

**Marietta Holley, Alice Duer Miller, the Rhetoric of Suffrage Humor,
and the Changing Notions of Womanhood, 1848-1920**

By

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For everything

For always

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Foreword

Generally when people think of the suffrage movement, they conjure up serious images of impassioned speeches, solemn picket lines, violent protests, and intense congressional lobbying. However, there was another side to the movement and that was laughter. Humor was used by both sides to unify the believers, ridicule the nonbelievers, and draw in the undecided. Taking a cue from Bergson's idea of laughter as a social gesture (20), this dissertation investigates suffrage humor as a rhetorical act: the strategic use of laughter to restrain people from engaging in certain behaviors, to reinforce certain perceptions or beliefs, to undermine opposing views, and to unify like-minded individuals. Laughter was a rhetorical tool both for the movement and against it as both sides fought to gain the middle ground and claim common sense as their own.

In a general sense, this dissertation is a critical inquiry into the nature of suffrage humor. However, more specifically, it investigates all of these issues with an eye toward the rhetorical function, what Burke sees as the purest rhetorical pattern: speaker and hearer as partners in partisan jokes made at the expense of another (*Rhetoric* 38). I do not see the humorist as merely an entertainer but as a catalyst for change, especially when given what Bergson sees as the aggressive, potentially humiliating aspects of humor. Humor theorist M. Thomas Inge echoes this idea when he refers to humorists as social, political, and cultural critics who use laughter as “constructive dissent” (28). This is especially relevant when you consider that both sides of the suffrage issue attempted to make the opposition seem in need of gentle

(and not so gentle) correction. Laughter can be used by the majority to define normative behavior and maintain differences in power (Weisstein 51), but it can also be used as an antidote to dominance (Woolf qtd. in Reincke 182) or to subvert the dominant ideology (Morrell qtd. in Smith 51). So humor of the suffrage era stands as an exact example of this duality: the clash between those who fight to maintain sole power and those who fight to reorder the power structure. And the best way to win supporters is to make your side seem like common sense, so both sides fought for the middle ground as they tried to show the logic and the validity of their claims.

The idea of humor as a power struggle is not a new one, but the suffrage era stands as the first time that so many women writers of humor joined in the struggle. It is not an exaggeration to say that this was the first large-scale gathering of humorous female writers dedicated to a common cause, and the resulting give and take between both sides is fascinating. The humor was controversial and clever, vicious and subtle, and, most of all, relentless. Generally, humor of the suffrage era seems an oxymoron to most people, and any mention of the suffrage movement conjures up the image of the grim, deadly serious bluestocking, but supporters on both sides laughed loudly and often. However the somber image of suffrage remains to this day, which may explain why this topic remains largely unexplored.

Most scholars have concentrated their efforts on either women's humor or women's suffrage but not on both. Within the last 30 years there has been an enormous amount of scholarship devoted to humor by and about women in general—its targets and its placement within a matrilineal tradition of humor. Parallel to that

has been an increased interest in suffrage history based on transcripts of serious, impassioned speeches and accounts of purposeful, often violent protests. Anthologies of humorous women writers like *Laughing Their Way* by Martha Bensley Bruere and Mary Ritter Beard, *Redressing the Balance* edited by Nancy Walker and Zita Dresner, and *The Penguin Book of Women's Humor* edited by Regina Barreca do include one or two selections from the two most popular suffrage humorists, Marietta Holley and Alice Duer Miller, but these collections are more reclamations of authors previously lost rather than detailed analyses of their works. Jane Curry's edition of Marietta Holley's *Samantha Rastles the Woman Question* is the only book-length study of any suffrage humor writer available. *Cartooning for Suffrage* by Alice Sheppard thoroughly covers one type of humor, but no one has put all the disparate scholarship together in an attempt to study the written humor of the suffrage movement. However, I plan to bring everything together in order to form a more complete picture of suffrage humor overall.

The scope of this study will cover the period from 1848, the date of the first women's rights convention, to 1920, the date that the suffrage bill became the 19th amendment to the Constitution. However, owing to the increased activity on both sides as the issue gained in importance and momentum, the majority of the humorous material with which I will be working was published in the 10 years before the ratification of the amendment.

Because I am doing a rhetorical analysis and not a full-scale history, I will narrow my topic by focusing on those texts that are most representative of both anti-

suffrage and pro-suffrage views. My first chapter will be an investigation of suffrage humor as a rhetorical act. Through the calculated use of purposeful humor, humorists were able to sway the public's attitude from rejection of woman suffrage early in the movement to somewhat grudging acceptance by the end. Guiding the debate about votes for women was the public struggle over the ideals of True Womanhood, and I will explore the battle in suffrage humor over the sentimentalized True Woman versus the more active New Woman. I will then extend my analysis to the pro and anti-suffrage humor of the popular press. This will include humorous columns, jokes, and cartoons published in newspapers and magazines. I have chosen to focus on the popular press because most of the give and take of the suffrage movement took place there. It served the widest audience and was the best forum for disseminating information and arguments, so most of the prominent writers on both sides of the issue used it as their platform. In an attempt to bridge the chasm between early and late suffrage humor, I will pair up Marietta Holley and Alice Duer Miller, both prominent pro-suffrage humorists. Marietta Holley was active in the beginning of the movement, and her writings tend to be more conservative as she aligns herself with True Womanhood. Alice Duer Miller's writings came as the suffrage movement was gaining momentum near the end. Her style was much more aggressive and witty, and her pro-suffrage stance aligns itself unapologetically with the ideals of New Womanhood. These humorists bracket the suffrage movement and show its progress from pleas for acceptance to demands for passage. In the end, the pro-suffrage movement was successful, not just in winning the vote for women but also in winning

the battle for the center. Through the calculated use of humor, the suffragists were able to move the audience into accepting the pro-suffrage construction of womanhood and common sense.

Chapter 1

Humor and Purpose

I

Kenneth Burke wrote that “every document bequeathed us by history must be treated as a *strategy for encompassing a situation...the answer or rejoinder* to assertions current in the situations in which it arose” (*Philosophy* 109). In other words, any public statement about contemporary conflict such as newspaper accounts, magazine articles, and the like are not isolated utterances only mirroring the situation. Instead we should view them as wholly engaged in the business of constructing meaning and making sense of their situations. Each document should be read as an active element of the ongoing dialogue as it not only exists within the turmoil surrounding it but also as its author attempts to stake a claim within that turmoil. The document reflects what has come before, by engaging previous arguments, and directs what is to come, by bringing to light new ideas and new directions. For this reason Burke says that historical documents are both strategic and stylized answers (*Philosophy* 1). They are carefully constructed to fit within the boundaries of a contemporary conflict while they attempt to gain the audience’s attention and favor. Therefore, it is more accurate to view any historical document as a rhetorical act that attempts to sway public opinion than merely an objective “fact.”

The suffrage controversy is a clear example of this. Lining up opposite each other were two sides: those in favor of universal woman’s suffrage and those

opposed. And, as the historical record demonstrates, both sides became engaged in the great debate as they issued contrasting opinions on the subject. Every anti-suffrage editorial was met by a pro-suffrage speech, which was answered by an anti-suffrage leaflet, which was rejoined by a pro-suffrage protest and so on. As a result, the fight over suffrage has a clear legacy of strategic, stylized answers arising out of a political climate as both sides engaged in what Burke calls the most basic function of rhetoric: inducement to action or to attitude (*Rhetoric* 42). Through their public statements, the historical documents we have today, both sides worked to win adherents, defeat the opposition, and claim common sense as their own. And for many, the war of words over suffrage was a serious business. On the anti-suffrage side there were many harshly worded editorials and leaflets threatening the dire consequences to home and family if women received the vote. On the pro-suffrage side were equally serious-minded editorials and leaflets detailing the terrible conditions the public already faced since women did not have the vote. Toward the end of the struggle, there was even civil discord in the streets as suffragists were arrested and imprisoned.

However, not all public statements were so serious. In fact, some were designed to provoke laughter, not outrage. Specifically, this was laughter with a rhetorical purpose: to unify the believers, to ridicule the nonbelievers, and draw in the undecided. In other words, pro and anti-suffrage humorists were working to induce action and agreement in their audiences, the same rhetorical goal as “serious” pro and anti-suffrage writers. So, as some writers resorted to blame, outrage, and warning to

stir their audiences, others used humorous blame, outrage, and warning to stir theirs. In fact, laughter was a rhetorical tool both for and against the suffrage movement as it served to restrain, reinforce, undermine, and unify those within and without the struggle.

Using humor to gain a political advantage is not a new technique. Many political leaders and movements, both ancient and modern, have come under humorous attack or led their own attack. Often, however, humor is viewed as merely a respite from the more important work involved in political movements. This seems to be the common perception of suffrage humor. The enormous amount of scholarship devoted to the suffrage movement has made very little mention of humor as many suffrage scholars have ignored the idea that there is power and change possible through laughter. For example, Linda Steiner, in her dissertation *The Woman's Suffrage Press, 1850-1900*, a cultural analysis of pro-suffrage newspapers, merely remarks on the existence of humor columns in a few publications but makes no attempt to analyze their contents. Lynne Masel-Walters' dissertation on suffrage publications, *Their Rights and Nothing Less: The History and Thematic Content of the American Woman Suffrage Press, 1868-1920*, discusses the use of humor in the suffrage movement but claims that pro-suffrage jokes were primarily "intended to amuse the readers or divert their attention from the pressing problems of their day and sex" (283). Now certainly humor is a means of producing pleasure, but to confine it solely to that purpose is to ignore its true power. It is much more accurate to think of humor as purposeful and to view the humorist as not merely an entertainer but as a

catalyst for change. During the fight over suffrage, purposeful humor was used as a strategic response to many more serious writings because of its unique ability to entertain the audience while attempting to manipulate its beliefs.

One of the main goals of purposeful humor is to restrain behavior through laughter, which is why Bergson calls laughter a social gesture (20). The fear of being ridiculed can restrain the behavior that caused the laughter in the first place. Bergson calls this the “threat of correction” that society holds over its members because society will avenge itself (in the form of humorous criticism) for liberties taken with it (135, 197). “Laughter is, above all, a corrective...checking the outer manifestations of certain failings, thus caus[ing] the person laughed at to correct these failings and thereby improve himself inwardly” (Bergson 197). The assumption is that one will act in a way so as to avoid ridicule; therefore laughter can modify behavior, keeping one from unacceptable behavior and rewarding acceptable behavior.

The reinforcement of certain perceptions or beliefs is closely related to the idea of restraint. Laughter can be used to reinforce acceptable behavior and force compliance to society’s norms when it is used by those in power. Hugh Dalziel Duncan says that humor can uphold authority “by making ridiculous, absurd, or laughable whatever threatens social order” (376). Weisstein, in her work on women and humor, says that laughter can be used as a weapon “constructed to maintain caste, class, race, and sex inequalities...It serves to put whoever it is in their place by showing that they cannot be taken seriously” (51).

The other side of this is that purposeful humor can also be used to undermine opposing views. This is often utilized by those out of power as a way of asserting themselves. By undermining authority, the disenfranchised can put the powerful in the unique position of having to defend what is believed to be acceptable behavior. Sociologist Richard M. Stephenson calls humor an ideal conflict weapon because it conceals malice, which shields the humorist from the consequences that would have followed an overt attack (569). Humor makes aggressiveness or criticism possible against the powerful (Freud 125), and it can tear down the obstacles they have set up as it undermines them with ridicule.

Laughter can also function as a unifying force among both the powerful and the powerless. Laughing together is the surest route towards unity because it implies a twofold sense of agreement among the laughers: first a common frame of reference and second, a common recognition of absurdity. According to Bergson, laughter is always in need of an echo (5); therefore the sense of laughing with others is both a necessary component of humor and a good way to bring people together. And, in terms of group dynamics, laughing together fuels feelings of solidarity within to the exclusion of others: those who are the butt of the joke and those who fail to recognize the absurdity.

II

As a rhetorical act upon an audience, humor generally achieves consensus more easily than standard serious argumentation because it seeks laughter, and in

seeking to shape attitude rather than action, humor attempts a less difficult goal. For example, a serious speaker may have to bring forth pages of statistics and studies to move an audience. A humorist, however, can win an audience on a clever turn of phrase. Aristotle believed that the proof provided by the speaker should be valid and persuasive. However, in humor, the validity and persuasiveness of any joke can be measured in laughter: the more laughter, the more persuasive the audience finds the proof. For a speaker who seeks agreement, laughter can imply both.

Freud calls this bribing the audience with pleasure into taking sides with the humorist without a very close investigation (123). However such a judgment from the audience would not necessarily be irreversible because, as rhetorician Chaim Perelman points out, with rhetoric most claims are not self-evidently true, that is they cannot hope to be absolutely proven, so the best the speaker can hope for is that the arguments are judged reasonable (xi). Therefore, rather than speak of acceptance or rejection by an audience, it is better to work for adherence, a sense of unity and agreement between the speaker and the audience, as this is the strongest bond that can be built. The humorist wins adherence through laughter. More important, derisive laughter at the expense of either a misguided or contemptible object can make the audience feel superior which benefits the humorist. Laughter can put the audience in the right frame of mind to be persuaded in addition to building goodwill between the humorist and the audience (Click 67).

It is important to note that all four goals of purposeful humor serve the same master: to induce the audience to action or attitude. And this inducement is possible

because of what Burke terms identification. Identification assumes that, while people are essentially separate from each other and not identical, they share common ideas, attitudes, and beliefs, which cause them to identify themselves as part of larger groups or social units. Therefore, although people maintain a degree of distinctiveness from each other, they align themselves with others who have the same interests or (and this is an important distinction) they can be persuaded to align themselves with others who may or may not have the same interests. In other words, identification may hinge upon the *belief* rather than the surety of shared interests. As Burke points out, speakers draw on identification as a way of establishing a rapport with their audience because “only those voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of a voice within” (*Rhetoric* 39, 46). Therefore it may be more accurate to think of identification as a tool for rhetoric, not a neutral byproduct of persuasion. In other words, identification can be manipulated in audiences, and humorists often manipulate their audiences into believing that the humorist’s point of view is not only completely compatible with their own but also the most reasonable view.

Purposeful humor often represents not just a battle for the hearts and minds of the audience but also a battle for the middle ground, the stable center, as it were. The goal is to make one side seem like common sense, which in turn makes the other side the outsider, the “lunatic” fringe. The humorist attempts to make a partisan way of thinking seem like society’s neutral standard of acceptability. Then the humorist turns around and shows how the opposition has fallen away from that standard or has

failed to measure up. In other words, the humorist builds consensus with the audience by adopting the appearance of shared interests. Once a foundation of identification has been built, the humorist then uses that sense of unity to move the audience to a partisan way of thinking, all the while claiming that such thinking is not only a natural extension of their shared interests but also just plain common sense. This is a difficult task to accomplish without the audience ever disconnecting or being aware of a shift in the argument, but what makes it easier is that everyone wants to be on the side of common sense, especially if they consider themselves to be thoughtful, reasonable people.

An example of this is how anti-suffragists used purposeful humor to reinforce society's perceptions about the proper, strictly domestic role of women. The dominant image utilized by the anti-suffrage humorists was the domineering, brutal suffragist. The humorists began with the shared belief that women's most exalted and precious role was found in the home. It was the place best suited for her special abilities and the only place she was truly safe from the dangers of the outside world. The audience by and large would agree with such a premise, and, having built a foundation of consensus, the humorist then argued that opposing woman's suffrage was nothing more than the natural extension of the shared premise of woman's strictly domestic sphere. Keeping women in the home and away from the polls was made to seem as the inevitable, commonsensical response.

