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**Abstract:**

Elizabeth Cady Stanton opened her now famous "Solitude of Self" by asserting her desire to make manifest the "individuality of each human soul." Using Stanton's attempt to display the human soul as a case study, I consider in this essay the capacities of language to disclose the self. I argue that, for Stanton, self-disclosure is fundamentally performative: the "Solitude of Self" evokes the "inner-being we call ourself" through a reliance on, and a subsequent violation of, a distinctively narrative logic. As this violation takes from the audience the sense of order that the narrative had theretofore provided, it puts the audience in a position where they, now shorn of narrative and the order it provided, can experience firsthand the solitude of self.

**Text of paper:**

\*Begins on the following page.

## Stanton's "Solitude of Self" as Public Confession

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## Stanton's "Solitude of Self" as Public Confession

On January 18, 1892, Elizabeth Cady Stanton delivered her now-canonical speech, "The Solitude of Self." First delivered to the House Committee on the Judiciary, the achievement of the speech was immediately recognized. The House Committee printed ten thousand copies at its own expense and distributed them throughout the country; Stanton's better-known partner in the woman's movement, Susan B. Anthony, called the speech the "most unanswerable argument" for the "full freedom and franchise of women;" and according to rhetorical scholar Beth M. Waggenpack, Stanton herself considered it her best speech.<sup>1</sup> Almost one hundred years later, in one of the few essays dedicated to Stanton's "Solitude of Self," Karlyn Kohrs Campbell assured us that Stanton's speech remained a classic "statement of the principles and values underlying the struggle for women's rights."<sup>2</sup>

By 1892 Stanton had long been a radical voice in the movement for women's suffrage. Historian Elisabeth Griffith notes, however, that by the 1890s Stanton's physical limitations "determined" her daily routine: speaking engagements dramatically decreased and most of her time was dedicated to "thinking and writing."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps because of this distance from the immediacies of the conflict, Stanton chose not to use her last major address—what Campbell has referred to as the "climax" of her oratorical career—to reiterate one more time the tired and by-then "familiar" arguments for women's enfranchisement.<sup>4</sup> Instead, Stanton used "Solitude of Self" to explore, in a rather philosophical register, the humanism and individualism that she believed undergirded the women's movement.<sup>5</sup> Susanna Kelly Engbers does an admirable job connecting the philosophical musings of "Solitude" to the political goals Stanton had long pursued: The speech, she writes, "is a meditation on the necessary solitary condition of all human beings and the corresponding duty of a political system to acknowledge that isolation and allow each citizen to exercise 'every faculty of mind and body' to accomplish his or her own necessary work."<sup>6</sup> Engbers' excellent summary, however, should not occlude the fact that, in "Solitude of Self," the philosophical focus on the "necessary solitary condition" of humanity takes clear precedent over the political "duty" of acknowledgement.

From the very first sentence of her text, Stanton emphasized that "rights of woman" must not be divorced from the ontological question of "what belongs to her as an individual."<sup>7</sup> Not until this fundamental question was settled could the debate proceed to consider the "rights of woman" as a citizen, a female, a mother, etc. Unless the ontological individuality of women was acknowledged, the pursuit of rights based on questions of citizenship and gender roles would ultimately prove specious. In practical terms, this meant that arguments for women's suffrage that claimed female enfranchisement as a means of enabling women to better care for their homes, families, or even their polities were fundamentally shortsighted. For even the argument that enfranchisement would allow women more access to the public sphere still elided the

ontological question Stanton sought to foreground, for public-sphere based arguments foreground the woman-as-citizen rather than the woman-as-individual. Stanton thus uses the “Solitude of Self” as an opportunity to wax philosophical, to momentarily set aside the demands for workable proposals and practical solutions, and to focus her audience on the ontological individuality of the self. In her words, “The point I wish plainly to bring before you on this occasion is the individuality of each human soul” (372).

