explains:

God thus prepared his people for deliverance from outward bondage; and I hope our sorrows have prepared us to fulfil our high and holy duties, whether public or private, with humility and meekness; and that suffering has imparted fortitude to endure trials, which assuredly await us in the attempt to sunder those chains with which man has bound us, galling to the spirit, though unseen by the eye (103).

The metaphor of slavery emerges strongly again. Woman's inner strength is her greatness, her defense against the pain of bondage, the hope of freedom. After encouraging women in this way, she retraces some major arguments from throughout the Letters: God sees all people as equal, women and men can both speak "to edification, exhortation, and comfort" (103). She goes on the prove "that women, under the Christian dispensation, were anointed of the Holy Ghost to preach, or prophecy" (104). She gives an example of Anna from the New Testament, returning to the primary text for more proofs, discussing Pentecost when the Holy Spirit filled the people:

Peter says, in reference to this miracle, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel. And it shall come to pass in the last days, said God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy—and on my servants and on my hand-maidens, I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy." There is not the least intimation that this was a spasmodic influence which was soon to cease. The men and women are classed together; and if the power to preach the gospel was a supernatural and short-lived impulse in women, then it was equally so in men (105).

In all things, women and men are equal. If women must prove their right to
preach, then so must men. And Sarah Grimké is eager and ready to enter into
discussion with any of them. She does not just depend on her own ideas alone to
expound on points which call for assent. She consults other Biblical commentary
and challenges and explains each view. She looks at ecclesiastical history and the
place of women in the church. She traces patriarchal tradition of women who
have been kept from participating as ministers. Again a misinterpretation sur-
faces; she explains the tradition of women keeping silence in the churches as
meaning they should not disrupt with many questions

or that the directions given to women, not to speak,
or to teach in the congregations, had reference to
some local and peculiar customs, which were then
common in religious assemblies, and which the
apostle thought inconsistent with the purpose for
which they were met together (114).

She has given several possible answers which allow men to admit their mistake
without injuring their pride, showing sensitivity to her audience to keep them
from being completely defensive.

The letter closes: “The subject [ministry of women] is one of vital impor-
tance. That it may claim the calm and prayerful attention of Christians, is the
desire of Thine in the bonds of womanhood” (114). Sarah had provided detailed
information for people to consider—to make the people think, not passively
accept the way things are and have always been. It is important to Sarah that
everyone pay attention and hear the truth themselves that “the bonds of woman-
hood” might be broken forever.

Letter XV. “Man Equally Guilty with Woman in the Fall”

Sarah Grimké comes full circle with her final letter of her series, Letter XV,
“Man Equally Guilty with Woman in the Fall.” Written from Uxbridge, October
20, 1837, it is a compelling piece which holds the essence of her arguments which
she had developed throughout her Letters. Her usual salutation, “My Dear Sister” is accepted now as more than to Mary Parker, President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society—is, in fact any woman, all women. Sarah begins the letter with a narrative which engages the reader immediately:

It is said that “modern Jewish women light a lamp every Friday evening, half and hour before sunset, which is the beginning of their Sabbath, in remembrance of their original mother, who first extinguished the lamp of righteousness,—to remind them of their obligation to rekindle it” (115).

It is a metaphor which she explains while establishing common ground, a common belief with good reasons in the hope of assent:

I am one of those who always admit, to its fullest extent, the popular charge, that woman brought sin into the world. I accept it as a powerful reason, why woman is bound to labor with double diligence, for the regeneration of that world she has been instrumental in ruining (115).

Grimké asserts woman is willing to fulfill her responsibility. Then she re-establishes the critical question which is her main concern:

But although I do not repel the imputation, I shall! [sic] notice some passages in the sacred Scriptures, where this transaction is mentioned, which prove, I think, the identity and equality of man and woman, and that there is no difference in their guilt in the view of that God who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins of the children of men (115).

She backs this up with Scripture repeating the proofs set forth in the previous letters: the circumstance of the fall, Eve “beguiled . . . through [the serpent’s] subtlety,” the subtleties of oppression. She constructs her final set of arguments after she reminds them her proof is in the Scriptures, the Word, are the truth.

Grimké gives credit to her reader’s ability to think and reason on the
subject of Adam's equal responsibility, telling the story of Eve and Adam, using

New Testament text then explaining it:

Again, 1st Tim. 2: 14—"Adam was not deceived; but
the woman being deceived, was in the transgression." Now, whether the fact, that Eve was beguiled and
deceived, is a proof that her crime was of deeper dye
than Adam's, who was not deceived, but was fully
aware of the consequences of sharing in her
transgression, I shall leave the candid reader to
determine (116).

Sarah Grimké's bridge to her intent is ingenious:

My present object is to show, that, as woman is
charged with all the sin that exists in the world, it is
her solemn duty to labor for its extinction; and that
this she can never do effectually and extensively,
until her mind is disenthralled of those shackles
which have been riveted upon her by a "corrupt
public opinion, and a perverted interpretation of the holy
Scriptures" (116).

Once more her language is pulsating with the image of woman as slave, the
metaphor working its way into the argument as subtilely as the oppression of
women has worked its way into women's lives. Since sin is considered the fault
of woman, she should be allowed to labor for its obliteration. Woman's duty is to
work for the good of all humanity, but she is prevented from her duty to God by
the bonds of womanhood.

But Grimké does not stop on a negative note, bemoaning woman's restric-
tions; she lays out requirements for a woman's effectiveness:

Woman must feel that she is the equal, and is
designed to be the fellow laborer of her brother, or
she will be studying to find out the imaginary line
which separates the sexes, and divides the duties of
men and women into two distinct classes, a
separation not even hinted at in the Bible, where we
are expressly told, "there is neither male nor female,
for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (116).
Her own words are charged with conviction and energy, but she does not depend on herself as sole authority. She adds others’ writing to her own:

My views on this subject are so much better embodied in the language of a living author than I can express them, that I quote the passage entire:

"Woman’s rights and man’s rights are both contained in the same charter, and held by the same tenure. All rights spring out of the moral nature: they are both the root and the offspring of responsibilities; ..."

(117).

Again this is a restating of one of her main arguments: Morality cannot be legislated. Rights come from responsibility and are necessary for responsibilities to be fulfilled.

There is no reason for distinction between female and male—both are equally commanded and admonished (as she points out in Scripture). Sarah makes her main point and explains it by continuing to quote her unnamed “living author”:

"I know nothing of man’s rights, or woman’s rights; human rights are all that I recognise. The doctrine, that the sex of the body presides over and administers upon the rights and responsibilities of the moral, immortal nature, is to my mind a doctrine kindred to blasphemy, when seen in its intrinsic nature. It breaks up utterly the relations of the two natures, and reverses their functions; exalting the animal nature into a monarch, and humbling the moral into a slave; making the former a proprietor, and the latter its property” (117)

These arguments parallel hers so well that it is difficult to refute her claims. But woman must overcome tradition: women feel inferior because that is what they have been taught. She continues, gradually giving more and more intensity to her arguments, empowering woman until they are willing to believe in themselves.
She begins by describing the reasons and consequences of being mistaught, following each statement with details. She tells what is necessary to change the oppressed condition of woman:

To perform our duties, we must comprehend our rights and responsibilities; and it is because we do not understand, that we now fall so far short in the discharge of our obligations. Unaccustomed to think for ourselves, and to search the sacred volume, to see how far we are living up to the design of Jehovah in our creation, we have rested satisfied with the sphere marked out for us by man, never detecting the fallacy of that reasoning which forbids woman to exercise some of her noblest faculties, and stamps with the reproach of indelicacy those actions by which women were formerly dignified and exalted in the church (118).