On the other side, pro-suffragists used purposeful humor in an attempt to reorder society's perception about the proper role of women. They used many

different images and ideas to accomplish this, but one of the dominant ones was an appeal to the audience's desire for social and moral justice. The pro-suffrage humorist began with the shared premise of Americans' belief in the innate goodness and purity of women, especially mothers. Having built a bridge of identification, the humorist then argued that woman's suffrage was the best way to bring incorruptibility and moral uprightness to public life. Woman's suffrage is made to seem as a necessary, acceptable, even commonsensical next step in the development of a just and moral society.

It is important to note, however, that the standard of acceptability the humorist has gone to such pains to establish in order to garner consensus may not actually be explicitly acceptable to those in the approving audience. As Stephenson puts it, the joke "may express collective, *sub rosa* approbation of action not explicitly approved" (570). An example of this is when someone laughs at a sexist joke but does not actually explicitly support the notion of sexism. In his work, *An American Dilemma*, Gunnar Myrdal examines the disparity between American ideals and behavior in terms of race relations and claims that joking can create "a collective surreptitious approbation for something which cannot be approved explicitly because of moral inhibition" (38). So humor cannot only reinforce certain perceptions, but it can do so even when those perceptions are largely disregarded or specifically reviled by the public at large. Therefore, the humorist can dwell in the fuzzy realm of what is truly acceptable behavior and what is not and can perpetuate and support a standard of behavior and thought that society itself will not explicitly tolerate. This gives the

humorist much more leeway in terms of exaggeration, criticism, invective, and distortion. Instead of having to be absolutely in line with approved outward behavior, a humorist may indulge in some extreme crossover, secure in the knowledge that what Myrdal calls the “understanding laugh” will absolve him of any wrongdoing (38).

Such tacit approbation worked in favor of both anti-suffrage and pro-suffrage humorists. Anti-suffrage humorists publicly voiced their absolute love and respect for women and claimed that their efforts to keep women from voting were only for women’s own protection. However, the cruel and degrading caricatures in which they indulged seemed to argue forcefully for women’s brutality and irrationality. Pro-suffrage humorists engaged in this as well when they seriously argued in favor of women’s rationality and unshakable morality, yet humorously painted anti-suffrage females as corrupt and selfish parasites. Using humor allowed both sides to distort and misrepresent their opposition in extreme ways that never would have been tolerated in serious public discourse but which enabled audience and humorist to indulge in the shared, understanding laugh.

When the anti-suffragists began their fight against female enfranchisement, they enjoyed great success because their cause was based on ideas that were completely acceptable to the public. The ideal of the pure, domestic woman safely ensconced at home was a belief shared by many, so, by using that as the basis of their humor, anti-suffrage humorists were able to utilize consensus to move the audience to

their partisan way of thinking, namely that suffrage threatened the safety and domestic harmony of women and their families. Anti-suffragism, therefore, did not seem like an arbitrary stance but like a natural extension of the domestic ideal, just plain common sense.

This made the task of the early suffragists much harder. With an audience fully invested in the idea of the sacred separateness of the sexes—men outside the home and women inside—pro-suffrage humorists had to articulate an argument for suffrage which did not violate society's conception of the proper duties for women. Therefore, early suffrage humorists argued that female enfranchisement would cause no disruption to families because voting is merely a civic duty, not a full-time calling, and a natural extension of her current duties as a law-abiding citizen.

However, the idea of a sacred separateness was not a lasting one as pro-suffrage humorists abandoned it after the turn of the century in favor of a more modern conception of womanhood that embraced the notion of women “doing” and “being” outside the home. Economic pressures, war, and shifts in social mores had wrought changes in women's lives, and the old ideas would not work anymore.

Despite these societal changes, anti-suffragists continued to insist on this static ideal even as the audience had begun to embrace a wider, more liberal conception of women pursuing activities outside the home, particularly works of charity and social justice. The anti-suffragists emphasized an ideal of womanhood that was pure but essentially passive; however mainstream audiences had evolved to believe that women had the special moral capacity needed to combat social ills.

Therefore, anti-suffragists hurt their own cause because of their continued insistence on outdated ideals and failed to maintain the foundation of consensus they had built with their audience.

Into this void stepped the pro-suffragists who adopted the previously anti-suffrage argument about women's purity and turned it to their own advantage. Many pro-suffrage humorists began to portray women in accordance with society's new ideals, as loving mother, moral crusader, and patriotic helpmate. Taking away the moral force of anti-suffrage arguments, pro-suffrage humorists, themselves, established consensus with the audience and began to move them to a new, partisan conception of womanhood, one in which woman's goodness could flourish and purify all things, including the political process. Confining women to a limited, strictly domestic role began to seem a selfish, irrational idea, and the anti-suffragists, previously so much in favor, lost their advantage. Pro-suffrage humorists were able to take the anti-suffragists' beliefs and arguments and, with a small amount of redirection and the full support of the audience, put them to work for the suffrage movement.

In the end, suffrage humorists were successful because their conception of what constitutes the best role for women was fluid enough to evolve alongside the audience's perceptions. Pro-suffrage humorists constantly reframed the suffrage argument to reflect the current boundaries of woman's proper place. The rhetoric of suffrage humor, therefore, evolved as conceptions of womanhood evolved, moving from appeals for parity to arguments of social and political expediency. Mutually

informing and being informed, suffrage humorists and the public found a point of identification – the special gifts of womanhood – and established a satisfying kind of consensus, which the humorists were able to exploit as they drew the audience along towards female enfranchisement. The audience willingly accepted the notion of women as politically and socially active yet still feminine and domestic, able to clean up politics and their kitchen floors. Even further, suffrage humor, having built a foundation of consensus, moved from Marietta Holley's rhetoric of conciliation and moderation, stressing conformity to the values of True Womanhood, to Alice Duer Miller's rhetoric of aggression and punishment, rejecting gender distinctions and refusing to conform to any model of acceptable womanhood.

Chapter 2

The Crux of the Matter: Womanhood Defined

I

In the struggle over woman's suffrage, much more was at stake than merely giving women the right to vote. At issue was society's conception of gender roles, of what was the true nature of womanhood and manhood. The contemporary belief that dictated entirely separate spheres for men and women ensured, at least on the surface, a clear set of expectations for behavior. The suffrage movement forced people to defend or reconsider those expectations. Understanding the uproar over simply dropping a piece of paper into a voting box, therefore, means understanding what such an action implied to both sides.

In the early nineteenth century, the differences between the sexes were believed to be "total and innate" (Welter 4). Women had a completely separate place in society than men, with a completely separate set of behavioral standards. The True Woman's nature, it was believed, had four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Welter 21); therefore, the True Woman's place in society should be where those virtues will serve her best: the home. In 1867, Reverend Dr. John Todd outlined the special role of women in his well-received pamphlet, *Woman's Rights*. According to him, woman is "the queen of the home, its center, its light and glory...the highest, holiest, most precious gift to man" (13). As a consequence of this noble position, she has a very limited place in society. While

men have political and economic power, True Women have moral sway over their families. She may not be able to effect social change on a grand public scale, but within her home the True Woman can use her feminine influence to effect local change through educating her children, developing their spiritual values, and providing them with moral guidance. The common view of men's sphere, however, was much less attractive. Men's work was portrayed as a never-ending cycle of drudgery, filth, and violence, and men, because of their rougher, coarser natures, were better suited to public life with its demands of ruthlessness and brutality (Todd 15).

Society's support of a strict division of men's and women's roles was widely seen as a way to protect women rather than oppress them. According to Rev. Todd, True Women had many rights including the right "to be treated with the utmost love, respect, honor, and consideration...to have every possible aid and advantage to fulfil [sic] her mission...to be exempted from certain things which men must endure" (14). Men were destined from birth to be protectors and leaders while women were destined from birth to be protected and led; anyone who tampered with this model was not just an enemy of society but of God himself (Welter 21).

Given such dire consequences, it is easy to see why the idea of giving women the legal right to vote caused such a passionate outcry. A woman exposed to the "dragging and wrangling" of the polls would degrade not only herself but all women (Todd 18). A voting woman was a tainted woman, and her involvement in politics could lead to other unthinkable violations of her sphere: she might argue over politics with her husband, she might publicly campaign for a candidate, or she might even run

for office herself, neglecting her domestic duties and her exalted position entirely. Needless to say, the ideal of separate spheres for men and women could not survive the entry of women into men's sphere.

After the first woman's rights convention in 1848, many newspapers published strongly worded editorials decrying the "unwomanliness" of demanding political rights. In the *Mechanic's Advocate* of Albany, NY, for example, "Women Out Of Their Latitude" objected to the societal upheaval inevitable upon any recognition of woman's rights:

Now it requires no argument to prove that [the granting of political rights to women] is all wrong. Every true hearted female will instantly feel that this is unwomanly, and that to be practically carried out, the males must change their position in society to the same extent in the opposite direction, in order to enable them to discharge an equal share of the domestic duties which now appertain to females...Society would have to be radically remodeled in order to accommodate itself to so great a change...and the order of things established at the creation of mankind, and continued *six thousand years* [sic], would be completely broken up (qtd. in Stanton 803).

Many editors echoed this position: women do not need political rights and to grant them would be completely calamitous to all society. Philadelphia's *Public Ledger* claimed that women already had enough influence over all human affairs, "Is not everything managed by female influence?...men have nothing to do but to listen

and obey to the ‘of course, my dear, you will, and of course, my dear, you won’t’” (qtd. in Stanton 804). However, allowing women legislated rights would spell disaster for all:

If affected [sic], it would set the world by the ears, make “confusion worse confounded,” demoralize and degrade from their high sphere and noble destiny, women of all respectable and useful classes, and prove a monstrous injury to all mankind. It would be productive of no positive good, that would not be outweighed tenfold by positive evil. It would alter the relations of females without bettering their condition. (*Mechanic’s Advocate* qtd. in Stanton 803)

Suffrage, editors argued, would overturn the careful and rational division of the sexes, so it must never come to pass.

In this context, suffrage humor, both pro and anti, was more than just a respite from more serious matters, more than just a laugh. Suffrage humor was a site of cultural conflict as both sides sought to define and redefine the notion of womanhood. The images and targets favored by the opposing sides attempted firmly to fix in the minds of the audience what the boundaries of acceptable female behavior were. Did women occupy a special place where they needed to be protected and served or were they merely fellow citizens deserving of the same rights as male citizens? As demonstrated below, the calculated use of tendentious humor became a force for social control, especially for the anti-suffragists who used humor both to echo the

dominant rhetoric of woman's proper place and to cement in the minds of the audience what kind of behavior was acceptable for women and what was not.

II

Anti-suffragists, also known as remonstrants, organized, at first informally, then formally as part of a nationwide group, to combat what they considered to be the growing threat of women's enfranchisement. Massachusetts became the birthplace of the anti-suffrage movement when a group of like-minded women gathered informally to express their concerns over the increasing number of pro-suffrage organizations (Benjamin 1). Soon after, the women formalized their own organization under the rather cumbersome name of the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women (Benjamin 3).

These women did not at first seek publicity or even notoriety; in fact, the members' names were not made public at all, so they certainly acted consistently with their own beliefs that women should not enter public life (Camhi 78). As the struggle went on, however, they adopted a number of techniques they presumably abhorred including campaigning and lobbying. This entry into public life revealed that many of them were white, wealthy, urban women and members of old, powerful families either by birth or by marriage (Camhi 2), and they included such east coast luminaries as Mrs. William Tecumseh Sherman, the wife of the famed Union general; Almira Lincoln Phelps, the sister of female education advocate Emma Willard (Jablonsky 3); Mrs. Schuyler van Rensselaer, the noted art critic who married into one of the east's

oldest families; and Mrs. Arthur M. Dodge, a descendant of one of the founding families of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Camhi 240).

Male anti-suffragists were no less powerful; Senator Elihu Root, Catholic Cardinal James Gibbons, Protestant Reverend Lyman Abbott, and former president Grover Cleveland all lent their names and support to the anti-suffrage cause (Jablonsky 12). Even the women's brother organization, the Man-Suffrage Association, a group dedicated to male-only suffrage, counted among its members railroad directors, corporate counsel, and J.P. Morgan's son-in-law (Camhi 108).

Anti-suffragists drew on their ties to business and industry for support. From the beginning, their strongest advocates had been women from families whose wealth often came from railroad, oil, and manufacturing interests (Benjamin 11). The reason for corporate America's opposition to suffrage was relatively straightforward. If women received the vote, business interests would be faced with a huge unknown electorate. Having championed women as the moral caretakers of society, business leaders realized that a woman who voted might very well pose a threat to the existing economic and political system. And, of course, female workers with the vote might cast their ballots for improving their own working conditions (Scott and Scott 25-26). The male leaders of these business interests, therefore, worked against suffrage through the anti-suffrage organizations to which their mothers, wives, and daughters belonged (Camhi 108).

Of course, anti-suffragists were not only driven by financial concerns. These were men and women who adhered to the ideals of True Womanhood, and they

considered these ideals as absolutely integral to a rationally ordered and highly evolved society. The notion of a strictly domestic sphere for women where they could be both protected from harm and allowed to develop their natural goodness and piety was so deeply ingrained among anti-suffragists that they insisted the suffrage question had deeper implications for society in general than merely political ones, warning of the potentially fatal consequences both to the very core of the family structure and to women themselves. Rev. Todd cautioned against educating women into the grave, taking them out of their sacred sphere and making them hermaphrodites (25):

The root of the great error of our day is, that *woman is to be made independent and self-supporting* [sic]—precisely what she can never be, because God never designed she should be. Her support, her dignity, her beauty, her honor, and happiness lie in her dependence as wife, mother, and daughter. Any other theory is rebellion against God’s law..., against marriage..., and against the family organization...(26)

Anti-suffragists, therefore, framed the suffrage issue not on legal grounds but on moral grounds.

III

Humor theorist Joseph Boskin calls humor both a saving device and a clarification process: “a protection against forces appearing incomprehensible,

overwhelming, or out of synchronization [and] a cleverly arranged mechanism for permitting insight into those same elusive, overpowering or ludicrous forces” (7). Despite the fact that humor can disguise its purpose with laughter, it can also bring basic social values into sharp relief (Boskin 7). In this way anti-suffrage humor, in its mockery of women’s enfranchisement, echoes the mainstream rhetoric of the boundaries of acceptable women’s behavior and serves as a warning against those who would try to subvert the dominant ideology of separate spheres.

The early instances of anti-suffrage humor in the nineteenth century targeted women who were foolish and wrong-headed but ultimately redeemable because the notion of women as deserving of respect and protection was so widespread. Early anti-suffrage humorists, therefore, had to refrain from treating suffragists too roughly; a woman demanding her political rights was still a woman. The message, at least at the start, was that women needed to be kindly led to see the error of their ways rather than cruelly exposed. The humorists, as a result, followed the same pattern to bring the ladies back into compliance: they offered a condescending explanation of the separate spheres men and women inhabited, subjected the ladies to a gentle ribbing, doled out a liberal measure of flattery, and always included a recitation of the terrible consequences that would inevitably follow any change.

One of the earliest pieces of suffrage humor is a perfect example of this kind of patronizing finger waving in which early anti-suffrage humorists engaged. *The John-Donkey* published an unsigned editorial on September 23, 1848 entitled “The Women in Arms” in which the editors irreverently referred to the Seneca Falls

participants as “pretty dears” and called Lucretia Mott, a respected leader in both the abolitionist and woman’s movement, a “savage old darling.”^{1,2} They laughingly referred to “woman hustling her neighbor in order to get her vote” and clamored for the chance to “electioneer among the pretty electors.”

In this case, the terrible consequences were evident in the problem of “who, under the new order of things, is to cook the victuals and wash the dishes—to say nothing of nursing the babies!” The problem with “hustling” women, which became a standard argument for anti-suffragists, is the neglect of the domestic sphere. The solution *The John-Donkey* advocates is for the “pretty dears” to stop arguing for the right to “wear the breeches” and instead “be satisfied with holding man under petticoat government.” In this piece, woman’s suffrage is treated as a laughable idea and suffragists are treated as recalcitrant children who can be taken in hand and led back to their place. Once reminded of their true duties and the impossibility of both hustling and nursing, these women will surely return to their rightful (domestic) place.