In our postmodern age it is tempting to dismiss as impossible Stanton’s attempt to disclose “our inner being which we call ourself, [which] no eye nor touch of man or angel has ever pierced” (384). For you don’t have to be a particularly savant poststructuralist to know that if the self is, as Stanton insists, accessible only to “Omniscience” (384), than the biased, partial, and mundane resources of rhetoric will hardly prove capable of presenting the “inner being which we call ourself.” Yet, I believe it would be a mistake to simply dismiss Stanton as theoretically naïve, for the work of Joshua Gunn has convinced me that the immense “time and energy” people invest in trying to make language bear witness to the transcendent is far more interesting than the fact, so widely rehearsed, that such a project is bound to fail.<sup>8</sup> In fact, in spite of the much-proclaimed theoretical difficulties that attend it, Stanley Fish has argued that the desire for a language capable of capturing a transcendent truth is recurrent. He claims that there have been “countless articulations” of the attempt “to construct a language from which all perspectival bias (a redundant phrase) has been eliminated.”<sup>9</sup> Gunn’s “time and energy” and Fish’s “countless articulations” both serve to remind us that no matter how vigorously academics might insist that language cannot represent the ineffable, this lesson has done nothing to temper the ambitions of those who, like Stanton, would seek to disclose their “inner being.”

Both Gunn and Fish emphasize that the desire for a perspective-free language manifests itself in the formal properties of discourse. Gunn, for example, argues that it was precisely the desire for an “Adamite language in which the signified and the signifier were one in perfect iconicity” that drove the occultists to the creation of ever-new esoteric vocabularies.<sup>10</sup> Fish, although he provides fewer examples, similarly argues that the drive for a language “purged of ambiguity” manifested itself in “linguistic reform.”<sup>11</sup> We might expect, then, that a discourse that takes as its aim to display “plainly” the transcendent self (which “no eye nor touch of man or angel has ever pierced”) to be marked by precisely such linguistic reforms. In this sense it is not surprising that Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, in her insightful and much-cited essay on Stanton’s “Solitude,” found that, “Rhetorically, the address violates nearly all the traditional canons. It makes no arguments; it provides no evidence . . . . It has no logical structure.”<sup>12</sup> As the work of Gunn and Fish suggests, if Stanton was to pursue her goal of presenting plainly the transcendent self, it was incumbent upon her to develop novel forms of address. For it was precisely by altering the “traditional canons” (Fish’s “linguistic reforms”) that Stanton sought in rhetoric the resources for her transcendent task. Thus while Campbell is certainly correct that the speech violates the “traditional canons” of rhetoric, this does not mean that it has “no logical structure.” Indeed, it is my argument that the entirety of the speech—and the conclusion in particular—is

superintended by a confessional logic in which the end (*telos*) of rhetoric is not persuasion, but rather the disclosure of the self. By placing “The Solitude of Self” in a confessional tradition of rhetoric, I am, then, able to foreground a logic that, as Campbell has aptly shown, tends to disappear when the speech is contextualized vis-à-vis the “traditional canons” of rhetoric. As such, I suggest that Stanton’s speech has much to teach rhetorical theorists about what Bradford Vivian has called the “modes of thought and speech” by which the self is disclosed.<sup>13</sup> It reminds us that if we are to understand the now-ubiquitous discourse of confession, we must be willing to situate confessional texts outside of traditional canons and traditional “modes of thought and speech.”

Situating “Solitude of Self” in a confessional tradition is not as farfetched as it may seem. The widely read feminist historian Ann Douglas argues that less than twenty years after Stanton’s death in 1902, her home city of New York would turn the attempt to speak with “terrible honesty” of the self into something of a modish fashion. If in 1892 the attempt to display the individuality of the self seemed appropriate only for a radical like Stanton, the onset of literary modernism, from which Stanton is separated by only a sliver of time, would make such attempts seem commonplace.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Susanna Kelly Engbers’ fantastic reading of Stanton vis-à-vis the nineteenth-century discourse of sympathy also suggests that Stanton may be profitably placed in a confessional tradition of rhetoric. Engbers explains that Stanton must not be situated in a classical tradition of rhetoric that takes persuasion as its ultimate goal. Rather, she argues that Stanton’s rhetoric fits more comfortably in a modern tradition of rhetoric “which claims as its end *communication*.” Further, and even more explicitly, Engbers notes that “much of the speech is surprisingly intimate—‘rhetorically inappropriate,’ as Campbell puts it. As if unburdening herself of a private confession. . . .”<sup>15</sup> In this essay, then, I take Engbers’ “as if” seriously, I place “Solitude of Self” in a modern, confessional tradition and read it, not to foreground the arguments that are marshaled for the purposes of persuasion, but rather to foreground the “linguistic reforms” by which Stanton sought to make language adequate to the task of self disclosure.

