

In *Fifty-One Key Feminist Thinkers* Lori Marso has brought together an excellent collection of accessible yet incisive, rich and original semi-biographical essays on key feminist thinkers, ranging from Sappho and Sojourner Truth to Nawal El Saadawi and Judith Butler. The volume is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in feminist thinking in all its variety and complexity.

Moya Lloyd, *Professor of Political Theory,
Loughborough University, UK*

Showing readers that feminist theory remains one of the most exciting sites for engaging questions of both political thought and action, *Fifty-One Key Feminist Thinkers* creates a remarkable conversation between feminist theorists past and present. Considering questions of identity, freedom, power, justice, desire, autonomy, inclusion, difference, and what 'counts' as feminism, *Fifty-One Key Feminist Thinkers* offers readers a thought-provoking vision of the past and future of feminist theory.

Cristina Beltrán, *Associate Professor,
Department of Social and Cultural Analysis, New York University, USA*

Lori Marso has done an artful job of selecting authors to tell the stories of feminism. This is a delightful collection of the intellectual contributions of a range of feminist thinkers.

Falguni A. Sheth, *Associate Professor of Women's,
Gender and Sexuality Studies, Emory University*

FIFTY-ONE KEY FEMINIST THINKERS

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Women can be angry, wild, passionate, powerful, loving, violent, frustrated, sad, truthful, hungry, tender. Women can change the world; women can be free.

footage of planes engulfing fields in poisonous fog, chemical plants belching black smoke, and rivers choked with dead fish. The verbal and visual narratives of “Silent Spring” were designed to move readers to action through empathy and a sense of urgency, reactions unlikely to be sparked by highly technical arguments.

A final and powerful feminist strategy evident in “Silent Spring” was Carson’s rhetoric of uncertainty. Expressions of uncertainty both open up debate and resist authoritative efforts to close it down. Against the scientific establishment’s guarantees of the safety of pesticides, Carson consistently stressed the incompleteness of the research, the risks of pesticides, and scientists’ ignorance of these risks. The CBS program amplified this strategy, repeatedly goading industrial and federal scientists into admitting “we don’t know,” “we can’t say,” or “we just don’t have that information.” This strategy had two aims. First, it opened a rhetorical gap into which the public could step. Carson wrote,

We urgently need an end to these false assurances, to the sugar coating of unpalatable facts. It is the public that is being asked to assume the risks that the insect controllers calculate. The public must decide whether it wishes to continue on the present road, and it can do so only when in full possession of the facts.

(2002, 13)

Second, on the basis of these uncertainties, Carson could call for preemptive action to limit pesticides, a political strategy often called the “precautionary principle.”

Carson’s status as a woman working outside the scientific establishment in post-war America was perceived by many as an insurmountable obstacle to her goals of limiting pesticide use and of preserving fragile ecosystems that included human beings. However, Carson was able to leverage the very elements her opponents interpreted as signs of weakness—dialogue with marginalized populations, prophetic language, storytelling, and uncertainty—to mount an effective rhetorical campaign. Carson was not singlehandedly responsible for the achievements with which she is credited. But her rhetoric shaped those events, and feminist techniques substantially shaped her rhetoric.

Notes

- 1 Lear 1988, 39. Other biographical notes about Carson are taken from this source.

- 2 Murphy 2005, 9. Other claims about the reception of *Silent Spring* are either from this source or from Walsh 2013.

Carson’s major works

- 1955, 1998. *Edge of the Sea*. Reprint ed. New York: Mariner Books.
 1951, 1991. *The Sea around Us*. Special ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
 1965, 1998. *The Sense of Wonder*. Revised ed. New York: Harper.
 1962, 2002. *Silent Spring*. Fortieth Anniversary ed. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
 1941, 2007. *Under the Sea-Wind*. New ed. New York: Penguin Classics.