Women must be educated and use their intelligence.

Grimké’s insistence that context is important in interpretation may be a message to her readers as well about understanding her work: we should look at her context and intent. When text is taken out of context, misinterpretation can result—she has given many examples throughout her letters. Here she highlights a few which have had grave consequences for women. She begins:

I should not mention this subject again, if it were not to point out to my sisters what seems to me an irresistible conclusion from the literal interpretation of St. Paul, without reference to the context, and the peculiar circumstances and abuses which drew forth the expressions, “I suffer not a woman to teach”—”Let your women keep silence in the church” (118).

She follows with explanation and example of the absurdities of such interpretations which are made by men for their own benefit. But Sarah shows that the benefit of recognizing woman’s equality actually comes with the true interpretation which would allow women “to be on an equality with them in the highest and most important trust ever committed to man, namely, the ministry of the
word" (119). Throughout this last letter she sets forth her premise then illustrates the implications. She explains possible reasons for the opposition's view:

It is manifest, that if women were permitted to be ministers of the gospel, as they unquestionably were in the primitive ages of the Christian church, it would interfere materially with the present organized system of spiritual power and ecclesiastical authority, which is now vested solely in the hands of men. It would either show that all the paraphernalia of theological seminaries, &c. &c. to prepare men to become evangelists, is wholly unnecessary, or it would create a necessity for similar institutions in order to prepare women for the same office; and this would be an encroachment on that learning, which our kind brethren have so ungenerously monopolized (119).

Each time their argument is refuted by the logic and strength of the greater goal of her stand: all humanity must work for the good of humankind.

Man's power and authority is threatened by equality. But why should they not embrace the doubled effort for good if women were allowed to help? Now she puts the challenge to her readers to think and choose:

I do not ask any one to believe my statements, or adopt my conclusions, because they are mine; but I do earnestly entreat my sisters to lay aside their prejudices, and examine these subjects for themselves, regardless of the "traditions of men," because they are intimately connected with their duty and their usefulness in the present important crisis (119).

Sarah had described the condition throughout the Letters; now she is presenting her plan. Women must claim independence and use their intellects. How could anyone want the present inequities to continue? She reminds women there will always be difficulties. She admits many women are working within the church now, but as she discussed in Letter XIV, they are doing their tasks in subserviency to men, who guide our labors, and are often the recipients of those benefits of education we
toil to confer, and which we rejoice they can enjoy, although it is their mandate which deprives us of the same advantages (119).

But women get no benefits. They are praised but still are not recognized as equal.

She describes the lack of respect for woman’s efforts:

The immense usefulness and the vast influence of woman have been eulogized and called into exercise, and many a blessing has been lavished upon us, and many a prayer put up for us, because we have labored by day and by night to clothe and feed and educate young men, whilst our own bodies sometimes suffer for want of comfortable garments, and our minds are left in almost utter destitution of that improvement which we are toiling to bestow upon the brethren (120).

But women need to be given the same privileges of education and ministry which they work to give young men. She subtly suggests rebellion, or at least a “what if” to raise their consciousness. They have an alternative. They have a choice which Grimké wants them to understand. If women were to stop supporting men and give

where they are more needed, to the advancement of their own sex in useful learning, the next generation might furnish sufficient proof, that in intelligence and ability to master the whole circle of sciences, woman is not inferior to man (120).

Grimké sees no logic in men not educating women. In fact, she logically proposes:

I should suppose it would be more in character with “The generous promptings of chivalry, and the poetry of romantic gallantry,” for which Catherine E. Beecher gives them credit, for them to form societies to educate their sisters, seeing our inferior capacities require more cultivation to bring them into use, and qualify us to be helps meet for them (121).

She explains how it would only be fair if men would now help women get an
education after women have supported men for so long. But if that were not to happen, each should help her own. Her wit and logic are equally sharp. She is quick to point out benefits for her ideas:

If the minds of women were enlightened and improved, the domestic circle would be more frequently refreshed by intelligent conversation, a means of edification now deplorably neglected, for want of that cultivation which these intellectual advantages would confer (121).

Men and all humanity would benefit from the education and freedom of women.

Having reviewed and expounded on her main points Grimké emphasizes woman’s responsibilities in a separate section of her letter: Duties of Women.

Sarah’s plan for equality gets more specific: Woman must be ready to prepare themselves for more extensive usefulness, by making use of those religious and literary privileges and advantages that are within their reach, if they will only stretch out their hands and possess them. By doing this, they will become better acquainted with their rights as moral beings, and with their responsibilities growing out of those rights: they will regard themselves, as they really are, FREE AGENTS, immortal beings, amenable to no tribunal but that of Jehovah, and bound not to submit to any restriction imposed for selfish purposes, or to gratify that love of power which has reigned in the heart of man from Adam down to the present time (121).

Sarah designs a positive plan of action for women: know your rights; accept those rights (as they are already theirs); fulfill responsibilities. It is in woman’s power to lift herself up. A woman has rights which she already possesses, given to her at her creation. The responsibilities come in response to the rights. There is no question what Grimké’s main point is repeated here: both women and men are equal in those rights as moral beings, with no distinction. If woman was edu-
cated, she could see that simple truths which keep her from fulfilling God’s purpose.

She admonishes both women and men that the distinctions are artificial ones: “WHATSOEVER IT IS MORALLY RIGHT FOR A MAN TO DO, IT IS MORALLY RIGHT FOR A WOMAN TO DO” (122). Then she repeats her earlier challenge to women “that confusion must exist in the moral world, until women takes her stand on the same platform with man, and feels that she is clothed by her Maker with the same rights, and, of course, that upon her devolve the same duties” (123). Women can fulfill the duties in a variety of ways. The important thing is not how they respond, but that they do act. The time is short, says Grimké:

The sign of the times give portentous evidence, that a day of deep trial is approaching; and I urge them, by every consideration of a Savior’s dying love, by the millions of heathen in our midst, by the sufferings of woman in almost every portion of the world, by the fearful ravages which slavery, intemperance, licentiousness and other iniquities are making of the happiness of our fellow creatures, to come to the rescue of a ruined world, and to be found co-workers with Jesus Christ (123).

There is an earnestness, an urgency in her tone. Picking up the pace and intensity of her letter again, she drives to the end of her series, creating vivid images with her words as she moves through this last letter. Sarah Grimké builds her arguments quickly: problem, solution, implication again and again, reviewing the arguments set forth throughout the Letters.