Taking one final cue from Engbers, I argue that Stanton affects this ad equation by a sort of “rhetorical indirection.” Drawing on Adam Smith’s lectures on rhetoric, Engbers argues that Stanton sympathized with her audience indirectly. Stanton, the argument runs, established sympathy by “refracting” her emotions through a third party, thus leading her audience circuitously to the desired affective response.<sup>16</sup> I pursue a similar sort of indirection. I argue that Stanton alienated her audience in the strongest sense of the term; she took from them the capacities of narrative to order and make sense of the world and thus left them radically alone. In such an alienated condition, Stanton suggested, her audience could *experience* the very solitude of self, which, because it is transcendent, could never be “plainly” brought before their eyes with the meager resources of rhetoric.

The argument proceeds in two sections. In the first section, I interrogate Stanton's much-repeated claim that the individuality of the self emerges only in the most extreme moments of life. Births, deaths, tragedies, warfare—these topoi dominate Stanton's speech because the extremity of each of these topics foregrounds the individuality of each human being. Here I draw on the work of Kenneth Burke, for textual movement of Stanton's text between an extreme scene and an individual self is a rather prominent example of Burke's scene-agent ration. I conclude this section by noting the limitations of a pentadic logic for Stanton's project. In the second section I provide a close reading of Stanton's conclusion. I argue that her invocations of the standard eighteenth-century markers of the sublime are in fundamental tension with the narrative, pentadic logic that had theretofore structured the speech. But this tension is productive: as the sublime interrupts the narrative logic, Stanton alienated her auditors by divesting them of the order that her narrative had provided. Thus the auditors find themselves in an extreme scene all their own and are able to experience the solitude of self. I conclude by reflecting more generally on how Stanton's text shapes our understanding of public confession.

### **The Work of Narrative: The Self *in Extremis***

Faced with the difficulty of representing the ineffable, Stanton sought recourse to an extreme situation. She insisted that the solitude of self is experienced only *in extremis*. She said, "We may have many friends, love, kindness, sympathy, and charity, to smooth our pathway in *everyday life*, but in the *tragedies and triumphs of human experience*, each mortal stands alone" (381; all emphases mine). The important thing to note here is that the solitude of self emerges under conditions of extremity. This is what Campbell referred to as the tragedy of Stanton's speech: bringing out plainly the human soul required an extreme setting.<sup>17</sup> The individual soul will not be experienced in everyday life, only in its tragedies and triumphs.

It is difficult to overestimate the energy that Stanton expends developing this point. Indeed, the speech reads as a veritable catalogue of extreme situations and superlatives modifying scenic descriptors. A few examples. Stanton argues that the solitude of self emerges in the "emergency" and the "hour of danger" (374). It is, for example, the soldier at war who experiences the solitude of self (375). Children, before they have any training, also experience the emergence of the unadorned self. Stanton tells the story of a little girl who received no presents on Christmas morning: "in the hours of her *keenest suffering*" she experienced the solitude of self. Stanton continues: the solitude comes in our "most bitter disappointments" and "brightest hopes" (375). It is experienced in "anxiety and agony," in the experience of "broken friendship or shattered love"; it comes to us in our "greatest triumphs and darkest tragedies"; it manifests itself in the "divine heights of human achievement" and in the "prison cell" (376). The individual self shines in the "hour of . . . deepest humiliation," and in the "deeper tragedies" of life (377). Not surprisingly, the aged also experience the solitude of self (378), as do the women "*suffering* in the prisons of St. Petersburg; in the *long weary marches* to Siberia, and in the *mines*" (379). In sum, Stanton concludes, it is "in the supreme moments" of life that the solitude

of self comes to the fore: “Whatever may be said of man’s protecting power in *ordinary conditions*, amid all the terrible disasters by land and sea, in *the supreme moments* of danger” the woman experiences the solitude of self (383).