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 Walsh, Lynda. “Rachel Carson: Kairotic Prophet.” In *Scientists as Prophets: A Rhetorical Genealogy*, 119–35. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

ANNA JULIA COOPER (1858–1964)

Penny Weiss

Anna Julia Cooper was an educator and an activist, an historian and a linguist, a writer on subjects from racism and sexism to literature and education. Her first book, *A Voice from the South*, was written in 1892, a time, she emphasizes, when “The race is just twenty-one years removed from the conception and experience of a chattel”;¹ her dissertation was defended in 1925, and she lived to see the Civil Rights Movement. Her vision is of a world where it is safe for everyone to be weak and peaceful and caring, but where the internal and external resources to be fully developed are readily available. This ideal invigorates the writings of the young and the old Cooper, in multiple genres.

Cooper can be read as a feminist theorist of voice, as images of speech and silence are woven into everything she wrote. She starts with the fact that certain people and perspectives are more easily and accurately conveyed and heard than others, always with a host of consequences, for knowable reasons, and not absent solutions. Looked at from the other side, “across her body of work she exposes how power conspires to erase dissent, silence the marginalized, and render alternative views unthinkable” (May 2009, 17). The primary case for this is put in terms of race, but she speaks in similar terms of gender and indeed any “weaker” group (105). Her mission in her writing is to motivate and enable us to listen harder and better. At stake are truth, justice, and progress, for the individual, social groups, and society at large.

Cooper is a believer in the “individual soul, capable of eternal growth and unlimited development” (53), a “soul with unquenchable longings and inexhaustible possibilities” (80). Seeing in *everyone* this “cultivable soul” (105), she becomes an advocate of lifelong education and a believer in social progress. She is utterly committed to the fact, and urges us to join her in the knowledge, that no matter the circumstances, “the divine Spark is capable of awakening at the most unexpected moment and it never is wholly smothered or stamped out” (*Equality* 293). It is *never* wholly smothered, which we would know if we listened more sympathetically. But despite this optimism, and despite Cooper’s deep connection to the oft-cited principles of the Declaration of Independence, her treatment of America always includes—indeed begins with—the introduction of slavery into the colonies: “a fact, silent and unforeseen which was destined nevertheless to embroil the entire future” (*Legislative* 3). She is knowledgeable, from her life (she was born into slavery) and her studies (her dissertation was on attitudes toward slavery around the French Revolution), about the institution of slavery, characterized as “founded solely on the abuse of power ... and only in the name of the right of the strongest” (2009, 31). She is also deeply acquainted with the everyday reinforcement of prejudice and “caste spirit” (103). It is within this broad constellation of the possible and the actual, historical, present, and future, that her ideas travel in her long life.

At the beginning of *A Voice from the South* the scene is of “an already full chorus”: the images are “clash and clatter,” “noisy controversy,” and “ceaseless harangues”; the tone is one of argument and “busy objectivity” (51). One feels oneself alternatively listening to a heavily percussive piece of music, in an overheated courtroom, on a too-busy city street. And yet Cooper senses something missing despite the turbulence, notices those in the corners whose mouths are barely moving, hears those from whom but a cry or a moan escapes.

Focusing on muted strains is a notoriously difficult task. What Cooper sees most obviously blocking out others are the individual and political versions of the obnoxious know-it-all and the blustering bully. But just as overwhelming are many of the voices of legitimacy and authority; indeed, she asks, how readily distinguishable are these? While we are used to the form a courtroom drama takes, with its evidentiary rules and parliamentary procedures, Cooper recasts this as oppressive noise. She similarly puts down the “dry-as-dust abstractions and mental gymnastics” (*Humor* 233) of certain classrooms. Also accused are white novelists who fail at “the art of ‘thinking one’s self imaginatively into the experiences of others’” (139). What do they have in common? Each confidently mistakes their partial findings and admitted technical skill for conversation and inclusive knowledge. They are guilty, in literature, in the classroom, of the larger social vices: egotism, overgeneralizing, and seeing “at long range or only in certain capacities” (149). So used are we to the din that it is the muffled strain that seems “jarring,” not the “vociferous disputation” (51).