Get involved, be active. She implores women with a verse [author unidentified]:

Ho! to the rescue, ho!
Up every one that feels —
Tis a sad and fearful cry of woe
From a guilty world that steals.
Hark! hark! how the horror rolls,
Whence can this anguish be?
Tis the groan of a trammel’d people’s souls,
Now bursting to be free (123).

She makes it clear she is not recruiting women for abolition, but just wants to free women to choose whatever cause they might want, to fulfill their responsibilities as a moral beings. The ministers should not have the power to assign rights and responsibilities. Their motives must be pure. She shows her dissatisfaction with the clergy, reporting, “We are beginning to understand that they are but men, and that their station should not shield them from merited reproof” (125). But Sarah warns women not to join a cause unless they truly feel called or compelled. They should not just sign up to satisfy their consciences.

Sarah encourages women to grasp onto their abilities and use them without depending on men when they could do better for themselves. She illustrates her point, writing:

I have blushed for my sex when I have heard of their entreating ministers to attend their associations, and open them with prayer. The idea is inconceivable to me, that Christian women can be engaged in doing God’s work, and yet cannot ask his blessing on their efforts, except through the lips of a man (125).

She explains with further example:

I have known a whole town scoured to obtain a minister to open a female meeting, and their refusal to do so spoken of as quite a misfortune. Now, I am glad that my sisters have been sometimes compelled to act for themselves: it is exactly what they need to strengthen them, and prepare them to act independently. And to say the truth, there is something really ludicrous in seeing a minister enter the meeting, open it with prayer, and then take his departure (125).

She urges their independence. She knows it is up to them to begin to work
through the fetters of bondage. Sarah wants to help all who are oppressed lift themselves up and feel their freedom.

She engages her reader with her last appeal in her conclusion. She begins in her clear logical voice:

I have now, my dear sister, completed my series of letters. I am aware, they contain some new views; but I believe they are based on the immutable truths of the Bible. All I ask for them is, the candid and prayerful consideration of Christians. If they strike at some of our bosom sins, our deep-rooted prejudices, our long cherished opinions, let us not condemn them on that account, but investigate them fearlessly and prayerfully, and not shrink from the examination; because, if they are true, they place heavy responsibilities upon women (126).

She began with common ground provoked thought (using rhetoric as a vehicle of motion) to move her readers to action. She has begun with belief (women and men’s equality), had a noble purpose (working for equality for all humanity), gave good reasons, and recognized the possibilities for assent—showing the benefits to men as well as to women.

Her restatement of her motives is consistent with the strong ethos she has built throughout her letters:

In throwing them before the public, I have been actuated solely by the belief, that if they are acted upon, they will exalt the character and enlarge the usefulness of my own sex, and contribute greatly to the happiness and virtue of the other (126).

Her motives are pure. Her purpose is to further goodness and dignity of all humanity. She is aware of the struggle most people feel when caught in the web of tradition and oppression.

As there is an assumption of superiority on the one part, which is not sanctioned by Jehovah, there is an incessant struggle on the other to rise to that degree
of dignity, which God designed women to possess in common with men, and to maintain those rights and exercise those privileges which every woman's common sense, apart from the prejudices of education, tells her are inalienable; they are a part of her moral nature, and can only cease when her immortal mind is extinguished (127).

Grimké is realistic. She knows her views are not popular and knows the difficulty many women will face in making a decision to claim their rights and fulfill their responsibilities.

One word more. I feel that I am calling upon my sex to sacrifice what has been, what is still dear to their hearts, the adulation, the flattery, the attentions of trifling men. I am asking them to repel these insidious enemies whenever they approach them; to manifest by their conduct, that, although they value highly the society of pious and intelligent men, they have no taste for idle conversation, and for that silly preference which is manifested for their personal accommodation, often at the expense of great inconvenience to their male companions (127).

Most women like Sarah Grimké have one foot in the tradition of their past and one in the present, moving into an unknown, perhaps different, order in the future. The dilemma is where do women place their feet while "standing firmly on the platform with man."

A final example firmly plants the image of the reciprocal and equal responsibilities of women which are the product of her God given rights. Grimké repeats her view:

Men and women are equally bound to cultivate a spirit of accommodation; but I exceedingly deprecate her being treated like a spoiled child, and sacrifices made to her selfishness and vanity (127).

Imagine the power if all people worked together. The possibilities are limited only by one's ability to let go of tradition and work for truth and equality.
Sarah Grimké has felt the bonds, shared her understanding and conviction, and empowered women with her words. She ends with her vision for freedom and equality and prays for its fulfillment:

And that we may become duly sensible of the dignity of our nature, only a little lower than the angels, and bring forth fruit to the glory and honor of Emanuel's name, is the fervent prayer of Thine in the bonds of womanhood,
Sarah M. Grimké (128).

Until then Sarah Grimké (and all of us) remains “in the bonds of womanhood.”
4. CONCLUSION

Sarah Grimké’s Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman is an empowering rhetorical work, giving courage and energy to women who read it—today as much as in 1837 when the letters were written. In answering the critical question “Why should the Letters be read now in the twentieth century when slavery is an issue long since resolved and women have been given the right to vote and have been assured of equal rights under the equal rights amendment?” I found that the letters demonstrate that rhetoric is a practical art, that the letters hold up to the scrutiny of rhetorical theory, and that they speak to the audience in a timeless way because they deal with truths, basic questions, which are issues important to people of all eras.

In answering the critical question, I also hoped to find out why Sarah Grimké was mentioned so often in feminist writing and in some history books (and not in others), asking what was her appeal, her strength. I also wondered why, if she was so significant, had I not heard of her sometime during my own education—in history, literature, or rhetoric. When I began my study I expected to find outdated, tedious language of a woman tied to an ideal in her own time. Instead, I found her words compelling, energizing, and enduring. Her vivid language engages the audience—she lets us see her vision.

After studying the history of rhetoric (which unfortunately deals only with rhetoric of men) and applying rhetorical theory to Grimké’s works, I found that Sarah Grimké’s rhetoric holds up soundly under both classical and modern rhetorical models. It is equal to the best and most memorable of all times. Her logic is clear in each letter, and her central theme (the equality of women and men whose united purpose is to work for the good of all humanity) is carried throughout the series. She touches women and men in all classes, on all levels. Her direc-
tion and organization is clear: she invites all to join her in achieving her noble cause and shows the way, anticipating questions and drawing the answers back to her central contention—the equality of the sexes—not for the good of women only, but for the benefit of all humanity.

Sarah has almost exhausted the available means of persuasion in her particular situation in her search for truth. She has engaged artistic and inartistic proofs, balancing ethos, logos, and pathos, exposing misunderstandings in an attempt to remedy her current situation. In analyzing her letters, I found that Grimké’s use of rhetorical appeals was solid. She had thorough knowledge of her subject and a sensitivity to and understanding of her audience. She indeed used all her resources to bring people together to find agreement, using rhetoric to strengthen rather than to divide. In Chapter 3, I demonstrated her specific rhetorical techniques. Sarah Grimké proved many times over that she had faith in the power of rhetoric and the possibility of assent, of agreement to work for the common good.