Originally published in 1876, humorist Josh Billings’ letter to Miss Jemima Josephine Jenkins about “Wimmins Rights” is another example of the pattern of condescending flattery and warning. After proclaiming his unequalled affection and reverence for women, Billings goes on to echo the standard defense of the sacred sphere women inhabit. According to Billings, voting would have many dire

¹ Many humor magazines relied on submissions from freelance writers and cartoonists to fill their pages, paying on a per-piece basis. As a result, the majority of jokes found in these magazines have no identified author. Cartoonists, however, often signed their work but frequently with an illegible signature. When practicable, I will include the writer or cartoonist of any humorous piece I use.

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consequences for women including causing them to neglect their duties at home and exposing them to dangerous influences. For example, a voting woman, to pay her poll tax, would have to work alongside “rum drinking and tobacco chewing wretches” (485). A voting woman would also have to arm herself and engage in rioting whenever a riot took place, running the risk of ruining her clothes (485). Therefore, the separation of the sexes, he argues, is the only way to keep women safe, “. . . i think the hour which sees yure sex, in this country, voters, will see the eazy and rapid dissolushun ov the only barrier we have, between the coarse instinkts ov man, and the sakred safety ov the domestick virtews, ov which yu hav been ordained the vestal keepers” (486).

Of course, since women already hold the balance of power, the franchise is unnecessary. “. . . i kno the power that woman haz over me, and i kno whare it lays, it dont lay in the ballot box, it lays in that misterious delikasy ov hers, thoze silken threads, whoze power iz invisible” (486). Therefore, women should not lower themselves to the physical act of voting—Billings calls that an “emaskulated privilege”—instead a woman should cherish the “‘magna-karta’ which she now iz empress ov” (486). Trading womanly influence in for a negative act fraught with peril is foolish. A woman should stay where she is most protected and cherished.

Women, it was believed, were merely following an absurd fad that they would lay aside as they would last year’s hat, so humorists set out to admonish them gently rather than let such foolishness continue. There was, however, an underlying caution to the humorists’ words, and, despite the flowery, elevated metaphors Billings uses in

his defense of female superiority, his piece is a warning to women. Underneath the flattery and gentle teasing is an understanding that men's care and reverence of women will disappear once women stop behaving in acceptable ways. This gentle chiding masked the hostility behind it, a socially acceptable hostility according to Freud (123), designed to release the tension inherent in their rebellion against mainstream mores and to bring the women back into compliance.

As the nineteenth century wore on, anti-suffrage humorists dropped the tone of gentle chiding and respectful teasing. The image of the silly, befuddled, but ultimately beloved female was abandoned in favor of a new image: a bullying, mannish shrew not above using tantrums to get her way. The reason for the change in targets is simple; the suffrage movement continued to grow in popularity and spread throughout the United States, so a stronger argument was needed to keep the existing social order intact.

Burkean scholar Hugh Dalziel Duncan calls authority "a kind of covenant between ruler and ruled that must be upheld if social order is to be maintained" (Burke, *Permanence* xxxvi). These women, anti-suffragists argued, were not just seeking a single political act, they were attempting to subvert the very foundation upon which American society rested: men had public lives; women had private lives. Therefore, since the threat was greater, the caricatures were harsher. Portraying women as more threatening and more disgraceful, anti-suffrage humorists argued that women's suffrage posed a danger to society as a whole because it changed women

from compliant, ministering angels to strong-minded, intemperate, menacing creatures.

Artemus Ward demonstrates the alteration in women's demeanor that could be a consequence of suffrage. In a sketch called "Woman's Rights," originally published in 1862, Ward and his traveling show set up shop in Indiana where he encounters the members of the Bunkumville Female Moral Reformin and Wimmin's Rites Associashun. The leader of the women, a "tall and feroshus lookin' critter," demands that they be allowed to enter without paying because they are women. He refuses and their interaction escalates into an angry encounter as the women alternately shout and sob as they attempt to force their way past him.

"O whot—whot!" screamed the femaile, swingin her umbreller in the air. O, what is the price that woman pays for her expeeriunce!"

"I don't know," sez I; "the price to my show is 15 cents pur individooal."

"& can't our Sosiety go in free?" axed the femaile.

"Not ef I know it," sed I.

"Crooil, crooil man!" she cried, & burst into tears.

"Won't you let my darter in?" sed anuther of the exsentric wimmin, taken me afeckshunitely by the hand. "O, please let my darter in—she's a sweet gushin child of nature."

“Let her gush!” roared I, as mad as I could stick at their tarnal nonsense; “let her gush!” Whereupon they all sprung back with the simultaneous observashun that I was a Beest. (108)

Such an attack on women by a man would usually have been viewed as grossly disrespectful, but Ward need not worry about society’s censure because these irrational women attack him first, stooping to bullying to get their way, and are, therefore, not deserving of respectful, gentle admonishment.

Adding to the belief that an emancipated woman was a loose cannon is Mark Twain’s “Petticoat Government,” a lively account of a female-populated legislature which seeks to predict what will happen if women enter politics. Using the commonly held assumptions of women’s irrationality and emotional intemperance, Twain argues that because of the presence of women, legitimate political discussion and order are swept away in favor of irrelevant discourses on fashion and insulting personal remarks from the female members of the state legislature.

Mr. Slawson of St. Genevieve. – Madam Speaker, This is absurd... We take up the discussion of a measure of vast consequence... and a member of this body, totally ignoring the question before the House, launches out into a tirade about womanly apparel! —a matter... utterly insignificant in presence of so grave a matter as the behests of the Great Pacific Rail—

Madame Speaker. – Consider yourself under arrest, Sir! Sit down, and dare to speak again at your peril!...

Miss Belcher. – Madam Speaker, I will dismiss the particular section of my subject upon which I was speaking when interrupted by the degraded ruffian from St. Genevieve, and pass to the gist of the matter. I propose, Madam, to prohibit, under heavy penalties, the wearing of the new street-dress... (Sloane 231)

In the hands of women, politics becomes a farce as the female elected officials insult and bully the men until the session disintegrates into a full-blown riot with the male legislators barely escaping with their lives.

Mark Twain's portrait of female politicians engaging in rude invective and physical violence to assert their positions works as a form of social disapproval to dissuade women from pursuing a political voice. By portraying women engaging in acts that are absolute violations of acceptable female behavior, Mark Twain vilifies suffrage and the terrible alterations in women's characters it will cause. In this piece Twain argues that the danger women pose to the political process is not that their delicate womanliness will be tainted by the abuses and excesses current in the process but that women will become wrathful and vicious because they have not the capacity of rational thought and emotional stability to temper themselves.

Visual representations of women were distorted as well to convey further the point that suffrage doesn't only cause women to behave in unnatural ways, it makes them look ridiculous. "Suffragettes" women began to appear in cartoons dressed in men's breeches, brandishing riding crops (Appendix A).³ They were shown taking

³ "The American Costume, as Represented by Punch," *The Carpet-Bag* 1851:np.

men's place as the head of the household, smoking their cigars and bullying them into a submissive role. Spinster suffragettes were dressed unattractively in masculine clothes and shown scowling at the men around them. According to art historian, Lisa Tickner, these caricatures were not recent inventions to stem the tide of suffragism; they were well established character types which nineteenth-century illustrators had used before and now pressed into service to serve the cause of anti-suffragism.

The domineering wife was almost instantly recognizable to audiences as she loomed threateningly over her cowering, hen-pecked husband (another recognizable type). The more influential image, however, was the suffragette spinster, sublimating her romantic frustrations into suffrage work.

The spinster is almost always thin, lacking the curves appropriate to pleasurable femininity, motherhood and charm. The angles of her body are echoed in the sharpness of her features and the lines that mark her face (for she is by definition beyond the stage at which she might still expect to find a mate)...The lines of disappointment are etched deep by the illustrator's pen...Her [dress] is presumed to derive from her indifference to her femininity, her desire to ape men's place in the world, and the hardening effects of public speaking on a woman's countenance and sensibility. She is devoid of feminine attributes, in fact, which explains both her looks and her political sympathies in a way which allows each to reflect the other. (Tickner 164)

The spinster is not a noble figure, working for an admirable cause; she is a figure to be pitied and scorned because she has abandoned every feminine attribute that might have redeemed her in favor of a harsh, “suffragette” masculinity which is both ridiculous and productive of no positive outcome. The audience is encouraged to view her quest for enfranchisement as meaningless: there is no terrible subjugation against which she must rebel, only the natural, laudable urge of men to protect and shelter her from a terrible burden, and her insistence on subverting the natural order of things makes her look foolish.

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke asserts that if you have an audience that admires a certain kind of conduct, you can better persuade them if you identify your cause with that same conduct (58). Conversely, if the speaker can identify an opposing cause with conduct that is not admirable, the speaker can use that antipathy to unite himself and the audience against the opposition. The rhetorical strategy here is evident: link the word suffrage with the most ridiculous, distasteful images of women and you may deter other women from joining the suffrage cause. Anti-suffrage humorists utilized ridicule to make the support of suffrage unpalatable to women in the audience. To avoid ridicule, women must eschew the behavior which causes it. In this way the use of humorous distortion and exaggeration is not only an attempt to restrain unacceptable behavior in women but to fix in the minds of the audience what is outside the commonly accepted boundaries of proper behavior.

IV

The suffrage movement, the first large-scale social movement by and for women, encompassing thousands of people from many different backgrounds, actually had very modest beginnings. During the summer of 1848, five women gathered around a tea table. Joined by their reformist sensibilities as well as friendship, Jane Hunt, Mary Ann M'Clintock, Lucretia Mott, Martha Wright, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton began a discussion about legislated discrimination against women. Their grievances became a formalized list they called the Declaration of Sentiments, with eighteen resolutions covering issues ranging from divorce to property to employment to suffrage. Having drawn up the list, they resolved to take their concerns to a larger audience, so they held a public meeting on July 19 and 20 in Seneca Falls, New York (Frost-Knappman and Cullen-DuPont 72). Over three hundred men and women attended this first woman's rights meeting, and thus the movement was born (Frost-Knappman and Cullen-DuPont 73).

All of the founders of the woman's rights movement were originally brought together under the abolitionist movement, and many of their supporters came from abolition as well (Frost-Knappman and Cullen-DuPont 27). Other suffrage leaders, including Susan B. Anthony, came to the woman's movement by way of the temperance movement, while others were introduced to it on the campuses of the women's colleges that had just opened their doors (Frost-Knappman and Cullen-DuPont 88). In the early years of the movement, what united these women was a

shared interest in social justice; suffragists, therefore, met like-minded reformers at conventions, across round table discussions, and in college debate societies.

As a result of their mutual interest in social equality, the arguments of the early suffragists tended toward appeals for parity and simple justice. Harking back to the principles of the Revolutionary War, suffragists insisted that women and men were both created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. This stance became known as the natural right argument. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was a staunch proponent of this view, arguing that “if we consider [a woman] as a citizen, as a member of a great nation, she must have the same rights as all other members, according to the fundamental principles of government” (qtd.in Kraditor 46). Eschewing emotional pleas and overly dramatic gestures, suffragists asserted that the very premise underlying the Declaration of Independence made such principles universal (Kraditor 51). Pro-suffrage arguments portrayed women as neither flawed nor perfected, merely human.

Rhetoric was a required subject at all of the Seven Sisters colleges, and Stanton’s plainly-worded, straightforward approach reflects one of the rhetorical styles that was prominent at women’s colleges during that time. As rhetorician Joanne Wagner notes, women who were learning to express themselves publicly in the late nineteenth century had to find their way between two conflicting ideals.

On the one hand, practical rhetoric courses reified the notion of plain and correct language as the way to enter educated society. On the

other hand, increasing emphasis on belletristic models showed women how a personal and powerful voice could be achieved... (185-6)

While belletristic rhetoric encouraged the use of a more personally expressive and distinct style, its use was limited to private writing or fiction, not public, persuasive discourse. For a woman to enter the public domain of speech and writing, she had to employ plain and unadorned language with a measure of restraint and distance.

Women rhetors, however, also had to contend with their credibility as public writers and speakers. As Wagner notes, women “had to gain acceptance not just for what they said but for their right to speak at all” (193). In response, many women writers, in their public writing, utilized a plain style exclusively, avoiding personal references, hyperbole, and emotional appeals, writing, instead, in the third person and using purely rational arguments. This unsigned editorial, entitled “Woman and Government,” appeared in the suffrage periodical *The Woman’s Journal* in 1870 and is indicative of the style female suffrage rhetors used:

Our government recognizes woman as a citizen, a member of the State...but denies her all active participation in State affairs...She is an intelligent moral agent, capable of understanding the principles of political science, and as the State demands her money for its support, it is but reasonable and just that she should have a voice in the administration of its affairs. (26)

Practical rhetoric was considered a male style of communication and was therefore privileged as the correct way to convey knowledge. As a result, female

students of rhetoric were urged to learn to express themselves as men did (Wagner 191). A more personally expressive style might lead a female rhetor to be classed with the critically panned popular female authors, “those scribbling women.” Male anti-suffragists, strictly speaking, did not always follow the guidelines of practical rhetoric, using the image of delicate, sainted motherhood to stir the tender, protective feelings of their audience. Female suffragists, however, to ensure a positive reception to their writings, adopted the male style of persuasive expression, lest their gender be considered a fatal flaw in their argument. Cognizant of the public’s opposition to their cause, female suffragists, therefore, sought to shore up their credibility by relying on practical rhetoric as the dominant means of expression in their public discourse.

V

As a result of their tenuous credibility, suffragists, in both their public acts and public writings, sought to restrain themselves even as the attacks by the anti-suffragists increased. Accused of extreme emotionality and intemperate, irrational thought, suffragists tried to counter these accusations through their public acts, which they conducted with the utmost decorum. Their meetings were organized and controlled, their speakers were rational and persuasive but demure, and their journals were intelligent and enthusiastic without being shrill.

During this time, their use of humor was rare and tended to be subdued rather than confrontational and accusatory. This short paragraph from the pro-suffrage journal *The Revolution* is an example:

During the Dark Ages, the University at Bologna was the most prosperous oasis of learning in that vast desert of ignorance, spreading the light of knowledge throughout all Europe. Among the professors of this distinguished institution were three women, Laura Brassi who lectured on physics, Clotilda Tambroni who taught Greek, and a professor of Canon law. Many of the present day would think womankind degraded if a woman dare to accept a professorship in Harvard or Yale. The Present is often darker than the Past.⁴

⁴ Untitled, 29 January 1868: 54.

Gently mocking those who did not think women capable of rational, intellectual thought, this paragraph argues that woman's sphere has been contracting, an ironic occurrence for such a supposedly enlightened time.

In the *Woman's Tribune*, one anonymous female humorist shared this anecdote, "I have no vote, but my groom has. I have great respect for that man in the stables, but I am sure, if I were to go to him and say, 'John will you exercise the franchise?' he would reply, 'Please mum, which horse be that?'"⁵ Both examples of pro-suffrage humor attempt to undo the stereotype of the foolish, intemperate female by utilizing careful, gentle mockery. This approach was vital because, once these women had been accused of irrationality and intemperance, they had to undo that damage themselves through their public writing and persona. The image of wrathful, manipulative suffragists, such as Ward's Bunkumville Female Reformin and Wimmin's Rites Associashun, was a potent one, so suffrage humorists countered with positive images of women—well-educated and temperate—rather than mocking portraits of their detractors.

What suffrage humorists needed to do was present the notion of female suffrage as the commonsensical next step of an evolving society. Underplaying the notion of social upheaval, pro-suffrage humorists stressed the idea of female enfranchisement as the logical extension of woman's current duties.