The superlatives continue, but I trust the point is made. The self *qua* self exists and is experienced only *in extremis*. Accordingly, Stanton’s speech is an unrelenting barrage of superlatives seeking to portray the experience of the individual self. The solitude of self, then, is figured with recourse to the extreme scene. This movement back and forth between an extreme scene and the agent as such is underwritten, or authorized, by a narrative logic. *Pace* Campbell, who suggests that Stanton’s “Solitude of Self” “must be distinguished from the narrative and dramatic,” I believe the free movement that we see time and again between an extreme scene and the agent as such depends precisely on a “narrative and dramatic” logic.<sup>18</sup> This is most clearly seen with the aid of Burke’s Pentad—a critical heuristic designed to allow the critic to understand all discourse as a story, or a narrative or, in Burke’s term, a drama. Developing his notion of “dramatism,” Burke argues that there is a “synecdochic relation” between the scene and the agent.<sup>19</sup> In a sentence that seems as if it were a commentary on Stanton’s speech, Burke writes, “By logic of the scene-agent ratio, if the scene is supernatural in quality, the agent contained by this scene will partake of the same supernatural quality.”<sup>20</sup> There could hardly be a better description of Stanton’s text: the supernatural solitude of self is understood in terms of the extreme, indeed supernatural, scene. Stanton, I might note, suggests that the solitude of self is seen in the “agonies” of Jesus on the cross—a supernatural scene indeed. Without this synecdochic relation provided by the logic of narrative, Stanton would be unable to present the “inner-being” of the self with recourse to scenic conditions. For on its face, the notion is absurd: who would dare say that essence could be represented by scene, or that the agent could be captured by her placement, or, in Burke’s terms, that substance could be represented by substance. As scholars from Nietzsche to Hayden White have insisted, however, the trope of synecdoche enables language to approach the ineffable. As Nietzsche scholar Tim Murphy put it, “The central feature that Nietzsche notes about synecdoche here is that it is a process of selecting an aspect of a thing and representing that aspect as the whole, *even the essence*, of the thing from which it is selected.”<sup>21</sup> In Stanton’s speech, it is not so much that the part may be substituted for the whole, but, following Murphy, that a part of one’s experience (the extreme part) may be substituted for the essence of one’s individuality.

In sum, as Stanton labored to bring the solitude of self plainly before her audience, she relied on a fundamentally narrative, synecdochal logic. It was this logic that made possible the passage from an extreme scene to the inner being of the self. This was a brilliant move on the part of Stanton. Her recourse to a synecdochally infused narrative allowed her to approach the ineffable indirectly, or figuratively. And yet, we know from the first line of her speech that she must have been dissatisfied with this. For she did not want to present the individual soul figuratively; rather, “the point I wish *plainly* to bring before you on this occasion is the individuality of the human soul” (372, emphasis mine). For a “plain” presentation of the inner

self, a narrative logic would simply not do. For this purpose Stanton needed to abandon the narrative that had thus far structured her speech and turn instead to a sublime logic.

### **The Work of the Sublime: The Human Soul Brought Plainly Before You**

Burke warns that one of the dangers of a narrative logic is that the agent merges with, and becomes indistinguishable from, the scene. Burke fears that the communion between agent and scene might become so intimate that the boundary that separates scene and agent might begin to blur and “human figures” would thus “[dissolve] into their background.”<sup>22</sup> The extremity of Stanton’s scenes, however, seems to suggest an opposite problem. She employs so many superlatives to describe the scene that one begins to wonder if there could be any communion at all with such a scene. Can the logic of narrative really support a movement between an extreme scene and a self? Stanton is here pushing the limits of narrative. Consider her reading of Jesus’ solitude:

In the highways of Palestine; in prayer and fasting on the solitary mountaintop; in the Garden of Gethsemane; before the judgment-seat of Pilate; betrayed by one of his trusted disciples at his last supper; in his agonies on the cross, even Jesus of Nazareth, in those last sad days on the earth, felt the solitude of self. (381)

This passage exhibits the work of narrative. Note the relationship and communion between scene and agent. But one must note also the strain on the powers of narrative; the story is a compendium of *un-common* experiences, of un-shared extreme moments, and, most importantly, un-shared scenes. Jesus alone was abducted in the Garden of Gethsemane, stood trial before Pilate, and was crucified by those he claimed to love. It would seem that the ability of narrative to move freely between scene and agent depends on shared experiences of place, whereas the extremity of the passion narrative seems to preclude this identification. Indeed, in all of Burke’s examples, the scene stands in synecdochal relation to the self primarily because the scene is a *common* scene; the audience knows what sort of people congregate in, say, a den or a countryside, and can thus move from the setting to the self.<sup>23</sup> By emphasizing the extremity of the scene, Stanton pushes the limits of the narrative form and the capacities of the Pentad.