Near-silences and less than fully articulated voices make Cooper tune in harder, and bring her focus to outsiders. She teaches us that a liberatory theory of voice must comprehend more than imagined poles of free speech and oppressive silence. The most silent figure Cooper portrays is “open-eyed” (51), while the most outspoken is rude, silencing, and arrogant. Also, what we have only seems to resemble a continuum; because the voices are in the same chorus none can be taken out of context, and the speech of one always affects that of others. Further, because we exist in multiple roles and relationships, our silence or voice in one situation may differ dramatically from that in another. She turns from the imagined poles of silenced and silencing to a portrayal instead of interacting voices in varied circumstances with different degrees of education and credibility unevenly backed by social structures. Cooper’s focus shifts from silencing to how we interact, where her thoughts on civil discourse and public manners become central.

It seems from a cursory glance that we *have* listened—every word has been “analyzed and dissected, theorized and synthesized” (51). Each attorney thoroughly presents a side. The well-reviewed novel reaches its conclusion. Yet somehow still there is “sublime ignorance or pathetic misapprehension” (51). There has not been a fair trial after all. Not all of the fictional characters are equally well developed. We have evaluated the French Revolution from almost every conceivable viewpoint—except that of those on the bottom, the enslaved in the colonies. This hushed scream is what we keep missing in the din,

despite the fact that it colors everything, her dissertation informs us, and that our understanding is dangerously shortsighted without it. Larger systems of extreme prejudice infiltrate through various institutions and practices all the way down to our very imaginations.

We seem to miss or resist, Cooper thinks, the fact that there are truths “from *each* standpoint” and that we can alone have only partial knowledge. The power we possess by virtue of our race, sex, and class influences what we see, what we have been taught, what we can easily understand. There is an epistemology in Cooper, a standpoint epistemology that demands of us many great *dialogic virtues*, such as sympathy, modesty, compassion, appreciation, imagination, and humility.

One needs others in standpoint epistemology, which is why Cooper’s theory of voice ultimately makes her a communitarian, someone who is inspired and required to relate to others civilly and open-mindedly, aware always that one needs “radically corrective” (52) perspectives from others. We cannot *quite*, Cooper tells us, put ourselves in one another’s shoes, and even “broken utterances” (51) from another can help. We must be “delicately sensitive.” What an exquisite social virtue: delicate sensitivity. Noise must be hemmed in or blocked out to exercise such skill. It takes something profound like a commitment to be one another’s keeper to “purify and exalt the narrow, selfish and petty personal aims of life into a noble and sacred purpose” (64). “Wondrous whisperings” await the seekers of divergent perspectives (158) who can get past “preconceived notions” (*Ethics* 209). But there is not one tonic, because the problems come in many forms and moments allow of different resolution.

The work to be done is on all parties. The most oppressed need to recover “self-assertion” (143), “tongue,” and “nerve” (173), and cannot allow themselves only to be spoken for. “Speak out and speak honestly” (159), she demands. One must challenge rules that function to silence, whether in the courtroom, in literature, even in what we think is conversation. We must all seek other voices, and make room for softer tones. Those same skillful ears that can make concordance out of noise can make a voice out of a cry. We will be rewarded with richer theories of theology, science, justice, and economics (76–77). We will be rewarded with friendships and expanded horizons—with cultivated souls.

There is better and worse “speaking for” others. Some of Cooper’s most poignant negative examples come from literature, where she shows how white authors fail at “the art of ‘thinking one’s self imaginatively into the experiences of others’” (139). The better example is Cooper, who proclaims “I speak for the colored women of the South” (202). She does her homework and she cares, as both intellect and feeling are required (147). In speaking for others she testifies to the

ideals of womanhood they maintained and acknowledges their “heroic struggle” (202). She celebrates their ignored accomplishments. To speak well for another one “vocalizes and inspires its better self” (142).

Most important, we have to cease our worship of the White, the male, the self, the bully, and the warmonger, in ourselves and each other. Cooper seems to believe that if we experience ourselves and one another through the fullness of community we would never give it up, for the gains—the gifts of a developed self, human friendship, and democratic society—would be so compelling. Through individual and group agency (62), and in the “flower of modern civilization” (54), people can come to true democratic relationships, where the humanity of each is respected. They require a culture to support this, and that culture is something to which everyone, especially women in gendered societies, can contribute. The set of civil manners they spread is capable of effecting a genuine revolution (97).