When woman goes to cast her vote—

Some miles away, it may be—

⁵ Untitled, February 1885: 4.

Who, then, I ask will stay home
To rock and tend the baby?...
As the matter seems to turn
On this one as its axis
Just get the one who rocked it when
She went to pay her taxes.⁶

In this poem, voting does not involve a radical reordering of society but rather a minor addition to a woman's duties as a law-abiding citizen. A woman who votes is no more a threat to the stability of her home than a woman who pays her taxes.

Unlike their anti-suffrage counterparts, early suffrage humorists refused to base their arguments on gender distinctions, choosing instead to stress the common humanity the sexes shared. Basing their position on the idea of parity, a basic tenet of the natural right argument, pro-suffrage humorists argued that because females are required to comply with the same governmental laws and regulations as male citizens, and do so already with no damage whatsoever to families or the sacred division of the sexes, they should share in the same rights as male citizens. Universal suffrage, they argued, would ensure a more balanced electorate with the will of all citizens taken into account.

As the century wore on, however, suffragists largely retired from the public eye and set about recruiting new members and revamping their public image. Rather than taking their arguments to the masses, suffragists began to recruit followers on an

⁶ "Who Will Care for the Baby," *Woman's Tribune* September 1884: 4.

individual basis and introduced the “Society Plan” which was designed to recruit wealthy society women through dinners and small tea parties (Graham 162). Once recruited, these prominent clubwomen would, in turn, use their influence to recruit others in the same social circle, thereby supporting suffrage through both an increase in membership and the treasury.

For pro-suffrage humorists, however, this was a time of invisibility and inefficacy. During the years of 1870 to 1910, suffragists launched 480 state campaigns for female suffrage. Only two were successful (Flexner 228). Suffrage journals had turned to serious material—limiting their jokes and wordplay to topics such as addled parents and precocious children—and popular press newspapers and humorous magazines were solidly united against them. Suffragists, as a whole, concerned themselves with appearing as the most reasonable, most conservative sort of women (Graham 165), and given both the incredible number of defeats suffragists endured at the polls and their new, less visible recruiting methods, it seems clear why the pro-suffrage movement adopted a serious mien during these years of reevaluation. Battered at the state polls and at the hands of many humorists and eager to appeal to a very conservative group of women, suffragists chose to become more serious rather than more humorous.

Even Mark Twain, a former anti-suffragist himself, treats women’s enfranchisement with uncharacteristic gravity. After his marriage to Olivia Langdon, an active suffragist, in 1870, Twain reversed his views on women’s suffrage, providing financial assistance to the Cause and publicly claiming to be a “woman’s

rights man,” (Skandera-Trombley 149, 120). In *Following the Equator*, he comments on the fact that the women of New Zealand are enfranchised and have a better voting turnout percentage than the men of the United States. He goes on to advocate the enfranchisement of American women arguing:

Men ought to feel a sort of respect for their mothers and wives and sisters by this time. The women deserve a change of attitude like that, for they have wrought well. In forty-seven years they have swept an imposingly large number of unfair laws from the statute books of America...Men could not have done so much for themselves in that time without bloodshed—at least they never have; and that is an argument that they didn't know how. The women have accomplished a peaceful revolution, and a very beneficent one...it is not such a dull world now, and is growing less and less dull all the time. This is women's opportunity—she has had none before. I wonder where Man will be in another forty-seven years? (299)

Far from being an ironic piece where he winks at the audience about the growing “woman's opportunity,” Mark Twain clearly supports the notion of woman's suffrage. This piece accurately reflects the mood of suffragists of the time—serious statements of the good women will do, their commitment, their sobriety, and their purpose.

The years of the nineteenth century were ones of triumph for remonstrants as they grew in numbers and stature. Public opinion was on their side, as was the preponderance of the popular press. Anti-suffrage humorists, in turn, reaped the benefits of their high profile as they refined their devastating portraits of suffragists. The silly, ineffectual suffragette female of *The John Donkey* gave way to Ward and Twain's bullying, mannish, intemperate shrew. By the end of the century, unattractiveness, bitterness, masculinity, emasculation, and anger all became standard female characteristics in the anti-suffrage repertoire.

Pro-suffrage humorists, with their rational arguments for parity and social justice were no match for the damaging caricatures being disseminated by their opposition.

The competitive and public ingredient in persuasion makes it particularly urgent that the rhetoric work at the level of opinion. Thus, in a situation where an appeal to prejudice might be more effective than an appeal to reason, the rhetorician who would have his cause prevail may need to use such means... (Burke *Rhetoric* 54)

This was the masterstroke of anti-suffrage humorists—using a prejudicial view of women in a humorous way to win adherents to their cause. Using ridicule against the suffragists, anti-suffragists attempted to subjugate and control them because suffragists threatened to overturn the rightful order of things. They also used the resultant, derisive laughter as a unifying force, winning the hearts and minds of the public as the suffragists shied away from the public view.

Chapter 3

Being and Doing: Womanhood Redefined

I

The end of the nineteenth century began a profound shift in society's conception of gender roles and the strict division between the sexes because women increasingly were being called upon to engage in what had been strictly men's work. The Civil War left hundreds of thousands of men dead or seriously wounded, and westward migration had taken many more of them away from the populous areas (Calhoun 106). With so many women left widowed, childless, or unmarried, the chance of being financially supported and fulfilling the ideals of True Womanhood became an all but impossible goal. Instead, women were being called forth to serve in much different capacities than before, as heads of household and as primary breadwinners. The notion gradually spread that the old ways would not work in a new society, and, as women grew into their new roles, they increasingly left behind their restricted sphere.

There were other reasons why the boundaries of acceptable female behavior expanded at this time. As social reforms like temperance gained mainstream support, they drew thousands of female supporters, and from the beginning, women who joined the various reform movements were encouraged to be active participants. They had public titles like President, they lobbied politicians and legislatures, and they drew up constitutions (Smith-Rosenberg 156). "They were among the first to

travel throughout the country without male chaperones. They published, financed, even set type for their own papers, and defied a bitter and longstanding male opposition to their cause. They began, in short, to create a broader, less constricted sense of female identity,” (Smith-Rosenberg 127). It was the first time many of these women had been given the chance to act as advocates for change. Instead of raising an opinion at the family dinner table, they were allowed to give public voice to movements. This first taste of the power of social advocacy carried some of them right into the woman’s rights movement.

In addition, both industry and higher education were feeling the loss of so many male workers and students, so they opened their doors to admit women. Researcher Robert W. Smuts detailed women’s contributions to industry in his book *Women and Work in America*:

In 1890, at least one million women worked in factories. They outnumbered men in the clothing factories. They made up about half the labor force in the textile mills and tobacco factories, and were a substantial minority in the shoe, food processing, and many other industries...many were also employed in foundries, tin plate mills, print shops, metal fabricating plants, and other kinds of factories...(18)

The United States Census of 1870 estimated that almost two million women were employed in jobs ranging from factory workers to physicians and lawyers (Solomon 45). The percentage of women over ten years old who were employed rose from 15% in 1880 to more than 23% in 1910, so the question of whether a woman was

abandoning her sphere if she sought employment outside her home became moot (Stock 189).

Many institutions of higher education were also forced to reevaluate their previous refusals to allow women admission to a course of college study. During and after the Civil War, for example, there was a sharp decline in enrollment at the male-only state universities, so many of them changed their admission policies and became coeducational institutions. Before the war, only one state school, the University of Iowa, was coeducational, but by 1870, eight more state universities expanded their admissions to include women (Eschbach 103). By the year 1890, the high school graduation rate of girls had surpassed that of boys (Solomon 46), and by 1908, almost 60% of America's high school enrollment was female (Stock 189). As the number of coeducational colleges increased steadily from 1870 to 1910, the number of male-only colleges showed an equally steady decline (Solomon 44). According to one scholar, the sheer number of women receiving not only advanced degrees but pursuing professions right before and right after WWI was not surpassed until the 1970s (Smith-Rosenberg 34). This was the first time many of these women had been taken seriously as breadwinners and scholars; the result was a new feeling of independence and self-reliance among those women (Calhoun 107).

The boundaries of acceptable female behavior were expanding, and the suffrage movement reaped the rewards of this. Thousands of women active in women's clubs and stirred by reform movements joined the Cause, and suffragists actively sought recruits from Socialist and labor groups (Buhle 33-34). Carefully

recruiting new members and strengthening their numbers, the suffrage movement was on the verge of revitalization as women increasingly began to see the good that they could do with access to political power. The specter of the inviolate True Woman was about to be banished because ultimately the essence of True Womanhood contained within itself the rationale for its own destruction. If you believe that women are angels in human form then why should they not bring their holy, God-given perfection to the outside world, especially since men are such brutish, corrupt creatures (Welter 40). And so the death knell sounded for the True Woman because the coming century had need of a new woman ready to take her place alongside the men.

The notion of a “New Woman” to take the place of the obsolete True Woman emerged in the 1880s as many women began to live their lives outside a strictly domestic sphere. Despite Henry James’s popular portrait of the socially and sexually independent young woman suffering the consequences of her unconventional choices, the New Woman in practice, as discussed by historian Smith-Rosenberg, was much more concerned with pursuing social and political reform. Many of these women pursued economically and socially independent lives, immersing themselves in their careers and marrying late, if at all. “In short, the New Women, rejecting conventional female roles and asserting their right to a career, to a public voice, to visible power, laid claim to the rights and privileges customarily accorded bourgeois men,” (Smith-Rosenberg 176).

With the public's changing conception of womanhood, the suffragists adopted a much higher profile. The beginning of the twentieth century saw many individual states pass universal enfranchisement laws, and suffragists began to hold public parades and demonstrations for their cause. The first suffrage parade was held in New York in 1910 (Frost-Knappman and Cullen-DuPont 294). According to the *New York Tribune*, in one year, the parade grew from 3,000 marchers and 70,000 onlookers in 1911 to 20,000 marchers and about 500,000 spectators (qtd. in Frost-Knappman and Cullen-DuPont 315). Politicians added suffrage to their platforms, and many previously anti-suffrage newspapers, such as the *New York Globe* and the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* began to publish pro-suffrage editorials.

The response of humorists was marked as anti-suffrage supporters increased their output and pro-suffrage humorists finally found their voice and gained the public's attention in the national humor magazines. The sheer number of jokes about suffrage increased substantially as the war over the vote for women played on the pages of the national humor magazines. During the early 1900s, the three most popular humor magazines were *Puck*, *Judge*, and *Life*. From their inception in the late 1800s, they were all strictly anti-suffrage. However, by 1915, both *Puck* and *Judge* had declared themselves for suffrage. *Judge* even had a regular column, "The Modern Woman," that was entirely devoted to suffrage news and humor. Only *Life* remained staunchly anti-suffrage for the entire fight over the franchise, with the exception of one novelty pro-suffrage issue in 1913.

With the unwavering support of *Life* magazine, anti-suffrage humorists had a reliable outlet for their jokes and cartoons, and they focused their attention on attempting to make the image of suffragists so repugnant, so unnatural that no sane woman could ever want to align herself with such a monstrous cause. Pro-suffrage humorists, on the other hand, finally found their comic voices and forums with a receptive audience for their humor, and they countered the anti-suffragists' unrelentingly bleak portraits with overwhelmingly positive images of women gently pressing the suffrage cause, heroically serving their country, and selflessly protecting their homes and families from evil influences. After so many years of silence, pro-suffrage humorists finally directly engaged their opponents, effectively recasting suffragists as the true representatives of the American ideals of morality, patriotism, and social justice.

II

By the start of the twentieth century, the last vestiges of gentle correction and lightweight criticism had been swept aside, and anti-suffrage caricatures had become much harsher as remonstrants emphasized weakness, mental illness, outrage, and violence in their portrayals of suffragists. Anti-suffrage humorists, intent on further damaging the public perception of women, harkened back to the previous generation's assertion that women were unfit for the vote simply because they were women and, therefore, inferior. By portraying women in demeaning, damaging ways,

they sought to illustrate to the audience that the frailties and instabilities inherent in the “weaker sex” made them unfit for the franchise.

Turning back to one of their favorite arguments, anti-suffrage humorists again argued that suffrage activity was not compatible with domestic life because it required a woman to be out and away from her family, naturally causing neglect and discord. Many cartoons showed abandoned families surrounded by dirty dishes and piles of laundry, left to fend for themselves. In one cartoon, a young boy is asked who “smooths your brow and wipes away your tears?” He replies, “The old man. Ma’s a suffragette” (Appendix A).⁷ Some cartoons even hinted that women consumed with outside concerns had no time for marriage. In “No Longer a Temptation,” a cherub in a military outfit tries to recruit “able-bodied men and women for the Matrimonial Legion.”⁸ He has no luck, however, because the women who rush by him in business suits and briefcases (one with a “Votes” pamphlet sticking out from under her arm) rebuff his entreaties as they eschew marriage opportunities for business opportunities (Appendix A).

Other anti-suffrage humorists insisted that suffrage could cause irreparable damage to a woman’s fragile mental health. Essayists in *Life* warned women to avoid suffrage because of the dangers of “systematized hysteria”⁹ and concentrate instead on home-centered concerns lest they permanently damage their naturally delicate psychological makeup. Some cartoonists argued that suffragism was a disease and

⁷ Dick Hartley, *Life* 16 November 1911: 859.

⁸ *Life* 13 May 1915: 840.

⁹ *Life* 3 June 1915: 1001.

that home was the sanitarium that would best speed a woman's recovery(Appendix A).¹⁰

The predominant caricature of this time, however, was the violent suffragette, a woman so consumed with her quest for enfranchisement that she would let nothing stand in her way, not the law and not the innocents caught in her (literal) crossfire. In one cartoon, a male bystander watching a suffrage parade is grabbed by the throat by a suffragist who threatens to break a window with him (Appendix A).¹¹ Leaving behind any notion of women's purity and goodness, anti-suffragists began to argue that all women were unfit for the vote because they were murderous and mentally unstable. Unfortunately for the Cause, the remonstrants had real life examples as targets for their ridicule and condemnation: the militant British suffragette.

In 1906, the suffragettes in England launched a campaign of active militancy in which they publicly heckled government officials on the suffrage question, deliberately provoking the police into arresting them and thereby calling attention to their cause (Strachey 311). Soon after, the British suffragettes turned to more violent methods such as throwing rocks and breaking shop windows (Strachey 313). However, this was merely a prelude to the escalation in violence that was to follow. By 1912, minor cases of vandalism gave way to much more serious acts such as physical attacks on governmental representatives, bombings of public buildings, and the destruction of everything from postal boxes to paintings in public galleries (Strachey 330). One woman even threw herself under the hooves of racing horses at

¹⁰ McKee, *Life* 13 May 1915: 861.

¹¹ *Life* 10 March 1912: 1907.

Derby, committing suicide to call attention to the fight for suffrage (Strachey 331-332).

The response of the American public was shock and anger. It was shocking that women—many of them titled nobility, no less!—would behave in such a vicious, violent manner. A woman, no matter how independent or politically active, was always expected to behave like a lady, not a common hooligan. And the public's rage was equal to its shock—how dare these women treasonously assault the government and its representatives. Physical confrontation was bad enough but terrorizing an entire country with bombings was completely outrageous and universally reviled. Unfortunately for the American suffragists, with their own cause linked to the British suffragettes, the caricatures became nastier and bloodier.

Sweeping aside any geographical or political distinctions, many American cartoonists turned their wrath onto the American suffragists. Gone was the scowling, menacing suffragist of the past. The violent, bloody-minded suffragette with her wild-eyed stare, wrathful expression, and bloodied weapon enabled the anti-suffrage cartoonists to link suffrage and violence in the minds of the public.