Sarah Grimké’s Letters are important. Her words are still compelling. The women she speaks to in those 1837 letters still live. The conditions she speaks of still exist. But Grimké’s letters are not leisure reading. They are packed with a combination of many ideas expounded by Sarah and Angelina in some speeches, pamphlets and other letters, both public and private. She had taken these ideas, arranged them and worked them into an effective appeal. When I first began reading the letters, I was carefully looking for her intent, her message, trying to see it in terms of her context. But I soon found myself caught up in Sarah Grimké’s words as they hurled me through time and space and back again to my own experience, but I think that is what good rhetoric is supposed to do. She touches many lives with real issues.

From these findings I have drawn several conclusions. Sarah Grimké’s
rhetoric still connects. The letters still speak to us today, recognizing limitations, revealing unresolved conflicts, giving hope. Even Grimké’s metaphor is still empowering. I. A. Richards said “to experience metaphor and have others experience it is the true art of rhetoric” (45). Sarah Grimké has indeed experienced her metaphor—a woman in bondage, the limitations, of her gender, like the limitations of the slave. And she has used rhetoric to let others experience the metaphor with her, coupling it with fact and logic so that her call to purpose does not fall on deaf, complacent ears. She wants to move and empower women to work to free themselves from their bonds.

Her metaphor works because it is still true today. Although we no longer have slavery in our country, the metaphor is still vivid. Wars and laws have not changed many people’s attitudes, just as Sarah Grimké predicted (knew). People are still shackled by the prejudices of tradition—including women: in education, in the work place, in family attitudes, in personal choices. Sarah Grimké was right—beliefs and morality cannot be legislated or won by war. Only rhetoric, a true meeting of the minds can produce change. Laws granting rights are only an reaffirmation that inequalities exist—they do not erase them; belief and tradition continue to be truth to many people.

The letters are also a biography of all women who have ever felt they were meant for better things, and yet were not allowed to be who they wanted to be or were not allowed to fulfill what had been their calling. The impact has continued—we know because women have taken up the cause in each generation. The lack of education keeps women inferior even in the twentieth century—we have more opportunity now, but must make sure women do not become complacent. Grimké shows us how to use rhetoric to keep the possibilities for women alive.

The implications of this study are many, entwined with my conclusions of the strength and effectiveness of Grimké’s letters. The letters need to be read and
studied because they hold valid ideas which are still unresolved. The letters need
to be contextualized, studied rhetorically to get at Grimke's original intent and
message, by listening to her original words. Women are still impoverished be-
cause of traditional restrictions and wide-spread belief that they are "lesser"
beings. Grimke can still enrich women's lives with possibilities, with a vision of
what could be.

Grimke's letters must be read. My study has validated the importance of
going to the primary source. To say that Sarah Grimke was the first American
feminist is not particularly compelling to the majority of women. Hearing that
statement in history books does not engage an audience. Readers can easily
remain passive and not want to get involved, skimming quickly over the related
information. But reading her words, feeling the energy projected from the pages
compels the reader to want to know more about the woman behind the words.
The experience is similar to the difference between hearing someone tell about a
good movie and actually seeing it personally. The Letters must be experienced.

We need to learn and teach the practical art of rhetoric, of gaining assent. If
we followed Grimke's carefully crafted, purposeful prose, and used language as a
vehicle of change (an example of what I. A. Richards defines as "a study of mis-
understanding and its remedies" [3]), we might be able to gain assent, search for
truth together, and change tradition for the good of humankind. In short, rhetoric
works. Sarah Grimke proved that through rhetoric, ideas can be explored, clari-
fied; truth can be found; belief can be strengthened or changed.

Perhaps I had not heard of Sarah Grimke before I started my research
because history has had a primarily male perspective. We must recognize that
women's writings are important; they have strength and validity. Women give an
important point of view, not as underlings or victims of a patriarchal system, but
as individuals contributing equally with man to a common cause—enlightenment
and education of humanity. We must use inclusive language and find words which have neutral connotations, to free us from words with either female or male implications—words with power of their own. I felt the limitation of language when trying to find a non-masculine word to describe Sarah Grimké's mastery of rhetoric, or to replace my reference to her as a master of that subject. It occurred to me that it was not appropriate to write that she impregnated the minds of the people, but I only found awkward substitutions in both cases—and neither quite meant the same. Language is part of the tradition which is hard to change; it shapes and holds on to tradition, manipulating our perspective and our thinking.

Grimké's small volume should be dusted off and viewed for what it is—the core of strength and hope for a better world, for equality, the tapping of all resources, utilizing talents of all individuals. We must read primary texts, not secondary or interpretive texts, to experience the author's rhetoric and recapture her intentions. If the words are true, we will hear the universal plea. Its timelessness makes us continue to search for the truth—like Sarah Grimké—for the sake of the dignity of all humanity, to free humankind from the fetters of tradition, to free women from "the bonds of womanhood."
Oppression is successful because of the subtleties it employs. Big injustices invite rebellion, but the small seemingly insignificant inequalities are just suspect, gnawing at individuals, felt but not quite identified. Sarah Grimké verbalized what many women have felt—a subtle unsettling feeling that something is not quite right. She had the insight, courage, and rhetoric to express what she had felt; she saw the injustice and named it. Like other women, I only felt those subtleties, but had no outlet.

Now I can name the injustice and know that sexism, like racism, is a form of discrimination. It is an assault on humanity, not on individuals. The problem with any kind of discrimination is that it eats away at our humanity in the same way that acid rain eats away at our environment and that noxious fumes poison our air. It is not always noticeable till the side effects appear, till the scars have formed. I have seen the scars of sexism and have felt it much like Lillian Smith felt the racism of her growing years which she describes in Killers of the Dream: "It was a vague thing weaving in and out of their play, like a ghost haunting an old graveyard or whispers after the household sleep—fleeting mystery, vague menace to which each responded in his own way."

My "haunted" childhood was a time when I grew aware of who I was as an individual. I was always aware that sometimes I was treated differently than my brothers. That was just part of the way things were—boys and girls were different. I was raised to be as feminine as possible. I was always dressed in a dress. I couldn't crawl on my hands and knees as a baby because my dresses kept getting in the way, so I adjusted to the minor inconvenience by crawling on hands and feet. My mother would try to get my fine hair to grow and cut bangs then fixed French braids or curls. My brothers would delay the special treatment
by giving me haircuts from time to time, and I happily wore overalls for playtime—until I was one day mistaken for a boy.

Girls always wore dresses to school which was just the way things were even though it was a challenge to keep the dress from flying up while swinging or playing baseball at school. I had a nagging feeling that it wasn’t quite right, but it never occurred to me to question the way things were and just wear jeans instead. Dresses were pretty, and I liked wearing them—until winter. Then I found out it was school policy: Girls must wear dresses to school. It certainly was not fair that boys could wear jeans in the icy cold and snow and the girls couldn’t. If I wanted to be warm walking to school, I would put on jeans under my dress, but had to take them off in the coat closet when I got to school. But I didn’t rebel; I accepted the way things were.