Throughout her work Cooper integrates theory, commentary, and biography. In the end, all direct her to civil conversation that nourishes every soul. Cooper has the same foes as do all the better enlightenment philosophers—“tradition and superstition,” which have “manacled and muzzled” rationality and freedom (106) and undermined equality. “All prejudices, whether of race, sect or sex, class pride and caste distinctions are the belittling inheritance and badge of snobs and prigs” (105). Mere manners (105), she suggests, go a long way, giving us the means to listen and learn. Cooper’s graphic portrayals of multiple forms and degrees of silence, in persons real and fictional, stay with the reader long after her works are read. She complicates every position. It is, after all, only “said that the South remains Silent” (51). Not being invited to participate, or having one’s words “uncomprehended” (51), should not be mistaken for someone either having said nothing or having nothing to say. It is ultimately “subversive of every human interest” that the voices of certain groups be “stifled” (107).

Note

- 1 Lemert and Bhan 1998, 61. References to essays in *A Voice from the South* are placed in the text with pagination only.

Cooper’s major writings

- [1902] 1998. “The Ethics of the Negro Question.” In Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield: 206–15.

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- [1930] 1998. "The Humor of Teaching." In Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield: 232–35.
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Further reading

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MARY DALY (1928–2010)

Krista Ratcliffe

Mary Daly, a prominent philosopher-activist of U.S. second-wave feminism, challenged mainstream religions for oppressing women and conceptualized a wildly original Radical Feminist metaethics. In her writings, Daly advocated language play (playing with etymologies,

capitalization, spelling, puns, homonyms, etc.) as a deadly serious means through which women may expose patriarchal socialization and discover not only Radical Feminist Truths but also their authentic Selves. Born in Schenectady, New York, Daly earned a Ph.D. from St. Mary's College/Notre Dame University in 1954 and then two Ph.D.s from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, one in theology in 1963 and one in philosophy in 1965. In 1967, she began teaching theology and ethics at Boston College. At this Jesuit institution, she gained a national and international reputation for her feminist scholarship in religion and philosophy and also for her pedagogical practices. Daly refused to admit men into her upper-division courses although she would agree to tutor them privately. This pedagogical choice was grounded in her principle of Radical Feminist Separatism, the idea that women should separate themselves from "all that is alienating and confining" in order to engage "deep questions" and "par[e] away the layers of false selves from the Self" (*Gyn/Ecology* 381). In sum, she believed women students talked more, and more honestly, when men were not in the room. In 1999, Daly's Separatist pedagogy was legally challenged by a male student at Boston College and resulted in her termination; she counter-filed and settled out of court, which resulted not in her admitting men into her classes but, rather, in her retiring in 2001. Throughout her life, Daly remained committed to writing and living a Radical Feminist philosophy that not only represents physical and metaphysical Truths of women but also provides women a method for discovering their Selves and, in the process, discovering and creating "a world other than patriarchy" (1).

Daly's Radical Feminist philosophy posits concepts and truths as actions, not abstractions. In *Gyn/Ecology* she defines *Radical Feminism* as "the journey of women becoming" (1), a journey made possible by Spooking (getting rid of old ghosts), Sparking (being fired up by foremothers), and Spinning (using generative, creative powers to change themselves and their worlds); this journey moves women's thinking and be-ing from the mystifications of patriarchal foreground knowledge into the realm of Radical Feminist Background Truths (34, 2–3). For years, this book was as popular in women's shelters as in feminist classrooms. In *Pure Lust*, Daly extends her definition of *Radical Feminism* by conceptualizing three more moves: Be-Longing or "experiencing our ontological connectedness with all that is Elemental" (354), Be-Friending or creating "a context/atmosphere in which acts/leaps of Metamorphosis can take place" (373), and Be-Witching or "the actual leaping/hopping/flying that is Metamorphosis" (388). Metamorphosis may be experienced by any Spinster and may result in her be-coming