Unlike the early caricatures of suffragists threatening violence, suffragettes were shown fully engaged in mayhem and murder. They brandished weapons, destroyed public property, and physically attacked bystanders. In one particularly disturbing cartoon, entitled "Woman's Place," a militant suffragette stands over a man lying on the floor.¹² She has her foot on his neck, and he is impaled on her

¹² Rodney Thomson, *Life* 25 September 1913: 517.

“Votes For Women” sign. As he writhes in agony beneath her, she stands proudly over him with a look of smug satisfaction (Appendix A).

Nelson Harding, a cartoonist for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, published an entire collection of suffragette caricatures titled *Ruthless Rhymes of Martial Militants*. Contained in this collection are depictions so graphic and so shocking that the two ideas of suffrage and violence become almost inextricably linked. Many of the cartoons feature gleeful suffragettes standing over the corpses of their victims. In one scene, a grinning woman swings her axe, covered in blood, as men run for cover (Appendix A). In the foreground is the body of her latest victim (26). Another celebrates a successful bombing because “...hardly more than four or five/Old Fogies left the place alive!” (5). Visible around the corner from her are a few victims neatly laid out and the fiery remains of a bombed out building (Appendix A).

The change in characterization from menacing suffragist to murderous suffragette is an example of what Burkean scholar Hugh Dalziel Duncan refers to as the comic villain and tragic scapegoat. When a group is confronted with a struggle over the boundaries of acceptable behavior, they may posit a comic villain who embodies the essence of the unacceptable behavior, in this case the menacing suffragist. The comic villain is treated humorously as the group seeks to reunify itself and bring everyone back into compliance. Importantly, the comic villain is never treated as irredeemable:

The comic villain can be saved once he allows laughter to be turned against him. He can be laughed *at* but he is also being laughed *with*.

We are laughing at him to purge him—and ourselves—of folly, not to torture and kill him (Duncan 395)

The menacing suffragist of the previous century, with her ill-fitting, pseudo-male attire and scowling expression, is laughable in her folly and therefore redeemable. She needs only to restrain her behavior in order to be readmitted to the group.

The tragic scapegoat, however, has gone beyond folly to unforgivable violations of the group's principles and is therefore irredeemable. The murderous suffragette is a tragic scapegoat because she has violated sacred womanhood with her violent, bloody actions. She cannot be laughed back into compliance with the group's norms; she must be reviled and cast out. For this reason, the tragic scapegoat is never treated comically or given the chance for redemption:

When laughter passes into derision, mockery, and the grotesque, it is no longer comic. The social essence of comedy is joy in reason—the shared joy of he who is laughed at, as well as he who laughs. Savage ridicule is a weapon. It wounds deeply; often, indeed, it kills (Duncan 404)

Casting American suffragists as the tragic scapegoat and charging them with the same crimes as British suffragettes was the humorists' way of not only deterring women from joining the suffrage cause but also making the point that passing suffrage would only be rewarding conduct that was outside the realm of acceptability. They have lost the right of gentle, respectful treatment; they must be shunned, punished because their behavior is irredeemable.

Their emphasis on the murderous intent and bloody rampages of suffragettes, however, was not the coup de grace to the suffrage movement that the remonstrants had hoped because the caricature proved to be an empty one; the violence and mayhem the anti-suffragists warned against never materialized. American suffragists never damaged any property nor did they ever physically attack anyone. Insisting on a threat that never materializes loses its potency after awhile, so the anti-suffrage argument lost some of its force.

The larger failure of the remonstrants, however, was that their rhetoric failed to evolve as the acceptable boundaries of female behavior evolved. Insisting that the delicacy of women necessitates a strictly domestic focus can be a strong argument when many women are already functioning in purely domestic roles with few other options open to them. When women are already functioning successfully and by necessity outside the home, however, the domestic argument becomes no more than an outdated ideal.

One of the limitations of countermovements is that they are, by definition, required to be reactive in nature. They exist for the purpose of preventing or reversing change to existing social or political structures, so “their rhetoric, strategies, and actions, rather than being *proactive*, are confined to *responding* to those of the movement they oppose,” (Burt 69). For anti-suffragists, these constraints were much less burdensome early in the movement.

During the nineteenth century, the remonstrants advocated the commonly accepted viewpoint of women’s proper role, so they had only to refresh those ideas

for their audience, reminding them of the already existing social structure. The remonstrants dominated the rhetoric because their arguments were already aligned with the common view of things. As the new century began, however, women's lives changed and their proper role expanded, and anti-suffragists lost the advantage by refusing to expand their conception of womanhood. Countermovement rhetoric "depends on evoking established societal myths to oppose change," (Burt 70) but by the early twentieth century, anti-suffragists had lost their hold on the dominant ideology.

One effective way to support a cause is to make it seem as the choice of the many rather than the narrow preference of the few (Burt 71), so anti-suffragists painted themselves as the representative voice of average women, the silent majority. With so many women, however, functioning outside their homes, this was a much less effective rhetorical strategy. Millions of women were employed in full-time jobs or seeking college diplomas. One late nineteenth-century study found that more than half of the single women in large cities worked not only to support themselves but their extended families, too (Calhoun 89). Many women, the silent majority for which the remonstrants claimed to speak, found anti-suffrage arguments simply irrelevant to their own lives.

Echoing the empty chivalries of a generation before, anti-suffragists found themselves

...rhetorically and strategically trapped by their negative and reactive stance. Unable or unwilling to create new arguments against suffrage

or create proactive arguments in support of women's continued non-political position in society, they failed to develop and maintain the support they needed to defeat suffrage. (Burt 80)

The anti-suffragists' focus on the weak and flawed woman of the past century allowed the pro-suffragists to appropriate their previously glowing estimations of the pure, untainted female who would turn her purifying hand to the world outside her window.

III

The sweeping changes in women's lives at the turn of the century did not produce the first generation of female college graduates – Oberlin College had welcomed female students since 1835 – but the first generation of women who received extensive training in rhetoric, a subject that had previously been reserved solely for male students. At the Seven Sisters colleges, women were taught logical and persuasive argumentation and given public forums in which to deliver their arguments. Female students formed debate societies and other community forums to practice their oratory, and they were encouraged to explore many ideas, particularly topics dealing with public policy (Conway 204).

This training ground gave many women their first taste of public oratory, encouraging them not only to develop rigorous arguments but to deliver them clearly and effectively to receptive and non-receptive audiences alike.

No matter how women planned to use their education, graduates expected to become participants in literate society. They expected the world to ask for their opinions, and they wanted to be able to reply in style. (Wagner 199)

Despite the fact that there was still some resistance to the full participation of women in matters of public policy, female students envisioned themselves as full-fledged members of society: leaders of charitable organizations, representatives of reform movements, and defenders of the disenfranchised.

One of the social movements that benefited the most from this influx of articulate, clear-thinking orators, needless to say, was suffrage, and many of the most influential suffragists of the twentieth century came from this training ground, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter Harriot Stanton Blatch (Vassar); Lucy Burns (Vassar), one of the founding members of the Congressional Union for Women Suffrage; Maud Wood Park (Radcliffe), the first president of the League of Women Voters; and Alice Duer Miller (Barnard), one of the most popular suffrage humorists. The study of rhetoric, in fact, was an important course in the lives of future suffrage leaders:

First, as a group, they were uniformly well educated in rhetoric: they studied the same classical texts and benefited from the same oratorical training as did their male contemporaries, and thus were the first women in the United States who were purposefully educated to be full "political persons." Second, they became deeply involved in

organizing themselves into “societies” during college, an activity that gave them great confidence in their own ability to be effective public speakers and political leaders. Third, and finally, they forged lifelong associations with mentors, peers, and successors in academia and in state and national women’s organizations—connections that proved to be invaluable for coordinating a national political movement.

(Conway 221-222)

With such an educated, committed pool from which to draw supporters, suffrage finally began to adopt a more public profile and engage the opposition more aggressively.

As suffragists became more self-assured in their challenge to the remonstrants, so too did their use of humor become more confident and more forceful. Up until this point, pro-suffrage humor had been defensive in nature as humorists tried to undo the damage inflicted upon their image by the opposition and salvage the public’s perception of them. After the turn of the century, however, pro-suffrage humor went on the offensive, and because so many of these women had a strong background in argumentation, their use of humor became much more sophisticated as they carefully dismantled the public reverence of anti-suffragists, accusing them of both selfishness and willful ignorance, boldly asserting that the remonstrants, not the suffragists, had failed to uphold society’s standard of acceptable behavior.

Having long endured a number of damaging personal attacks, pro-suffrage humorists disparaged female anti-suffragists by portraying them as pampered parasites, concerned only with their own comfort. In one particularly harsh poem, “Anti Logic,” Meta L. Stern argued that because anti-suffragists were such egotists, they could not see the good that suffrage had done for them, nor the good it could do for others:

They own stocks and bonds and mortgage,
 Have a bank account or two,
 And control their children’s welfare
 Just as much as fathers do.
 They’ve had college educations,
 And may work at what they choose;
 They can even speak in public
 Without insult and abuse...
 For no harm they ever see
 In the things that are, but only
 In the things that are to be
 So the onward march of progress
 Still beholds the antis taunt,
 Come to tell the other women
 They have all the rights they want.¹³

¹³ *The Woman Voter* July 1912: 8.

Ending on a note of pure selfishness, this poem paints anti-suffragists as fundamentally blind to anything but their own needs.

Pro-suffrage humorists also argued that this same blindness carried over to anti-suffrage work because no anti-suffragist ever acknowledged the hypocrisy of extensively traveling the United States to lecture on the evil of leaving home to work for suffrage. For example, Stern's poem "Anti Logic" opens on that note:

They have packed their trunks and satchels,
 They are rushing for the train,
 They are going to Wisconsin,
 Bound to fight with might and main.
 They have left their homes and children,
 From their husbands far they roam,
 Just to tell the other women
 That a woman's place is home.

Other humorists weighed in with cartoons showing families abandoned and babies crying inconsolably while the mother attends a meeting about the sanctity of the home or jokes about one woman's inability to keep her own house because she is too busy telling other women to stay in theirs.

Presenting the anti-suffragists as privileged and hypocritical was a calculated attempt to undermine the moral high ground anti-suffragists had claimed for themselves. Not only were anti-suffragists completely ignorant of other women's struggles, suffragists argued, they were purposefully indifferent. Anti-suffragists,

who had insisted for years that they were working for the benefit of all women, were derided as hypocritical society women concerned only with keeping the freedom and rights they enjoyed all to themselves.

The harshest attack on the anti-suffragists, and possibly the most damaging, was the accusation that they had allied themselves, either by ignorance or by design, with corrupt and evil influences. In the hands of pro-suffrage cartoonists, anti-suffragists became the pawns of greedy politicians, shysters, saloonkeepers, and even white slavers. The suffragists positioned themselves as the moral guardians in the fight against the encroachments of scandal and evil, bringing their pure, untainted influence out of the home and into public life. Once the anti-suffragists, the previous defenders of home and family, had been tainted by dirty money and dirty dealings, what one editorialist called “that overwhelmingly preponderant class of Antis, the corrupt and vicious interests who fear the moral influence of women in politics and who are lavish with their Anti-Suffrage contributions but who usually hide their identity,”¹⁴ they could not be entrusted to uphold the morals of society.

In one example, *The Saturday Evening Post* offered a cartoon that accused anti-suffragists of ignorance.¹⁵ “Mrs. Anti-Suffrage” is at home when she is surprised by a group of anti-suffrage supporters who have stopped by to express their appreciation of all her hard work. Among them is a “Child Labor Exploiter,” a “Saloon Keeper,” a “Political Boss,” and a “White Slaver.” Their spokesman says, “We Have Called To Express Our Extreme Gratichude For the Bee-utiful Fight You

¹⁴ July 1912: 12.

¹⁵ Herbert Johnson, rpt. *The Woman Voter* May 1913: 17.

Are Making In Our Behalf.” As they offer her a big bouquet of flowers, she faints dead away from the shock (Appendix A). Clearly this woman has been the unwitting dupe of these men, so, at worst, she is guilty of ignorance, not willful collusion.

Needless to say, anti-suffrage groups were not the only ones working to defeat suffrage and the often covert dealings of these other organizations usually undermined the public perception of the remonstrants, sullyng their reputations and driving away potential supporters. Therefore, accusing the anti-suffragists of being in collusion, whether knowingly or not, with corrupt and evil influences was an especially effective strategy. Many anti-suffragists considered themselves social reformers (Turner 209), and an accusation of collusion with the brewing industry or corrupt business elements could cause them to renounce their affiliations with all anti-suffrage groups rather than be subjected to public censure.

For years, anti-suffragists had been single-minded proponents of the cult of True Womanhood. Only women, they insisted, were invested with the most sacred powers of piety, purity, and domesticity, and women alone had the power to guard the home and all its inhabitants from evil and corruption. For pro-suffrage humorists, however, it took just a small shift to turn that moral force of good towards the poll. Agreeing with the anti-suffrage premise that women were guardians of the home, suffrage humorists took that premise a step further and argued that as the guardians of home life, women were uniquely qualified for the franchise. What is the point of having such a sainted female figure, they argued, if she cannot have access to that

which will enable her to do the most good, and who better, they insisted, to enact laws of moral decency and social justice than the members of society most concerned with that? Asserting that it was natural for women to right the wrongs of society, to crusade for children and the underprivileged, and to reform social institutions, suffrage humorists claimed that the only harm would be to the corrupt elements of political life.

This idea of women as the natural moral guardians of society as a whole represents what rhetoric scholar Joanne Wagner calls “the strongest elements of rhetorical instruction at women’s colleges”: the notion that women have a right and a responsibility to speak out on issues of public policy. “Supportive teachers, imaginative scholars, and social activists, [female professors] provided models for both academic and more public styles of rhetoric,” (Wagner 199) and one of the most influential rhetoricians of the Seven Sisters was Prof. Mary Jordan of Smith College. She, herself, was not a suffragist, but she did advocate the idea that women had a responsibility to be social leaders who would bring much needed moral judgment to the political process. She believed that women should model themselves as either “intelligent members” of society or “restless disturbers” (Wagner 198).

As intelligent members, women had the obligation to engage publicly issues which affected society. No longer constrained by domestic ties, women, by virtue of their moral vision and lucidity, had the right to influence public decisions as much as men did. As restless disturbers, they no longer had to utilize a plain, unadorned style in their writing. Instead, they were encouraged to tackle social issues using moving,

heartfelt appeals. In this way, female rhetors saw their emotions as a stylistic advantage.

Joining the lucid argument with the emotional plea, pro-suffrage humorists took the emotionally evocative ideals of the anti-suffrage movement and recast them to make an argument for suffrage. Women should vote, they reasoned, because of all the positive qualities the anti-suffragists had ascribed to them: they were domestic, nurturing, compassionate, and pious. In other words, women should vote because they were women. Then they set about placing their version of the domestic angel in a number of situations where they could prove her worthiness of the political franchise.

One cartoonist argued that with the vote, women would use their domestic focus to inform and control their political objectives. In “Barred Out,” female enfranchisement is shown keeping out undesirable elements such as “Hotel Vice” and “Red Light Dive”.¹⁶ Setting itself up as a barricade between darkness and debauchery on the left and light and wholesomeness on the right, woman’s vote makes possible positive things such as public playgrounds, schools, libraries, and sanitary homes. Children play happily and families stroll together through the parks, unmolested by criminals, prostitutes, and other miscreants (Appendix A). This cartoon argues for the innate domesticity of women voters, which would, as a matter of course, cause them to vote in family and child-friendly reforms.

¹⁶ Harrison Cady, *Life* 16 October 1913: 646.

Other humorists portrayed women working outside their homes, performing heroic deeds. A powerful cartoon called “The Weaker Sex?” shows a female Red Cross nurse going about her duty on the front lines of World War I.¹⁷ As bombs explode just a few feet behind and dying men litter the ground around her, she tends to an injured man efficiently and dispassionately (Appendix A). As she brings much needed aid and comfort to the wounded soldier, the caption makes an ironic comment on the situation, “‘Woman’s place is in the home’ *Anti-Suffragists*.” Obviously, with this nurse’s skill and calm composure, the cartoonist argues for a conception of women as capable, even heroic under extreme circumstances, a direct response to the anti-suffragists’ insistence on women’s frailty.