One of my heroes was Linda Layer, a girl in my brother’s class who challenged the system. One winter day in sub-zero weather, Linda came to high school in a nice pair of red wool slacks and beautiful mohair sweater. She looked wonderful—and warm! However, she was called to the office and suspended for a week for going against the dress code. Linda’s parents were appalled at the ruling and word soon got around. With the support of parents, girls began wearing sensible slacks every day during that snowy winter and the rule was grudgingly changed to allow exceptions for extreme weather.

I was good in sports—could run as fast as any boy and hold my own playing ball well into high school, but there were no teams for girls outside of the elementary school playground. Something wasn’t right. In church the hymns and prayers praised fathers and mankind, and God’s blessings came to men. I searched for acceptance in the Scriptures and found little comfort—there were few examples of women who were great and no pronouns which included me. I asked about the words and was told by my Sunday School teacher (a woman)
that of course the words meant me too. But an aching uncertainty remained down deep, unspoken but searching—was I not worthy?

In high school, except for the dress code excitement, I continued to quietly accept my role as a girl. I wore skirts, usually even on those icy days. I took the required year of boring home economics, even though I could already cook and sew, and was envious of the wonderful tables and bookcases my brothers would make in woodshop. I took Latin because it was the thing to do. I ironed my horrid P.E. uniform and embroidered my initials precisely on the pocket and on the cuffs of my socks and hightops as prescribed. I wasn't particularly aware of inequalities because I didn't question the way things were. The boys always had the big new gym for P.E. and the girls had the old one.

I had no exciting goals to motivate me. When I graduated, I would go to college, study liberal arts, get married if I was lucky, or maybe get a job in teaching or social work. What I secretly longed for was excitement and adventure in far off places as a photographer or forest ranger. I took career interest and ability tests which only offered bland, boring possibilities—office work. NEVER! Wasn't there anything exciting? Maybe a stewardess for an airline? That's the best I could find. Dismal. When I took the SAT's, I also signed up for the Air Force Qualifying Exam for fun. Several weeks later I received a letter congratulating me for being selected as a candidate for the USAF Academy in Colorado Springs, informing me I was being considered for a scholarship because of my high scores in electrical engineering. I was ecstatic! I ran to my family and proudly showed them the letter expecting the usual approval and congratulation, but I got—laughter! Disbelief! "It must be a mistake. They must not know you are a girl." I was crushed. What difference did being a girl make? I had high scores—they wanted intelligence. I couldn't believe that a chance for excitement and purpose was being negated because I was female. My comfortable world suddenly felt cold.
This was wrong. It had been my chance to get out of the quiet complacency of my existence. Yet I withdrew. I let the drawbridge be pulled up and the protective gate be lowered with a resounding clang. I never said any more about it, but I knew I'd never feel the same. I know now that, like Lillian Smith's encounter with racism, it "worked its way like a splinter, bit by bit, down to the hurt places in my memory and festered there" (481).

I still loved my parents and my brothers, but I was more guarded after that—and somehow stronger. I was less easily influenced to accept the way things were and questioned the validity of most assumptions and measured carefully the things I said and the opinions I offered. I managed to have my adventures when I went away to college, working harder to build an identity which was not based on being female, but on being capable and strong. I had been manipulated by subtleties for too long. I became more outspoken against accepting roles which were imposed on the basis of gender rather than ability. My grandmother was my greatest supporter and encouraged my choices. She taught me that individuality is more important than myself as a member of any group.

I still have warm memories of my home and town where I grew up because most of what is good in me came from there. But my heart aches for those who never had an experience to awaken them to the awareness of the erosion of the soul of a woman's being who can never see to be other than what she is now.

Since then I have been discriminated against in other ways such as in getting work because I am a woman though the deed was masked with lies. Being an assistant football coach was not part of the job description, but a man's willingness to take that activity on was more important than teaching ability and experience. The same thing has happened to other friends and acquaintances; it is an old story. And I bristle when I am put in a position secondary to my husband
rather than equal, capable of having separate ideas and values.

But I know, like Sarah Grimké did 150 years ago, that sexism is just another excuse for injustice, a misuse of power. It is a smokescreen for the real issue of human rights, human dignity. I think that my indignation that someone would think that I was a lesser individual because I am a woman is accompanied by a greater sadness for the condition of a society that still does not value humanity and does not know its meaning. Margaret Mead is right: the real question has to do with the dignity of the human species, not just of individuals or of minority groups. I am willing to fight for human rights, for dignity of all people. And that fight must also be against men and women who degrade their own humanity by imposing limits on others, and who degrade themselves by accepting limits imposed by others. Nothing will change until humanity expands its narrow vision, looks in the mirror and then out at the world.
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LETTERS

ON THE

EQUALITY OF THE SEXES

AND THE

CONDITION OF WOMAN

ADDRESSSED TO

MARY S. PARKER

PRESIDENT OF THE

Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society

By Sarah W. Grimke

BURT FRANKLIN
NEW YORK
APPENDIX B

LETTERS ON THE EQUALITY OF THE SEXES

AND

THE CONDITION OF WOMAN

I. THE ORIGINAL EQUALITY OF WOMAN. Amesbury. 7th Mo. 11th, 1837.

II. WOMAN SUBJECT ONLY TO GOD. Newburyport. 7th M., 17th, 1837.

III. THE PASTORAL LETTER OF THE GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONAL MINISTERS OF MASSACHUSETTS. Haverhill. 7th Mo., 1837.

IV. SOCIAL INTERCOURSE OF THE SEXES. Andover. 7th Mo., 27th, 1837.

V. CONDITION IN ASIA AND AFRICA. Groton. 8th Mo. 4th, 1837.

VI. WOMEN IN ASIA AND AFRICA. Groton. 8th Mo., 15th, 1837.

VII. CONDITION IN SOME PARTS OF EUROPE AND AMERICA. Brookline. 8th Mo., 22nd, 1837.

VIII. ON THE CONDITION OF WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES. Brookline. 1837.

IX. HEROISM OF WOMEN—WOMEN IN AUTHORITY. Brookline. 8th Mo. 25th, 1837.

X. INTELLECT OF WOMEN. Brookline. 8th Mo. 1837.

XI. DRESS OF WOMEN. September, 1837.

XII. LEGAL DISABILITIES OF WOMEN. Concord, 9th Mo., 6th, 1837.

XIII. RELATION OF HUSBAND AND WIFE. Brookline, 9th Mo. 1837.

XIV. MINISTRY OF WOMEN. Brookline, 9th Mo. 1837.

XV. MAN EQUALLY GUILTY WITH WOMAN IN THE FALL. Uxbridge, 10th Mo. 20th, 1837.
APPENDIX C

A BIOGRAPHICAL VIEW OF SARAH GRIMKÉ

Preface

The following biographical sketch is based predominantly on the works of Catharine Birney (The Grimké Sisters: Sarah and Angelina) and Gerda Lerner (The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Rebels against Slavery) whose thorough research and scholarship have provided important insights into the life of Sarah Grimké. I do not have the first-hand experience of living in Sarah Grimké’s time, nor have I seen her, nor have had the privilege of reading her unpublished journals and diaries. But from my study and analysis of her letters I have heard her voice, and through this twentieth century telescope, I can re-see her and affirm the dedication, strength, and courage which Sarah Grimké must have had in order to have made such an impact in both her world and mine. Therefore, I submit this short biography, a reflected interpretation which I believe contains the spirit of Sarah Grimké’s life.