Indeed, I want to argue that in the critical closing paragraphs of the speech, Stanton’s descriptions of extremity violate the limits of the narrative form. In her conclusion she recounts the writings of a “recent writer” who experienced the solitude of self in angry seas and soaring mountains. The passage is important, and I here quote it at length:

I remember once, in crossing the Atlantic, to have gone upon the deck of the ship at midnight, when a dense black cloud enveloped the sky, and the great deep was roaring madly under the lashes of demoniac winds. My feeling was not of danger or of fear . . . but of utter desolation and loneliness. Again I remember to have climbed the slopes of the Swiss Alps, up beyond the point where vegetation ceases, and the stunted conifers no



longer struggle against the unfeeling blasts. Around me lay a huge confusion of rocks, out of which the gigantic ice peaks shot into the measureless blue of the heavens; and again my only feeling was the awful solitude. (384)

At this point in the speech, the scene is not simply extreme, it is sublime: it is beyond description, it resists disclosure, and, Stanton insists, it cannot be measured. On this score it is indicative that Stanton chose roaring seas and measureless mountains as the two scenes with which to end her speech, for these two scenes are, thanks to Kant, the standard eighteenth-century markers of the sublime. Indeed, the logic here is of a distinctly Kantian cast: the experience of the sublime casts the human mind back upon itself. Kant suggests that confrontation with extreme magnitude “makes us judge as sublime not so much the object as the mental attunement in which we find ourselves when we estimate the object.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, the experience of the sublime is, perforce, an experience of the self. Kant thus concludes that the self is “subjectively purposive.”<sup>25</sup> Or, in other words, when the human mind is confronted with “shapeless mountains piled on one another in wild disarray, with their pyramids of ice, or the gloomy raging sea” it “feels elevated in its own judgment of itself when it contemplates these [things].”<sup>26</sup> Given the similarities in logic between Stanton and Kant (sublime scene leads to an experience of the self), the similarities of examples (mountains and seas), and the similarities of emotive responses to the sublime (both Stanton and Kant emphasize that one does not respond to the sublime in fear<sup>27</sup>) one cannot help but wonder if Kant was the “recent writer” to whom Stanton refers.

That, however, is a question for another time. My point here is that, in the all-important conclusion of the speech, the scene, with reference to which the solitude of self has consistently been figured, is no longer simply extreme, but sublime. It is significant for my purposes that Kant insists that the sublime is only “universally communicable” because of what he calls the “*sensus communis*”: “a sense shared [by all of us], i.e. in our thought, of everyone else’s way of presenting [something].”<sup>28</sup> In other words, the sublime situation is communicable only because all human minds are hard-wired after the same fashion—they all present things, Kant insists, in the same way. It is here that I must take my leave of Kant and side, instead, with one of his best students, Hannah Arendt. Arendt suggests that if there is any genuine *sensus communis*, it is only in the fact that “we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.”<sup>29</sup>

To the extent that Arendt is correct that the human condition is one of plurality, the sublime becomes literally incommunicable—for there is no common ground that could make two people identify the sublime object in a similar fashion. And thus it follows that there can be no communion between a sublime scene and the self. What I am getting at is this: Stanton has so emphasized the sublimity of the extreme scene that she has broken the power of the Pentad and by extension the logic of narrative that has, to this point, authorized the presentation of the self through scenic invocations. She has, it seems, undercut the very logic that has supported her

speech; the logic of narrative authorized the movement between agent and scene, but by casting the scene as sublime and thereby wholly un-common, Stanton has broken the power of narrative to accomplish its task.