Such images of women, the crusader for morality and the selfless caregiver, were palatable to the audience as they bridged the gap between acceptable female ideals and acceptable female actions. In this way, suffrage humorists carefully built their arguments on the base of what was already acceptable to their audience, and in doing so, managed to build a bond of identification with the audience.

As America entered World War I, the remonstrants charged the suffragists with treasonous indifference to the war effort because they refused to give up their fight for enfranchisement during wartime. In response, the suffrage humorists turned their attention from women as nurturing and peaceful to women as the model of preparedness and patriotic dedication. Laura Foster’s cartoon “Hand in Hand” shows a column of men and women marching together with their hands clasped (Appendix

¹⁷ Chamberlain, *Puck* 7 November 1914: 5.

A).¹⁸ The men all carry rifles, and they wear sashes that read, “Patriotism.” The women carry American flags and wear sashes that say, “Universal Suffrage.”

Previously much had been made of female votes changing the course of history away from wars and other destructive forces, such as cartoonist Lou Rogers’ series of cartoons in *Judge* showing the woman’s vote breaking the sword of war and spiking the cannon, but with America’s looming participation in war, pro-suffrage cartoonists quickly changed their tone to women leading the charge of the triumph of the country.

“Three Graces” was one of the first cartoons to make a direct link between suffrage, war, and patriotism (Appendix A).¹⁹ The cartoon shows three beautiful women standing on a hill with the American flag waving in the background. On the left is “Suffrage” with her rolls of legislation. In the center is “Preparedness” wearing a pseudo-military outfit. On the right is “Americanism,” resplendent in an outfit covered stars and stripes. The caption reads, “Any man who loves and reveres his mother and his country should idolize, if he worship at all, the three graces of Suffrage, Preparedness, and Americanism.” For full effect, this caption capitalizes on the purely emotional connection between the love a man may feel for this mother and the pride he may feel for his country. The cartoon seeks to wrap them up inextricably together into a fierce, visceral devotion to the ideals of patriotism and, of course, suffrage. In this way, voting for suffrage becomes a patriotic duty because of the blessed image of mother and America.

¹⁸ *Judge* 30 June 1917.

¹⁹ Nell Brinkley, International News Service 1916.

Suffrage humorists, therefore, engaged in what is best characterized as the humor of social expediency, painting the vote as the surest way to social change and moral righteousness. Pro-suffrage humor that utilized this approach, therefore, both reflected the changes in women's lives and in conceptions of gender and directed such changes. As this humor proliferated, it confirmed women's evolution in the mind of the audience and spread the gospel that old, outdated notions of womanhood would not work in a society dedicated to progressive ideas. As suffragists worked to make their ideology seem like common sense, rather than a radical reordering of society, they needed to ally their ideas with an acceptable construction of womanhood. The growing number of socially active, middle-class women who embraced suffrage allowed the Cause to occupy the middle ground and make the progressive politics of one seem like the natural evolution of the other.

Reaping the benefits of the advances women had made in the previous century and coming of age in a time when women were fully active both out and inside of the house, New Women were more political than the previous generation and less home centered:

...they placed more emphasis on self fulfillment, a bit less on social service, and a great deal more on the flamboyant presentation of self...
New Women fused their challenge of gender conventions with a repudiation of bourgeois sexual norms. They fought not in the name of a higher female virtue..., but for absolute equality. They wished to be as successful, as political, as sexual as men...Not one shred of the

Cult of True Womanhood remained to cloak their life style in the symbols of respectability. (Smith-Rosenberg 177-8)

These women were radically political, in comparison to the women of the last century.

One of the reasons the suffragists were successful at winning the support of the public was that they carefully aligned their portrayal of suffrage with notions of womanhood that were already acceptable to the audience. The anti-suffragists faltered because they sought only to resurrect old ideas of women's strictly domestic role, failing to take into account the advances women had made. Persuasion, Burke notes, is dependent upon both the context in which it takes place and the audience to whom it is addressed (*Rhetoric* 62). Therefore, a rhetorical act which might have been effective in an earlier situation may fail entirely if the context changes or if the audience's position shifts. The American audience no longer supported the notion of the sheltered, solely domestic female, so the remonstrants' insistence on this empty ideal was a serious misstep.

With the suffragists' appropriation of the entire foundation upon which the anti-suffragists had built their argument, the remonstrants were left with no clear direction for their humor. Either they had to abandon their exalted female image and concentrate on the weakness and frailty (or conversely the brutality and viciousness) of women, which many of them did with limited success, or they had to fight the suffragists to keep their sacred mother on her pedestal and away from politics, which

they also attempted with even less success. By 1915, the suffragists had succeeded in stealing the moral force of anti-suffrage arguments and using it for their own ends. And the American public, which had long supported the notion of the sainted female, turned its attention willingly to the image of the purifying female who would clean up politics as more and more states passed universal suffrage laws.

The years leading up to 1920 and the ratification of the national suffrage amendment brought more and more victories of the suffragists as universal suffrage legislation passed in state after state. Anti-suffragists, however, faced with the seeming inevitability of female enfranchisement, abandoned completely their advocacy of the natural delicacy and submissiveness of women, adopting instead many of the negative characteristics they had previously attributed to suffragists. They became shrill, bullying, emotionally intemperate, and irrational. Abandoning their humorous treatment of suffragists, they also began to issue grandiose charges and unfounded, inflammatory claims in the pages of their anti-suffrage journal, *The Woman Patriot*, accusing the suffragists of inciting a “sex war”²⁰ and advocating the overthrow of the government²¹. One issue printed this entreaty on the front page:

With 900,000

Men Who Cannot Vote

“Over There”

Are YOU Willing

To Double

²⁰ 17 January 1920

²¹ 1 June 1918

The Bolshevist Vote

The Socialist Vote

The Pro-German Vote

The Underworld Vote

AND

The Expense

of Elections

“Over Here”

?

Then Ask Your

Senator to Vote “NO”

on the

Susan B Anthony

Suffrage Force Bill²²

Their excessive use of capital letters and emphasis in rage-filled diatribes gave the impression of women out of control, violating the very ideals of chivalry and delicacy which they had always privileged.

The suffragists, however, managed to counteract such unrelieved negativity and darkness with positive images of women engaged in patriotic, laudable activities. World War I was a dark time for the American public, and the newspapers were filled with angry, ethnically bigoted caricatures and emotionally charged images of

²² 29 June 1918

suffering and death. Giving the public positive, uplifting images of women became a touchstone of hearth and home. Suffragists, emphasizing the sacrifice and nobility of women, offered a positive, affirming portrait of womanhood, one destined to carry her to the polling place as her reward.

By the end, anti-suffragists had turned themselves into a caricature of their former selves as they rushed to outrageous judgments delivered at the top of their lungs. They undid their public image with their overly emotional displays, and they inadvertently turned the public's laughter on themselves as they fell away from the high standards they had espoused. Attracting the derisive laughter they wished to direct towards the opposition, anti-suffragists made themselves ridiculous, even pitiable; it was the suffragists who were awarded the audience's approbation because they were perceived as both espousing and embodying the highest ideals of woman's gentle, nurturing, virtuous nature.

Chapter 4

Marietta Holley and Alice Duer Miller: True vs. New

I

The fight over woman's suffrage caused many humorists to take up their pens both for and against the Cause. The two most prominent and prolific of them, however, were both women and staunch suffrage allies. Marietta Holley and Alice Duer Miller published thousands of words for the suffrage cause and claimed for themselves a huge mainstream audience and unparalleled popularity.

Marietta Holley's career began in 1873 with her first book *My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet's* about a plain spoken, marginally educated farm wife named Samantha Allen. Holley's Samantha series spanned more than 40 years and 20 books, ending with *Josiah Allen on the Woman Question* in 1914. Alice Duer Miller's weekly column "Are Women People?" appeared in the *New York Tribune*, a large circulation daily that served the metropolitan New York area, from Jan 25, 1914 to November 4, 1917 and numbered almost 200 columns.

Despite their mutual support for suffrage, Holley and Miller had quite different ideas about the role of women in society and the reasons for granting them suffrage, so they stand today as exemplars of the different times in which they wrote. Holley, with her emphasis on the happy domesticity of Samantha, echoes the edicts of True Womanhood and separate spheres common in the late nineteenth century. Miller's focus on the politically active, gainfully employed female reflects the shift to

the ideals of New Womanhood in the early twentieth century. Bracketing the beginning and the end of the suffrage movement, Holley and Miller illustrate where pro-suffrage humor began and where it ended.

This chapter explores in detail the strictures under which these women wrote and the line they had to walk between promulgating a much more progressive view of womanhood and still staying within the boundaries of acceptable female behavior. Opening with a discussion of their backgrounds and the conditions under which they wrote, this chapter attempts to discover both the rhetorical strategies they utilized and the reasons behind those choices.

Marietta Holley was born in 1836 in upstate New York, the youngest of seven children (Winter 11). Born on the family farm run by her father and three of her brothers, Holley joined her mother and one of her sisters in the regular farm chores that were considered woman's work: housework, gardening, canning, etc. (Winter 16). In her spare time, however, she wrote whenever she could, focusing mostly on poetry (Curry 1). By 1850, however, there was gold fever in the West, and all of her brothers left the farm to seek their fortunes (Winter 17). As Holley's responsibilities on the farm increased, so did her drive to write, and she published her first poem in 1857 when she was 21 (Curry 4). In 1861, her father died, leaving the now 25 year old Holley to run the farm and support her aged mother and reclusive older sister (Winter 22).

Her brothers and other male relatives offered neither help nor financial support as they were either called away to fight in the Civil War or busy with their

own livelihoods, so Holley was forced to keep the family farm almost single handedly (Winter 22). The three Holley women survived as many all-female households did during that time: Holley taught herself to manage the farm and the finances while her mother and sister supplemented the farm's income with a kind of domestic industry, selling the products of their labor such as knitted or embroidered goods (Winter 30). The Holley women, neither helped nor supported by any of the male figures in their lives, functioned with Marietta as head of the household and her mother and sister as the domestic helpmates.

Despite the burdens of the running the farm and caring for her family, Holley continued to write. Her poems brought her modest success, published as they were in her local Jefferson county newspaper, so, in 1869, Holley began to write humorous dialect sketches under the name Josiah Allen's wife (Curry 5). *Peterson's Magazine*, a national periodical with a much larger circulation than her local newspaper, published every sketch she wrote under that pseudonym, and soon she was offered a book contract which she negotiated herself. *My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet's* was published in 1873 when Holley was 37 and earned her \$600. Twenty years later, she could command a \$14,000 advance, a small fortune at the time (Curry 9).

Even after Holley began to publish her books and achieve both success and financial stability, she continued as head of the family, hiring caretakers and servants to help with the running of the farm, negotiating all business contracts by herself and, eventually, building a grand mansion to replace the small cottage her father had built

(Curry 9). She never married nor gave anyone else charge of the farm, preferring instead to have things done in her own way according to her own choices.

Holley's financial independence and status as head of the household, it is important to note, were not unusual for the time. With so many women left as the sole support of their own families, having lost fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons to the Civil War or westward migration, an independent woman making decisions for the family and leading as the ultimate authority in the home became a more common occurrence (Calhoun 106). The dominant feeling of the age may have been to prize the retiring domesticity and gentle submissiveness of women, but fulfilling the limiting (and possibly perilous) dictates of True Womanhood was a luxury many women could not afford. Instead, like Holley, many women trained themselves to be breadwinners, financial managers, and heads of household, crossing the boundaries of acceptable female behavior to keep themselves and their families sheltered and solvent.

It is easy to see, then, why Holley would support suffrage legislation as a way to empower women who were alone. The prominent anti-suffrage refrain of women staying home where they were loved and protected had to be an empty chivalry to Holley, and the argument that women did not need the vote because they were represented already by their husbands was, at best, completely irrelevant to her. Financially independent and solely supporting a home full of family and servants, Holley must have felt keenly the irony of anti-suffragists exhorting single,

impoverished women to give up their work and stay home so that the ideals of True Womanhood would not be violated.

When Alice Duer Miller's column "Are Women People?" debuted on January 25, 1914, the political climate was much different from that at the beginning of Marietta Holley's writing career. Women could vote in 11 states, and the woman's suffrage movement was gaining in both numbers and popularity throughout the United States (Wheeler 375-6). Politicians stumped on suffrage platforms, a woman had been elected to Congress, and many wide circulation newspapers and magazines had added regular pro-suffrage columns.

Despite these changes, however, women were still not completely equal in the eyes of the law or the general population. Most states still would not allow them to vote or practice certain professions, such as law or medicine. Many more women than before were attending college, but so few careers were open to them that a financially independent woman was a rarity, especially one who supported her family on her earnings (Schwarz 56). Into this climate of both limited and limitless possibilities for women stepped Alice Duer Miller, a woman who was in some ways both a traditionalist and a radical.

She was born in 1874 into the aristocracy of New York. Her family name, Duer, had been associated with the state since colonial times, and the money to support Hauxhurst, the Duer family estate, came from Wall Street (H.W. Miller 3). Despite her great love of both mathematics and poetry, Miller was best schooled in what her husband and biographer Henry Wise Miller referred to as making herself

agreeable: going to balls and hostessing dinner parties with her family (29-30). There was, however, a severe downturn in the stock market when Miller was just out of her teens, and her father's banking firm failed. Miller, nonetheless, decided to go to college and made the shocking decision to work her way through Barnard by tutoring and writing for money (H.W. Miller 30-31). As H.W. Miller points out, this was an very unusual notion for the time (35). Young ladies of Miller's social position rarely pursued higher education, and they certainly did not work to support themselves while doing it.

While at Barnard, she studied both mathematics and astronomy, writing fiction and poetry in her spare time. After graduating with a double major in 1899, she married H.W. Miller and followed him to Costa Rica where he had a few investments (Blain, Grundy, and Clements 740). During their time abroad, Miller focused on raising their son, Denning, and keeping house, writing steadily but mostly for pleasure. Miller had, in fact, made a conscious decision to leave behind both her studies and her occupation and focus strictly on her domestic life, a choice completely compatible with the time. In the words of her husband, "The talented woman of the world was laid aside for [Denning's] benefit and her relation was that of any good mother to her son," (47). Her writing became a pastime, not a vocation, as she left behind the unorthodox beginning of her adulthood.

Within a few years, however, the collapse of H.W. Miller's investments and health drove the family back to New York and a fresh start (H.W. Miller 61). Miller once again took up her pen and began to write for money, needing to support both her

son and her ailing husband. She wrote whatever would sell: verses, novels, editorials, book reviews, short stories, etc., becoming a regular contributor to the *Saturday Evening Post* (H.W. Miller 63).

During this time, she became a member of an unusually radical group for its time, a group of women who were both independent and powerful, a group that certainly informed her politics. Heterodoxy was founded in 1912 as a luncheon club for women of diverse backgrounds, politics, and occupations (Schwarz 17). They met every other week to discuss topics ranging from birth control to pacifism to suffrage (Schwarz 19). What made Heterodoxy so unusual was not just the membership, although it was certainly a varied group, ranging from Republicans to Communists, from married women to committed lesbian couples, from Christians to atheists (Schwarz 1). Heterodoxy was so unusual because, unlike most women's organizations of the time, it was not formed around a central belief. It was simply a forum for all kinds of women to discuss all kinds of ideas and beliefs in a setting that encompassed both differences and disagreements (Schwarz 7). Given the wide range of politics and personal beliefs, the women of Heterodoxy were united in only two things: their gender and their belief in feminism.