Tradition

Sarah Grimké was born on November 26, 1792 in Charleston, South Carolina, the sixth of fourteen children. Her father, John Faucheraud Grimké, in addition to being a judge and politician was a plantation owner and slaveholder. He was important in the community, and the family enjoyed the privileges of the elite, living part of the year on the plantation and part in town. The large household supported a large staff of household slaves including a black “mauma” who took care of Sarah. Her family background and her experiences growing up all worked together to formulate Sarah’s strong sense of justice. Her life illustrates
the tension she and many women felt between tradition and the empowerment of equality.

Sarah was educated at home as was the custom. The small amount of education girls were offered was designed primarily to make them proper young ladies. That was not enough for Sarah. She wanted more than needlework, reading, writing, painting, singing, and basic arithmetic necessary for domestic duties. She preferred the company of her brother Thomas and spent more time with him than anyone even though he was six years older. She wanted to learn everything Thomas learned—so she studied Thomas’ lessons including history, Greek, geography, and science. Although her father encouraged her brothers in their education, he denied Sarah permission to study Latin and later law, seeing no point in it for a girl. He did, however, allow her to enter into family debates with her brothers and himself.

Sarah adored her father and, because he was head of the family and she was eager to please, she accepted his rules. When her mother was absent, she enjoyed being in charge of the household, but soon realized that (as she wrote in her journal) "any slave could be of greater service to her father than she could" (qtd. in Lerner 19).

Sarah was well protected—she had her needs taken care of, but she was denied intellectual growth. When Sarah was 12, Thomas left home for college, and her chance for more education ended—just because she was a girl. Her only outlet seemed to be religion. Girls were taught the Bible (that was “proper”) and in turn Sarah and her sister taught Bible classes for the slaves. Sarah wanted to teach the slave children to read the Bible themselves since they obviously enjoyed the stories and she thought that no one could object to the Bible. But she was told:

slaves have no use for reading; it would make them restless and rebellious. Their minds were not fitted for such pursuits; it would strain them and make
them unfit for the labor they must do. Besides, it was against the law (Lerner 22).

However, she taught a slave girl anyway, secretly at night in her room. When she was discovered and they were punished, the sense of helplessness was overwhelming and she seemed to have “a resigned acceptance of [her] place in the world” (qtd in Lerner 24). She became depressed and withdrawn. Bright and sensitive, she grew more and more disturbed by the cruel punishment of the slaves who were disobedient.

When the youngest Grimké, Angelina, was born, Sarah seemed to gain new energy and purpose. Sarah was only 13 but asked to be her godmother. Since her mother was worn out from having 14 children, she welcomed Sarah’s help and honored her request. Sarah pledged to give her every opportunity and to be an example to follow; she fulfilled her job with energy, caring for “Nina” devotedly. Those responsibilities were Sarah’s passion for the next few years.

When Thomas returned from college, he talked with Sarah about his interest in general education for all—to create an American system for universal education. Sarah listened endlessly and helped him copy manuscripts for publication—and became more and more aware of the opportunities she was missing because she was born female. She had been denied permission to study law (although she had studied her father’s books secretly and persistently). There was not much left for her to do but join in the carefree life of the elite society.

While getting married was a priority for most young girls of her society, Sarah avoided the subject, perhaps because of the way she defined marriage by what she saw around her: men continued in interesting pursuits while women had children. Lerner describes the nineteenth-century woman’s situation:

Their education and intellectual growth ended with marriage; their contact with the world outside their homes was confined to a social life among families of
like social standing. Their interests were narrow; their minds confined; only religion offered an escape and outlet (Lerner 33).

Hardly a life a bright young girl whose mind was bursting with curiosity and longing for knowledge would choose. Sarah grew increasingly uncomfortable with the horrible injustices and punishments meted out upon the slaves, but she still felt powerless to say or do anything to change it. Sarah again sought an outlet for her intellect in religion, perhaps to try to ease the guilt of her conflicting feeling of loyalty to a family who happened to have a Southern way of life and her growing disgust at a system of injustice and cruelty, or because it was the only acceptable outlet that could challenge her intellect.

At age 24 Sarah took her ill father to Philadelphia to be treated by a specialist. When nothing could be done to help him, she took him to the New Jersey shore where Sarah nursed her failing father lovingly and devotedly until his death. Her strength was evident in those difficult months, but it changed her, made her independent, and gave her the confidence which sustained her the rest of her life.

Courage and Conviction

Sarah Grimké’s life changed rapidly from that point. She learned first-hand the realities of the law when Judge Grimké’s will made it clear that his widow could use the house and furnishings and any slaves as long as she needed them; the rest would be given to the sons. The women of the household were now on their own—Sarah, her young sister Angelina for whom she had full responsibility, and her mother.

Sarah had seen a different way of life in Philadelphia where she had spent two months with a Quaker family after her father’s death. The simplicity and tranquility had helped soothe her aching grief. The contrast to her return to the
old way of life in the South—to the reality of slavery—was startling. She wrote:

From early childhood [I] long believed their bondage inconsistent with justice and humanity . . . after being for many months in Pennsylvania when I went back it seemed as if the sight of their condition was insupportable, it burst on my mind with renewed horror . . . can compare my feeling only with a canker incessantly gnawing—deprived of ability to modify their situation, I was as one in bonds looking on their sufferings I could not soothe or lessen. . . . Events had made this world look like a wilderness. I saw nothing in it but desolation and suffering (qtd. in Lerner 52)

Sarah had no one to share her feelings with. Angelina, now 14, had grown away from her in those six months. Sarah became depressed and went to live with family friends for a while. While there she read a book which she had received from Isaac Morris, a new Quaker acquaintance whom she had met during her return trip from Philadelphia. The book by John Woolman, a noted Quaker, inspired her. She once again became interested in Quaker practice, especially because of its strong stand against slavery. Sarah finally could not tolerate the injustices in the South any longer and left Charleston for good in 1821.

Sarah spent seven years in Philadelphia staying much of the time with the Morris family whom she had continued to correspond with after their initial meeting, asking questions about their faith. She wanted to work and, according to Lerner, often wrote on the theme of her feeling of worthlessness:

Oh, had I received the education I desired, had I been bred to the profession of the law, I might have been a useful member of society, and instead of myself and my property being taken care of, I might have been a protector of the helpless, a pleader for the poor and unfortunate (qtd. in Lerner 59).