In another place, Hannah Arendt notes that it is among the powers of narrative to give order to the otherwise chaotic nature of our lives.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the order-giving power of narrative is widely attested. To cite only one further example, Hayden White quotes Levi-Strauss to argue that it is the task of narrative to impose order on the “blooming, buzzing confusion” of the world.<sup>31</sup> By grounding her speech in a narrative logic, Stanton’s speech also provided order. Yet, if I am correct that, in the conclusion of the speech, the powers of narrative falter under the weight of the incommunicable sublime, then this failure of narrative is also a divestment of order and an imposition of chaos upon her auditors. The auditors of Stanton’s speech have been living in the order she has provided for them. That order dissolved with the failure of narrative and the auditors thus find themselves in precisely the chaotic condition for which Stanton has just provided the protocols of reading. They find themselves *in extremis*, without order and without a story; in short they find themselves confronted with the sheer experience of being and they have nothing (no story, no narrative, no order) save for the resources that they have within themselves. They experience, in Stanton’s words, the solitude of self, or in Kant’s words, the subjective purposivity of a world divested of narrative.

It is as though the weakness of narrative and the subsequent failure of the pentad produced, for Stanton, a truth-effect and allowed her “plainly to bring” the self qua self before her auditors. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell put it perfectly, “To encounter the speech is to experience the magnitude of human solitude.”<sup>32</sup> Why? Because after insisting via a narrative logic that the self could be experienced only in the extreme moments of life, she put her auditors in precisely such a moment. She pushed narrative to the breaking point and accomplished the extremity necessary for the presentation of the agent apart from both the scene and the act.

### **Conclusion: Reflections on the Modern, Public Confession**

Stanton’s “Solitude of Self” was delivered in 1892, on the cusp of modernity. As I noted in the introduction, this was a scant thirty years before modernism would turn honest, unabridged, uncensored honesty into a literary fad. It is not too much, then, to read “Solitude of Self” as an early example of what has now become a ubiquitous genre: the public confession. Indeed, understanding “Solitude of Self” as a public confession teaches us two lessons about that genre that have endured throughout the twentieth century.

The first lesson is that the public confession is a decisively secular genre. Stanton’s speech makes no references to sins that must be atoned for or mistakes that must be set right. Yet, her speech remains confessional in the sense that she endeavored to disclose her deepest self. At this point I can hazard a generalization: the modern public confession replaces the admission of sinfulness with the disclosure of the self as the ultimate goal of the genre. Thus,

although Rousseau was reading Augustine's sin-lined *Confessions* as he wrote his own, in a typically modern spirit he concluded, "The particular object of my confessions is to make known my inner self."<sup>33</sup>

The second lesson of Stanton's "Solitude of Self" is that the public confession is a decisively modern genre. Campbell was correct that Stanton's "Solitude of Self" violates "nearly all traditional canons." This fact, combined with the enduring popularity—indeed, the canonicity—of the text, forces us to ask difficult questions regarding the limits of our "traditional canons." For how could a speech that "makes no arguments" and "provides no evidence" be so manifestly successful? I suggest that the sheer endurance of this "strange speech," reminds us that the now-ubiquitous practice of public confession cannot be explained with recourse to a Graeco-Roman tradition of rhetoric centered on concepts of persuasion, argument, and evidence. As I have argued elsewhere, the public confession is a decisively modern phenomenon, rooted in the rhetorical theory of the Enlightenment.<sup>34</sup> Stanton's confessional "Solitude of Self" is no different, grounded as it is in the Enlightenment belief that the experience of the sublime is subjectively purposive, casting the subject back onto the truth that is hers alone.

If the public confession is a fundamentally modern phenomena, it should not be surprising to us that so many contemporary public confessions operate with an Enlightenment epistemology. From the confession of Jimmy Swaggart in 1988 to the confessions of Bill Clinton in 1998, to the confessions of former New Jersey Governor James McGreevey in 2004 and 2006, each of these confessants assumed that language was little more than a glassy medium through which their true selves could be revealed without distortion. As critics it is, of course, requisite that we register the impossibility of this task and complicate the assumptions about language that undergird the entire genre of public confession. But, as I argued above with recourse to Gunn and Fish, it is equally important (and far more interesting) to demonstrate how the desire to present the self "plainly" before the public manifests itself in the formal properties of the confessions themselves.

In the case of Stanton, I have argued that her desire to present her "inner being" manifested itself in the *performative* nature of her text. To the extent my reading holds, Stanton's presentation of the solitary self depends not on a semiotic logic of sign and signifier, but on the performance of providing a narrative order for the audience and then taking it from them. Indeed, as I suggested in the introduction, it doesn't take great theoretical savvy to know that language cannot represent the ineffable. It is thus of the utmost significance that Stanton does not attempt to *represent* the solitary self. As Campbell put it, she "evokes" it; she enables the audience to "encounter" it. The very performance of her speech cast her auditors into an experience in which they, now divested of the comforts of narrative, might themselves encounter a being that could never be represented.