The membership included writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Susan Glaspell (Schwarz 15), journalists such as Bessie Beatty, one of only two American reporters allowed on the Russian frontlines during WWI (Schwarz 19, 53), performers such as choreographer Agnes DeMille (Schwarz 48), and social radicals such as Crystal Eastman, the editor of *The Liberator*, a noted Socialist publication

(Schwarz 27), and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, one of the leaders of the American Communist Party (Schwarz 1). Some members even held legal or medical degrees, despite public opposition (Schwarz 117, 123). Their guest speakers were women like Helen Keller, birth control advocate Margaret Sanger, and anarchist Emma Goldman (Schwarz 19). Heterodoxy was, in the words of lifelong member Mabel Dodge Luhan, a club for “unorthodox women, women who did things and did them openly,” (quoted in Schwarz 1). Many of these women were active in reform movements, and almost all of them supported their families, financially independent from their husbands because of their own work.

These women dedicated their lives to breaking down gender barriers and redefining the notions of acceptable womanhood. They chaired political associations like the Socialist Party, they organized thousands of women in suffrage parades, and they traveled the world pursuing their occupations and preoccupations. As a member of this group, Miller participated in both the twice monthly meetings and their suffrage rallies and parades. From their progressive approach to suffrage propaganda, Miller took valuable insights and applied them to her own columns using their example of independence and outspokenness to inform her own sharply critical writing. The women of Heterodoxy exemplify what scholars call the New Woman: economically and socially independent, the next step in the evolution of womanhood.

With the passage of the suffrage amendment, however, Miller turned her hand to a much different, much less political type of writing. She began to write humorous novels which were later optioned by the movie industry including *Gowns by Roberta*

(1933) which became the musical *Roberta* with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. She soon went to work for Hollywood movie mogul Samuel Goldwyn as a screenwriter, working on comedies such as *Wife vs. Secretary* (1936), starring Clark Gable, Jean Harlow, and Myrna Loy. During her tenure as a screenwriter, Miller left behind her earlier, political bent and focused on light, screwball comedies set among the upper class. Her most famous work, however, *The White Cliffs* (1940), was a long poem set during WWI, full of stirring patriotism and sentimental imagery, about the romance between an American girl and an English soldier. Published on the eve of America's involvement in WWII, it sold almost 700,000 copies, going into 33 editions, in just four years (H.W. Miller 207-209).

Her royalties from her Hollywood career ensured that she and her family never had to worry about money again (H.W. Miller 63-4), and even though her husband did eventually recover and enjoy his own financial success, Miller, herself, never left writing again to return to a strictly domestic existence. For a time she was the sole support of her family and for years she provided the majority of the income, so her position in the household as the main breadwinner was not just unorthodox, it was a true rarity. She and her husband had an unorthodox partnership as well. They supported the same causes, including suffrage, and would often appear together campaigning for women's enfranchisement as a husband and wife team (H.W. Miller 25). They kept separate residences, however, with Miller providing a kind of allowance to her husband out of her earnings until he became financially independent (H.W. Miller 111). In a very real sense, Miller is an example of the New Woman,

living an economically and socially independent life and asserting her right to a career, a public voice, and visible power (Smith-Rosenberg 176).

Separated as they were by time and circumstances, what connects Holley and Miller most clearly besides their support of suffrage was their insistence on common sense as the cure for anti-suffragism. They both utilized a style that privileged the rational as the correct way to combat their opposition. This emphasis on the rational lends them an air of legitimacy, for the more strident and accusatory the opposition became, the more logical Holley and Miller are. Their wit, in a sense, enabled them to deconstruct the power of the anti-suffragists without seeming to lower themselves to anger or irrationality. Holley and Miller both exhibited an emotional control, choosing to combat ignorance with reasonable words rather than a shouting match. They both exposed outrages such as hypocrisy, immorality, and brutal violence, but they did not preempt the audience's outrage with their own.

Products of different times and different expectations, Holley and Miller nonetheless form a rhetorical frame around the suffrage movement. Whether a woman should vote because she is morally superior or because she is ethically entitled, both humorists argued from the middle ground of common sense. Both took the center as rational thinkers and pushed the opposition to the edges of extremism, even fanaticism. Both believed that in order for suffrage to capture the minds of the public, it had to seem the most logical choice. Common sense is at best a fluid notion, belonging to whoever can make the most persuasive case, and most people want to be on the side of reason and common sense. In the case of suffrage, victory

would go to whoever was judged the most reasonable. Holley and Miller, therefore, carefully constructed the most reasonable and the most palatable version of a suffragist according to the needs and prejudices of their time.

Constrained by the strictures of popular conceptions of womanhood, Holley and Miller were required to utilize much different rhetorical strategies from each other, making much different choices both in how they presented themselves and how they presented their arguments. As a woman writer during the height of the cult of True Womanhood, Holley's rhetorical strategy was to use the traditional to advocate the progressive. First, she adopted a persona that was in line with the values of True Womanhood. Secondly, she emulated the rustic, homespun style of the Literary Comedians, a comic style of humor that was widely known and already popular with her audience. Thirdly, in order to align herself with her readers, she treated her opposition gently and echoed the prejudices and criticisms of the anti-suffrage movement, making her opponents seem her allies and her allies seem her opponents.

Miller, writing more than 40 years later and with all the benefits of great social and political progress for women, employed much different rhetorical strategies to win her audience as she attempted to bridge the gap between the current realities of women's lives and regressive ideals of womanhood. First, she adopted the persona of the purely objective journalist, focusing on the politically active, gainfully employed female of the early twentieth century. Secondly, her style privileged both the literary and the cynical as she eschewed Holley's illiteracy and humility. Thirdly,

she aggressively attacked her opposition, treating them with contempt and refusing to turn on her suffrage allies in order to placate the anti-suffrage lobby.

II

When Holley introduced her character Samantha in 1873, female enfranchisement seemed a complete impossibility. The Cause had almost no allies in the popular press, and damaging anti-suffrage caricatures of angry, emasculating women were widespread. Holley's goal, to advocate a social reform that was considered an absolute violation of the tenets of True Womanhood, was made more difficult by the fact that women as a rule had very little public authority, much less a receptive audience for humorous propaganda. In her work on the satiric rhetorical strategies of Harriett Beecher Stowe, Jan Pilditch comments that even though Stowe's desire to speak out against slavery came from a sincere religious fervor, a perfectly acceptable feeling for a woman, it was still an act fraught with peril, "For a woman, to preach or even to comment publicly on any matter was to court social ostracism. For a woman to satirize was even more hazardous. Humor is aggressive, and satire especially so... Satire, like the sermon, is a literature of authority, and nineteenth-century American woman did not have easy access to such authority," (59-61).

Frances Whitcher, a female humorist from the 1840s, is a prime example of this. Hiding behind various pseudonyms, she wrote humorous fiction skewering the pretensions and hypocrisies of small town life. While Whitcher did achieve a modest amount of fame, she was always careful to use fictional names for the places and

people she satirized. She was a minister's wife, so she had to be circumspect. Despite her subterfuge, the people of her town discovered her authorship and objected to her work, which contained, as they believed, thinly veiled attacks on themselves. The outrage that followed caused her husband to lose his post, and they were forced to leave town (Blain, Grundy, and Clements 1158). She died of tuberculosis two years later. Women's humor, if it is deemed too close to the truth, can have severe repercussions as evidenced by Witcher, who once remarked that it was "a very serious thing to be a funny woman," (qtd. in Toth 201). A female satirist by definition violates the notion of True Womanhood because she indulges in criticism and derision, two traits incompatible with proper submissiveness.

Given the public's antipathy towards a female satirist, Holley had to devise a way to convince an audience at large that the Cause was a good one. Using herself as the model of suffrage advocacy, however, would not have been successful. As a financially independent woman, Holley had no authority to preach social upheaval nor would an audience have granted her the authority to speak. As an unmarried female she could easily have been classified with the entire lot of bitter, wrong-headed spinsters, marginalized by mockery and reduced to caricature. She was, in a very real sense, the feminist decried and damned in the editorial pages.

The first obstacle Holley had to overcome was how to devise an effective persona for her ideas, a character who would be granted a fair hearing because her subject matter was not only unpopular but considered a fundamental perversion of the ideals of True Womanhood. As Burke argues, "You persuade a man only insofar as

you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his,” (*Rhetoric* 55). The only way Holley, an unmarried, financially independent woman, could win an audience, therefore, was to write behind the mask of Samantha Allen, a loving wife and mother, possessed of absolute familial devotion, rock solid practicality, and clear headed logic.

Holley’s emphasis on Samantha’s domesticity made her an anomaly among the early pro-suffrage humorists. As discussed earlier, contemporary pro-suffrage humorists stressed the common humanity the sexes shared rather than making a distinction by gender. Holley, in contrast, instead of arguing the simple justice of treating women like equal citizens, went to great lengths to argue both in favor of women’s enfranchisement and the preservation of the home. She purposefully presented a view of women’s suffrage that was more acceptable to a contemporary audience, practicing Burke’s idea of identification that, “only those voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of a voice within,” (*Rhetoric* 39). It was Holley’s masterstroke to put her radically subversive arguments in the mouth of a woman who serves as the epitome of True Womanhood.

Samantha, in fact, is specifically designed to win over the opposition and undo the negative image of suffrage. In the first book, *My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s*, readers learn that Samantha has been happily married to Josiah for 14 years. As any True Woman, she keeps house for her family, regularly attends church, and loves her husband with a “cast-iron devotedness.” Samantha takes great pride in her housekeeping, and, while she does get carried away “episodically” or sermonizing to

almost anyone who will listen, she never fails to put her husband and home first. Her garrulous tirades about the injustice of single-sex enfranchisement generally occur while she is engaged in some kind of womanly chore which further emphasizes the point that suffrage and domesticity are not mutually exclusive.

In the first days of our married life, I strained nearly every nerve to help my companion Josiah along and take care of his children by his former consort, the subject of black African slavery also wearin' on me, and a mortgage of 200 and 50 dollars on the farm. But as we prospered and the mortgage was cleared, and the children were off to school, the black African also bein' liberated about the same time of the mortgage, then my mind bein' free from these cares – the great subject of Wimmen's Rites kept a goarin' me (My Opinions v)

Samantha supports woman's suffrage, but her advocacy does not drive her to commit any neglectful acts in the name of woman's rights.

As further proof of Samantha's adherence to the dictates of acceptable womanliness, the one character who is Samantha's constant companion through all 20 books and through 40 years of marriage is her foolish, yet beloved husband Josiah. Not a physically imposing man, he weighs less than half his wife and possesses less than half her reasoning. Remaining an ardent, yet ill-informed anti-suffragist through all of the Samantha books, Josiah stands as the one constant foil to Samantha's clear headedness, and Holley structures Samantha's interactions with Josiah to balance disagreement with devotion.

In one scene, Samantha waits outside the polling place for Josiah to cast his vote, having been warned by him that the poll was a place of purity and honor, and, therefore, no place for a woman. While Samantha sits there, she notices a stranger wearing one of Josiah's old coats. When she questions him, he tells her that the coat is payment for voting the correct ticket. Faced with Samantha's shock, the man defends himself by claiming that even though his family is poor, they are honest and willing to vote for whomever will pay them the most (*Josiah Allen's Wife* 159).

On the drive home, Samantha confronts Josiah about his bribe, accusing him of "lickerin' in dishonesty; tradin' in treason," (*Josiah Allen's Wife* 188). Shamed into silence, Josiah hangs his head and offers no defense. Already softening towards him, Samantha describes his doleful demeanor:

Oh how his feathers drooped and draggled on the ground speakin' in a rooster and allegory way. Oh, what a meachin' look covered him like a garment from head to foot. I declare for't if his boots didn't look meachin', and his hat and vest. I never seen a meachener lookin' vest than hisen... (*Josiah Allen's Wife* 187-8)

Despite the bluster in her accusation toward him, Samantha takes care to remark on his genuine chagrin, ascribing it to true repentance. By the end, even though he has not apologized or expressed true remorse, Samantha forgives him fully, claiming that "for all his back slidin's [he] is oncommon dear to me" (*Josiah Allen's Wife* 192).

It is imperative that Samantha carefully balance her clear-headed arguments for suffrage with wifely sympathy for Josiah because the destruction of the home was

one of the primary dangers predicted by the anti-suffragists, so she always handles Josiah with loving exasperation, never allowing their conflict to cloud her affection for him. Samantha can become exasperated with Josiah's irrationality or foolishness, but she never becomes furious or rises to invective. She must control her feelings lest she be deemed a virago or a shrew and suffer the charge of unwomanliness. Women were to submit to the rule of their husbands, not rage against it.

Holley was so successful with both pro and anti-suffragists because she wholeheartedly supported feminist humor but she hid it behind a mask of traditional womanhood. Samantha, with her unwavering devotion to home and family and her powerful social conscience, provided an alternative model of womanhood, one that could appeal to both sides of the Woman Question. As an icon of domestic suffragism, Samantha invites identification with her own political stance and offers reassurance to both potential converts and suffragists (Tickner 151).

Holley and the public found a point of identification – the sacred notion of womanhood – and established a satisfying sense of consensus, which she was able to exploit as she drew her audiences towards a sympathetic view of female enfranchisement. In her dissertation on nineteenth-century feminist novelists, Cheri Graves Ross argues that Holley's dialectic approach to the opposing sides actually "pioneered a new dimension in both humor and feminist discourse," (132). Her use of the traditional to advocate the progressive also paved the way for later pro-suffrage humorists who echoed her use of domesticity as an argument for the vote and the

special gifts of womanhood as a necessary civilizing agent for public service and government.

Miller's aggressive, forceful stance on women's issues stands in sharp contrast to Holley's. Rather than put on the mask of a devoted, illiterate narrator, Miller, instead adopts the persona of a highly educated, confident, and worldly narrator. Miller does not have to pretend to be less than she is, to know less than she does. Feminism may not have been mainstream, but literate, erudite women were less of a rarity and, unlike Holley's time, less of a threat.

Miller was a product of an all women's educational system predicated on the belief that all women had a natural right and a responsibility to join the public dialogue on social issues. Many students of the Seven Sisters modeled themselves after the twin ideals of educated womanhood – the intelligent members and restless disturbers of society who would use their uniquely female judgment and lucidity to advocate social justice (Wagner 198). Given this, she had no compelling reasons to adopt a persona that required her to pretend an ignorance that she did not have. Surrounded by like-minded peers both in school and in her social circle, Miller loudly voiced her dissatisfaction and attempted to right the inequities using every weapon in her rhetorical arsenal.

In rejecting the use of a fictional character behind which to hide, Miller utilized the detached tone of an objective journalist presenting her arguments as self-evident conclusions, and her columns, unlike Holley's books, were not a serialized

narrative at all. “Are Women People?” is a collection of Miller’s witty commentary in prose and poetry about women’s conditions in the United States and all over the world, particularly England and Europe, which were all engaged in their own internal struggles over women’s proper place.

It is probably more accurate to classify Miller’s column as “feminist” in subject matter, in that it targeted general issues of equality for women, rather than strictly “suffragist,” in terms of advocating enfranchisement. Throughout her writings, certainly, she advocates women’s suffrage on a consistent basis. However, Miller’s activism touches on all aspects of women’s lives – political power, social justice, intellectual pursuits – so her writings advocate not just a voting woman but a New Woman: educated, socially aware, and ready to legislate from a woman’s point of view.

Miller’s global feminism, unlike Holley’s view of suffrage, was not predicated on the notion of a fully domestic woman. In Miller’s column women are shown outside the home, supporting themselves and their families, sometimes as the sole wage earner. In one sarcastic paragraph titled “The New Freedom,” Miller notes,

“The Michigan commission on industrial relations has discovered,” says ‘The Detroit Journal,’ “that thousands of wives support their husbands.”