Sarah felt her only hope was to become a Quaker minister—the only profession besides teaching open to women in her day. But the Quaker officials were suspi-
cious of anyone not a "birthright" Quaker, and she had a difficult struggle, always blaming the problem on herself.

Sarah fell in love with Isaac Morris whose wife Mary had died in 1821. When Isaac proposed in 1826, Sarah was torn between her strong feelings for him, and another yet unnamed call for purpose in her life. After she refused him, they agreed to continue to be the best of friends. He proposed again several years later, but she once again refused despite her love for him. She writes of the proposal:

That was a day of solemn heartfelt supplication that nothing might intervene between me and my God . . . to the individual there was sufficient attachment, but my soul shrunk from the fearful responsibility of such a situation (qtd. in Lerner 63).

She later continues:

I have found it very hard work to give him up, had I never known of his love, I did not covet it, it was bestowed to my astonishment for I am unworthy of it. I have even thought if death had taken him from me I could more easily have yielded him (qtd in Lerner 63).

Sarah was definitely a woman of deep feeling and conviction. One can only speculate on her reason for deciding to live an unmarried life, but it seems to be a combination of self-deprecation, a feeling of unworthiness and a sense that if she gave up the independence that marriage requires, she would never have a chance to work for justice and equality and the improvement of humanity. Having made that soul-searching and painful choice, Sarah moved forward in her life with renewed resolve.

Meanwhile, Angelina remained in Charleston in the now female-dominated household. She was self-assured and independent due in large part to Sarah who had encouraged her and taught her self worth. It never occurred to
Angelina that she might be considered inferior because she was a girl but found that the brothers closest to her in age excluded her from their “male world” (Lerner 67).

Angelina was active in religion and shifted from the Episcopal to the Presbyterian denomination, then studied the Quakers’ practice. Her independent nature showed through in all she did. She organized the first ecumenical female prayer meetings. In an outward protest against the extravagant way of life, she began to dress more simply. Her outrage against the system of slavery continued to grow until, like Sarah, she realized she couldn’t fight against it alone, and left the South (with her mother’s blessing) to join Sarah in the North in 1829.

Abolition

The Grimké sisters grew close once more as they began working together. Sarah was pleased to see Angelina’s outgoing nature and energy. They joined the Quaker religion and worked for charitable activities. They were inspired by Frances Wright who was an advocate for equal rights for all men, women, and children. But they still found themselves restricted as females. That they were “spinsters” held its own stigma. If a woman was not married by age 30, her life was considered over. Sarah and Angelina saw life differently: their life of usefulness clearly lay ahead of them. They joined the anti-slavery societies although the women were segregated from the men’s activities. Birney reports from their journals that they joined into the discussions and debates defining abolition and began reading the anti-slavery papers, The Liberator and The Emancipator. They attended the lectures (participation of women Quakers was not unusual) and responded by distributing anti-slave literature, encouraging the boycotting of slave-made products. Sarah became increasingly dissatisfied with the Quaker faith, and wrote of her feeling of the inconsistencies and tensions. Not only was
she feeling personally restricted, she noticed segregation of blacks and whites within the Quaker practice and rebelled against it by aligning herself with the black women, sitting with them in meetings and walking with them instead of riding the way most white women did. She had had a long struggle trying to make a contribution to society through her work as a Quaker, but when suppressed from talking during a Quaker meeting, she made the decision to break away from the ministry. Writing of the experience, she said, “The incident has proved the means of releasing me from those bonds which almost destroyed my mind” (qtd. in Lerner 142). Later she wrote that she felt her “sympathies freed, expanded to new light and love and labor” (qtd. in Birney 222). She now felt free to work for abolition as an independent woman, not as a Quaker.

At the same time, Angelina felt a duty to try to convince the women of the South to join the cause of abolition, or at least see the wrongs created by the system. She wrote the strong, controversial “Appeal to Christian Women of the Southern States.” She refuted all Biblical arguments for slavery, calling the system non-Christian. The outrage produced by the letter was punctuated by a warning to the Grimké sisters to never return to Charleston again.

The Grimké sisters’ career as abolitionists was launched. Sarah and Angelina attended the abolitionist Agents’ Convention in November of 1836 and became the first female abolitionist agents in the United States, drawing praise from such notable male abolitionists as Theodore Weld, Henry C. Wright, and noted statesman William Lloyd Garrison. They began speaking to women’s groups in private parlours. Birney reports from newspaper accounts of the time that the small groups soon became large crowds and they had to move to larger quarters. They were the first women in America to address an audience in a public place. Angelina was an animated speaker with great charisma who concentrated on the political aspects while Sarah spoke more of the moral and theo-
logical view, “to help forward the cause of Truth and Righteousness” (Birney 158). In Philadelphia and New York the clergy and some abolitionists who believed that the “woman question” should be left out of the abolitionist issue voiced intense opposition. But Sarah saw that the reform must begin with women and sought ways to empower them. Certainly women knew what it was like to be restricted, and she knew that women especially could identify with the inequality issue of the slaves. She had certainly demonstrated that women were intelligent and capable of working publicly with great dignity. Angelina had been critical of the Female Anti-Slavery Society of New York as “inefficient and doing literally nothing” (qtd. in Birney 168), and felt that the abolitionist cause could be won if the other half of the population (women) would join in.

The “Woman Question”

As Sarah and Angelina’s popularity grew, so did the opposition. Abolitionist were split on the issue of treating the rights of women along side the issue of slavery; they felt it detracted from the most pressing issue. John Greenleaf Whittier’s letter to the Grimkés about adding “the woman question” to the slavery issue summed up the opinion of many:

Does it not look, dear sisters, like abandoning in some degree the cause of the poor and miserable slave . . . for the purpose of arguing and disputing about some trifling oppression, political or social, which we may ourselves suffer? Is it not forgetting the great and dreadful wrongs of the slave in a selfish crusade against some paltry grievance of our own? . . . Oh let us try to forget everything but our duty to God and our fellow beings; to dethrone the selfish principle, and to strive to win over the hard heart of the oppressor by truth kindly spoken. (qtd. in Barnes 424)

The sisters felt the subject was anything but “trifling” or “selfish.” The oppression
of women was a truth which they had lived (and they believed it was hindering the success of the slave issue), but they refrained from the subject in their public appearances. However, they had another strategy to keep the issue alive. In the summer of 1837 Sarah accepted the suggestions to write on the “woman question” in letters to be printed in a non-abolitionist newspaper, The New England Spectator. The result was a series of fifteen carefully crafted letters (which were later reprinted in The Liberator). These letters on the equality of the sexes and the condition of woman, written at the height of Sarah’s abolitionist career, gave encouragement and strength to women across the nation.

Using arguments based on Scriptural evidence, these letters attacked the patriarchal view of women, revealed historical and world-wide injustices against women, including contemporary laws, educational and social restrictions. She compared the plight of women with that of the slave.