Thus the modern confession, although it sets for itself an impossible task, it must not be dismissed as philosophically naïve. The form of the confession as well as its very performance harbor resources to which the traditional canons are blind. For, at least as far as Stanton is concerned, the power of the public confession lies not in the arguments advanced or the evidence provided. Rather, the power of the public confession resides in its performative capacity to evoke an “encounter” with the self.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs, *Man Cannot Speak for Her, Volume II: Key Texts of the Early Feminists* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 372. Beth M. Waggenspack, *The Search for Self-Sovereignty: The Oratory of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 82.

<sup>2</sup> Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Stanton's 'The Solitude of Self': A Rationale for Feminism." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 66, no. 3 (1980): 305, 304.

<sup>3</sup> Elisabeth Griffith, *In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 206-207.

<sup>4</sup> Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak to Her*, 371. Campbell characterizes the period from 1890 to 1915 as the "doldrums" of the suffrage movement: "Their arguments had become familiar . . ." (Ibid., xxiii).

<sup>5</sup> Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak to Her*, 371.

<sup>6</sup> Susanna Kelly Engbers, "With Great Sympathy: Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Innovative Appeals to Emotion," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 37 (2007): 324.

<sup>7</sup> Qtd. in Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her*, 2:372. Hereafter "Solitude of Self" will be cited parenthetically.

<sup>8</sup> Gunn refers to this as "theological form": "transcendent truths are ineffable, but people invest a lot of time and energy into trying to represent ineffability." Joshua Gunn, *Modern Occult Rhetoric: Mass Media and the Drama of Secrecy in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), xxi. See also my argument regarding the limitations of Derrida. I note that although Derrida's claim that Rousseau's language of self-disclosure is plagued by contradictions is theoretically accurate, these contradictions have not hindered scores of peoples from imitating Rousseau. Dave Tell, "The Secular Confession of Jimmy Swaggart," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 39 no. 2 (Spring 2009): 136.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 475.

<sup>10</sup> Gunn, *Modern Occult Rhetoric*, 76.

<sup>11</sup> Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally*, 477.

<sup>12</sup> Campbell, "Stanton's 'Solitude of Self,'" 305.

<sup>13</sup> Bradford Vivian, "The Threshold of the Self," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 33, no. 4 (2000): 303.

<sup>14</sup> Ann Douglass, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 31-34.

<sup>15</sup> Engbers, "With Great Sympathy," 318, 326 (emphasis in original).

<sup>16</sup> Engbers, "With Great Sympathy," 318-23.

<sup>17</sup> Campbell, "Stanton's 'Solitude of Self,'" 308.

<sup>18</sup> Campbell, "Stanton's 'Solitude of Self,'" 305.

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- <sup>19</sup> Kenneth Burke, *The Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 7.
- <sup>20</sup> Burke, *The Grammar of Motives*, 8.
- <sup>21</sup> Tim Murphy, *Nietzsche, Metaphor, Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 25, emphasis mine.
- <sup>22</sup> Burke, *The Grammar of Motives*, 9.
- <sup>23</sup> Burke, *The Grammar of Motives*, 8.
- <sup>24</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 255-56.
- <sup>25</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 268.
- <sup>26</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 256.
- <sup>27</sup> For Kant on fear and the sublime, see *Critique of Judgment*, 261ff.
- <sup>28</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 275, 293.
- <sup>29</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 8.
- <sup>30</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics, 1994), 232-33.
- <sup>31</sup> Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 103. See also page 90: “We do not *live* stories, even if we give our lives meaning by retrospectively casting them in the form of stories.”
- <sup>32</sup> Campbell, “Stanton’s ‘Solitude of Self,’” 306.
- <sup>33</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. Angela Scholar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 270.
- <sup>34</sup> Dave Tell, “The ‘Shocking Story’ of Emmett Till and the Politics of Public Confession,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94.2 (May 2008): 156-178. Dave Tell, “Jimmy Swaggart’s Secular Confession.”