Not surprisingly, the letters stirred up quite a controversy. The strongest opposition was voiced by members of the clergy in the “Pastoral Letter of the General Association of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts” sent to all the churches. It had two primary aims: first to close off the churches against use by anti-slave lectures and secondly, to persuade their members (both male and female) to stay away from the lectures of the Grimkés who displayed “immodest conduct” and were “unwomanly and demoralizing” (Birney 182).

The Pastoral Letter did stir up a lot of interest, but did not limit their audience. In fact, the audiences grew and the public responded by building a large public meeting hall for use as a public forum. Sarah continued writing and submitting her letters to the New England Spectator. While the Pastoral Letter insisted “the power of woman is in her dependence” (qtd. in Garrison 135), Sarah logically and methodically showed that the real power lay in independence and submission only to God. She used Letter III as a response to the clergy, showing
that given freedom and equality women could carry out their Christian duties and responsibilities to their fullest as God intended—women and men are both moral beings with moral duties and can work side by side to fulfill God’s purpose of dignity for all humanity. In a letter to Theodore Weld dated September 20, 1837, she writes: “We believe that if women exercised their rights of thinking and acting for themselves, they would labor ten times more efficiently than they now do for the A. S. cause and all other reformations” (qtd. in Barnes 450). It was not just a secondary cause which would be righted on the heels of the other as Weld had suggested.

The debate continued. According to newspaper accounts researched by Birney, the meeting hall was full to overflowing each time the sisters spoke. More and more women joined the abolitionist movement and also took up the cause of women’s rights fervently fueled by Sarah’s letters. Angelina and Sarah lectured almost every day all summer, sometimes traveling several hours to engagements. Since Angelina was the better speaker, Sarah relinquished the podium to her but was always present with support. She concentrated on writing. Exhausted by the grueling pace they had kept, they retreated to recuperate at the home of friends for the winter, but Sarah continued to write her series of letters.

The sisters were supported and admired by many male abolitionists. While W. L. Garrison encouraged the sisters in their parallel campaign of the “woman question,” Theodore Weld, who was usually supportive, asked them to drop the subject. He used the argument that they were so effective for abolition because they were Southern women speaking against a condition they had witnessed first-hand that they should leave “the lesser work” to others who could do it better and save themselves for the greater cause of slavery (qtd. in Barnes 426). Sarah seemed invigorated by the opposition and set forth with greater resolve to speak for woman’s rights.
Meanwhile, as the sisters regained their strength, it became clear that Theodore Weld had captured Angelina's heart. Angelina and Sarah continued corresponding with Weld during the winter months till Weld finally proposed to Angelina and she accepted. Sarah's reaction was interesting. She accepted Angelina's choice and told Weld that she "resigned" Angelina to him—her old intuition about marriage returning. Weld did not fully comprehend her real meaning and answered Sarah in turn saying "You shall not do it [resign her]! rather consent that I may be admitted to a brother's companionship with you to share the sorrows and the joys of you both" (qtd. in Barnes 558). It seemed that Sarah sensed that the marriage would end a chapter of their lives which had been stimulating, productive, and fulfilling—all she had hoped for from the time she was first denied the same education as her brothers.

**Realities**

Angelina and Weld were married May 14, 1838 and "resolved to hold themselves to the best they were capable of" (Birney 231). But Sarah's intuition became truth. Shortly after the fire which destroyed Pennsylvania Hall, Angelina and Weld moved to Fort Lee on the Hudson to live a difficult domestic life. Angelina never spoke in public again. They invited Sarah to live with them. Her traditional sense of family still strong, she readily accepted the invitation. There Sarah finished revising her *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women* for publication as a book.

Life changed dramatically for Angelina and Sarah, but Weld kept up his abolitionist and political activities. Their diet was sparse—almost completely vegetarian. They used no slave goods, only produce from their own garden and fields, baked their own bread, and did all of the work of the household. They turned over their entire small inheritance to Weld and became his background
support. He was concerned that they continue intellectually so put them to work reading newspapers to help him document the continuing cruelty of slavery. They introduced petitioning to women and taught women how to be active participants in the Cause. Even though their life was hard, there were frequent visitors who helped keep the two women intellectually active. After Angelina’s first baby was born, they moved to a larger farm which isolated them even more from the mainstream of the exciting political activity they had been accustomed to. Sarah helped out with the babies and children and with the domestic chores. Angelina felt inadequate when she had been unable to nurse her first child and at times seemed to resent Sarah’s attachment to the children. But Angelina had been weakened by the births and the hard life they lived and needed the support of her sister. Sarah willingly gave her all to her family—part of the commitment she had made so long ago when Angelina was born.

Weld continued to be active in the abolitionist cause even though Angelina was not well. Her condition was described as “normal trials of a woman’s life” (Lerner 310). Equality for women remained an elusive dream.

The life of Sarah and Angelina is a familiar story—what happens to the resolve for equality for women when the physical demands of domestic life become the reality. Their energy sapped by domestic duties, they had little time for their Cause. Angelina felt the reality of the burden of women at home (Lerner 310). In June of 1840 the World Anti-Slavery Convention was to meet in London. The Grimkés were invited to attend, to get involved, but they had to decline. Catharine Birney summarized the feeling of many when she wrote: “The world lost precious good toward freedom for all when Angelina and Sarah Grimké were kept from participation in anti-slavery work by domestic circumstance” (Birney 299). Weld lobbied for Congress until he finally had to return home to take care of the farm to support his family.
Even though the domestic life did not stop the sisters completely, the work for abolition and women’s rights became secondary to the survival of the family. It was difficult for the two women to put aside their convictions to spend their energies on the necessities of mere survival, but they accepted it and spent their energies on their domestic duties. Sarah was especially resolved to continue working for women and found other ways to contribute. She worked for the poor and taught women how to petition. Angelina wanted her husband’s talents used, so supported his activities.

They started a school on the farm to educate their own children and that of friends—both girls and boys. In addition to being coeducational, the extraordinary school was also interracial. Later they had a boarding school and worked hard for reforms in education, making their work as abolitionist agents and women’s rights advocates secondary. The culture kept Angelina and Sarah tied to “women’s duties” and multiple roles were a must for survival (Lerner 326), emphasizing the tension between tradition and hope for change (which continues even today). Sarah dedicated herself to working in Weld’s school and was an excellent teacher.

Sarah left the Weld household for the winter of 1853 and researched laws pertaining to women and children. She spent time with her close friend and confidant Harriet Hunt who had become the first woman physician. She continued being influential in women’s rights, still remembered for her Letters which were reminders of what could be, empowering women in subsequent generations with purpose and hope.

Sarah Grimké’s concepts were way ahead of her time. Eventually she found that her traditional value, the need to be part of a family made it impossible for her to choose total independence and she returned to the Weld household. She had to harness that independent spirit which had made her such a
powerful force earlier in her life. She stayed with the Welds, helping as she could, working tirelessly for the happiness of others and for the dignity of humanity until she died December 23, 1873 at age 81.