Woman’s place is in the home, but under a special privilege she is sometimes allowed to send her wages as a substitute.²³

²³ 17 March 1915

Instead of making herself seem traditionally feminine or home centered, Miller argues that women should be admitted as full participants in the franchise because of simple justice and human rights. Women's status as human beings entitles them to enfranchisement, not any idea of their moral superiority or their devotion to home.

Never in Miller's column does she ever refer to her domestic life. She doesn't use her personal behavior to validate her opinions, and she rejects the contemporary suffrage notion of social expediency – the idea that women's inherent domesticity and morality are what's needed to purify politics – as an acceptable rationale for the ballot. She refuses to placate her audience with avowals of happy housewifery, and, unlike other contemporary pro-suffrage humorists, she never claims that the ballot will enable women to stay home safely ensconced with domestic affairs. She argues, instead, that women's lives by necessity already encompass duties beyond a solely domestic sphere. Her writings are heavily populated with women who work in jobs and industries that have nothing to do with traditionally woman-centered skills, so she argues against the empty chivalries pressed upon women.

Miller's notion of womanhood, importantly, is in no way an anarchistic one. She does not present herself as a radical calling for an overhaul of societal norms; rather she calls for an acknowledgment of the place women already hold. In "To the Great Dining-Out Majority," Miller attempts to illustrate the chasm between the anti-suffragists' view of things and how things really are:

The New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage
is sending out leaflets to its members urging them to "tell every man

you meet, your tailor, your postman, your grocer, as well as your *dinner partner*, that you are opposed to woman suffrage.

We hope the 90,000 sewing machine operatives, the 40,000 saleswomen, the 32,000 laundry operatives, the 20,000 knitting and silk millgirls, the 17,000 women janitors and cleaners, the 12,000 cigar makers, to say nothing of the 700,000 other women and girls in industry in New York State, will remember when they have drawn off their long gloves and tasted their oysters to tell their dinner partners that they are opposed to woman suffrage because it might take women out of the home.²⁴

Miller even argues that the limited notion of good housewifery could be a trap to keep women from political participation, and she uses a pamphlet from the Woman Anti-Suffrage Association of Massachusetts entitled “Household Hints” as her example. This leaflet argues that the best way to improve domestic life is through elbow grease, not the ballot. One tip offers, “You don’t need a ballot to clean out your sink spout. A handful of potash and some boiling water is quicker and cheaper.” Another one reads, “Common sense and common salt applications stop hemorrhage quicker than ballots.”²⁵ For Miller, this is a twisted notion of domesticity, the idea that kitchen cleaner could ever be a substitute for political representation, and she decries the use of flippant household tips rather than vigorous political discourse.

²⁴ 10 January 1915

²⁵ 1 August 1915

She offers, in response, her own much more sarcastic idea of sublimating political action into banal household duties.

Government is based on force,

(Take your grease spots out with ink.)

Woman's place is in the home, of course.

(Don't keep chicken in the sink.)

Woman suffrage costs a lot.

(Pork and Beans are always cheap.)

Men may think, but women not.

(Camphor makes your butter keep.)

Guard your pedestal remote.

(Flavor fish with kerosene.)

Women do not want to vote.

(Rub your teeth with Vaseline.)²⁶

While certainly Miller is not demonstrating any serious grasp of domesticity (using kerosene as a flavor must have been more poetry than fact), she does grasp the underlying problem of using the home as a force to trap women. With her poem she clearly argues that the ballot has very little to do with housework and to insist that a ballot will not stop bleeding or clean your sink spout is fatuous.

Miller's sharp wit and intellectual sparring lend an air of assurance and forceful feminism that is largely absent from the writing of Holley. As a writer

²⁶ 1 August 1915

during the height of the Cult of True Womanhood, Holley had to play down her feminist leanings and take care not to display any overt intellectual powers, lest the audience perceive too much wit in her. Miller, however, as a New Woman can be assured and forceful and a feminist. Miller insists on fair treatment, equal opportunity, and a higher regard for women as people, not perfected humans, “...women do not want to be given the vote because they are angels, any more than they want to be denied the vote because they are queens.”²⁷ Through Samantha, Holley argued that women deserve enfranchisement because they are special, ordained by God and driven by their own nature to protect and serve those who need it, but Miller believed that women deserve regular treatment, not special, because they are people, not saints.

III

Despite their radical stance for the time in which Holley lived and their overtly feminist message, her Samantha books are best characterized as what Blair and Hill refer to as conservative or reputable humor, as opposed to subversive humor (*America's Humor* 163). Through her marriage and domestic life, Samantha exalts traditional values and privileges social order over disorder. She also espouses decorum over unbridled license, railing against the indecent dress and behavior of “bold brazen faced wimmen that go a rantin’ round the country rigged out in that way, jest to make themselves notorious,” (*My Opinions* 346). She supports a rigid

²⁷ 13 August 1916

social hierarchy, and she champions what Blair and Hill call a “moral and predictable universe” (*America’s Humor* 163) in which women continue to function as they always have within the home with just the added task of voting.

Holley’s use of the traditional to advocate the progressive is evidenced not just in her use of a very conservative mask but also in her choice of a vehicle for her humor. The humorous style she chose was not only familiar to her audience but on the wane even as she began. Holley wrote in the style of the Literary Comedians, an earlier generation of humorists whose genre relied on homespun wisdom dispensed from a rustic philosopher. In the work of the Literary Comedians, the uneducated sage with his down-home wit functions as both the voice of common sense and the impetus of the laughter.

A generation before Holley, during the 1830s, writers such as Charles Farrar Browne (Artemus Ward), Henry Wheeler Shaw (Josh Billings), and Charles H. Smith (Bill Arp) adopted the personae of homespun philosophers in their humor, and they utilized standard comic traits such as the use of regional dialect, homely extended metaphors, bad grammar, malapropisms, and revelatory misspellings as they tackled social and political issues of the day. In adopting these same characteristics for her books, Holley occupies a place for her writings with which her audience is already familiar. Holley can then earn the goodwill and acceptance which previous Literary Comedians have already earned. The difference between Holley and her comic forefathers is that she used a familiar style of humorous writing to espouse a political stance that was considered to be an anathema to most of her audience.

The most common traits of the Literary Comedians were the use of dialect and the persuasive use of plain-spoken common sense, what Blair called “horse sense” or “mother wit.” According to Blair, a person with horse sense

does not have to look into a book to find the answers, does not have to ask anybody on earth what to do. He can solve his own problems because he was born with a long head on him, he has “been around,” and he has learned everything he can from experience. When he gets into a new situation, he whittles his problem down to its essentials, sees how it compares with situations in his past and how it differs from them, and then he thinks out what he should do. (*Horse Sense* vii)

Samantha’s authority, therefore, comes from her straightforward, candid simplicity.

The use of elaborate proofs and statistical research to persuade would have been at odds with Samantha’s style of argumentation. Her whole notion of common sense, what she would call “megumness” – mediumness or moderation – comes from her own observations. In Samantha’s own words: “you have to hold up the hammer of personal incident to drive home the nail of Truth and have it clench and hold fast,” (*World’s Fair* 115). For Samantha, reason is the ability to see the truth of what is right under her own nose. This makes her persuasive because she in no way seems like a conscious propagandist. The audience believes that there is no artifice or trickery inherent in a woman who purports to “tell it like it is.”

Woman’s suffrage had long been comic fodder for many of the most popular Literary Comedians, but Holley sought to craft an acceptable image of womanhood to

support what many humorists thought insupportable. Holley's use of homely wisdom, therefore, coupled with Samantha's uneducated way of speaking was calculated to win over the audience not just through familiarity with the style but with a non-threatening female persona. Samantha is not an educated, emancipated woman; she is a contented wife and mother who does not wish to be "liberated" from her domestic life. She does, however, believe that suffrage and domesticity are not mutually exclusive, despite what prevailing anti-suffrage attitudes dictated. Blair considered Samantha the exemplar of contemporary womanhood, "Practically all her ideas, her notions, her prejudice, according to the standards of her day, were beautifully right," (*Horse Sense* 234). As such, Samantha and her carefully crafted image of illiteracy and domesticity could serve as a model of acceptable suffragism.

Holley's emulation of the style of the Literary Comedians, a form of humor that was almost anachronistic even as she took up her pen, may seem a curious choice in retrospect not only because of its waning popularity but also because the vast majority if not all of the homespun sages were male. There was, however, one compelling reason for Holley to utilize this style: the basis of argumentation. Samantha argues from a basis of observation and pragmatic common sense, and her homely metaphors and sayings all spring from her personal experience which, given the time in which she lives, is all she is allowed as argumentative proof.

In her exploration of the cult of True Womanhood, Barbara Welter found many socially-dictated rules and roles for women, most of which came from the notion of women as spiritually purer than men, yet mentally inferior. One of the

many ways in which this manifested itself was the idea that women were incapable of intellectual, scientifically rational thought. Women may have been naturally good, but that goodness relied on the absence of any knowledge whatsoever (“Anti-Intellectualism” 261). A True Woman, one popular magazine argued, should “possess general information on every subject of daily life; but it is not necessary that she be scientifically educated. The true relations of life are more important to her than mathematics, astronomy, or the dead languages,” (quoted in “Anti-Intellectualism” 263).

According to Welter, nineteenth-century men, in general, prized common sense over intellect, but the strictures on women were much more confining:

If mankind, generically, was anti-intellectual, woman was so in a particular way...the more she used her heart rather than her mind, the more feminine she was. Anti-intellectualism was implicit in the cult which exalted women as creatures who did not use logic or reason, having a surer, purer road to the truth – the high road of the heart. Womanhood, as defined by contemporary science, religion, literature, and many of the leading citizens of the period, symbolized the romantic desire of a romantic age to replace the deductive by the impulsive, the rational by the supra-rational... Thus, whether she drew man to a higher spiritual plane or bound him to earth by her life-force, female nature and functions were untouched by human intellect. (258)

Having as her narrator a woman who embodied True Womanhood not just in her domestic life but in her complete lack of any kind of formal education enabled Holley to tackle a controversial topic like suffrage. Holley was compelled to use an uneducated character as her mouthpiece because women were not permitted to argue any other way, especially about such a contentious subject. Samantha can be naïve and common-sensical but not intellectual or “book learned.” She can offer up argumentative proofs based on her sphere of influence and experience – domestic metaphors and familial relations – but not statistically-based proofs. Even her colloquialisms, misspellings, and mispronunciations, such as “pole” for “poll” and “spear” for “sphere,” are an essential part of her anti-intellectualism because the audience must not only laugh at her deft dealings with antagonists, they must also laugh at her as well. Samantha, a True Woman, cannot dominate her detractors completely, especially when her opponents are men, so a certain amount of foolishness and humiliation are necessary to keep her from seeming an upstart feminist.

The beginning of the twentieth century, when Miller began her weekly columns, marked the final decline in the popularity of dialect humor and the rustic philosopher. Slang, vulgarity, and colloquial speech began to give way to more urbane and sophisticated witticisms (*America's Humor* 371). Humor theorist Sanford Pinsker is even more specific, claiming that the death of Mark Twain in 1910 is the true dividing line between the rural humor of the previous century and the urban

humor of the new one because he “simultaneously exhausted the best possibilities of nineteenth-century American humor and made it painfully clear that they would no longer suffice,” (184).

Miller herself functions as the literary precursor of the humorous writing to come. As a result of her urban setting and the lessening of the strictures on women’s intellectual displays, Miller looked ahead to the humor of the coming years and prefigured the New York wits with her use of literary and classical allusions, cynical and ironic arguments, and often provincial references.

Popular humor was no longer located in small, frontier towns or the farming community of Holley. Humorists placed their jokes and stories in city settings like the Chicago pub of Finley Peter Dunne’s *Mr. Dooley* and Miller’s city dwellings. New York became a kind of training ground for many of the famous humorists who were about to make their mark in 1925 on the pages of the *New Yorker*, such as Franklin P. Adams, Dorothy Parker, and Robert Benchley, all good friends of Miller, and many of the now recognizable traits of the New York wits were present in Miller’s work ten years earlier. Through her writing and her social connections, Miller traveled in the same circle as these writers. She was a frequent member of the round table at the Algonquin, and she later became a member of the *New Yorker*’s advisory board (Lee 6-7)

The *New Yorker* exemplified the comic traits of that generation with its focus on city life and urban concerns. More cynical and less humble than the previous century’s humorists, the *New Yorker*’s reliance on “in jokes,” first names, and strictly

provincial doings lent an air of exclusivity and privilege to the magazine. In her work, *Defining New Yorker Humor*, Judith Yaross Lee argues that the *New Yorker* ... defined itself and redefined American humor as urban and urbane: the magazine's artists and writers transformed nineteenth-century traditions of character, dialect, and situation into material appropriate to a mass market of educated, sophisticated consumers. (10-11)

The *New Yorker* aimed for the mass market, ironically, by cultivating an air of exclusivity and specialized knowledge. The New York wits' use of irony, history, and esoteric references served to separate casual readers from cultured ones.

Rejecting the nineteenth-century notion of women's intellectual inferiority, Miller filled her columns with literary references, classical and modern history, and humorous parodies of authors such as Shakespeare (*Are Women People?* 22), Alfred Lord Tennyson,²⁸ and Rudyard Kipling.²⁹ Samantha used homely sayings and humble examples to press her case and draw in her audience, but by Miller's time, an educated woman was less of a threat to the order of things. She makes reference to public figures by last name only, calling the prime minister of England simply "Asquith," and offers no title or explanation, assuming that her audience is as well read in history, literature, and current events as she is. She makes reference to ancient history, such as when she draws a connection between the struggle for suffrage and the Greeks stand at Thermopylae.³⁰ She paraphrases Shakespeare in her sonnet on a

²⁸ 14 February 1915

²⁹ 16 August 1914

³⁰ 2 January 1916

cannery bill, “Let us not to an unrestricted day/Impediments admit (*Are Women People?* 22) and Blake in “Anti, Anti, Burning Bright”

Anti, Anti, burning bright
 In our intellectual night,
 What ingenious-minded guy
 Could frame thy dreadful sophistry?³¹

Holley aimed at the largest audience she could, using Samantha’s simplicity as a way of both placating and inviting her audience. Miller, like her later counterparts, rejected both humility and the homespun, using a much more refined, yet sharper wit to pursue her agenda. In her poem, “A Prepared Epitaph,” she looks ahead to the New York suffrage referendum coming in November:

RIP...
 Here lies
 The Indirect Influence
 A Form of Power which every legislator
 gladly attributed to every woman
 not only because he did not want it himself,
 but because
 he knew it never existed
 anyhow³²

³¹ 7 June 1914

³² 9 May 1915

As Miller's column unfolded week after week, the antidote to hypocrisy and irrationality, it attempts to present a persuasive alternative to the seemingly ridiculous and willfully ignorant acts of anti-suffragists. Her intelligent, cynical observations on her opposition invited the reader to join her hegemony of ridicule, offering them what one theorist calls "the comforts of collusion" (Tickner 163). Miller's purposeful humor may evoke laughter, but its primary purpose is to seek consensus between herself and the hearer, what Freud calls bribing the audience with pleasure into taking sides with her (123).

IV

Possibly the hardest obstacle for Holley to overcome was the absolute antipathy of anti-suffragists towards the pro-suffragists. Accused of everything from unwomanliness to outright brutality, pro-suffragists were almost assured of a passionately hostile reception from the public no matter how gently they advocated the Cause. Holley was forced, therefore, by the ascendancy of the anti-suffrage movement to conciliate her enemies and alienate her allies. As Burke notes, this effort of conciliation is necessary to build consensus with an audience that might be antagonistic to your cause:

...the rhetorician may have to change an audience's opinion in one respect; but he can succeed only insofar as he yields to that audience's opinion in other respects. Some of their opinions are needed to

support the fulcrum by which he would move their other opinions.

(*Rhetoric* 56)

Holley's first tactic, therefore, was to criticize pro-suffragists for excesses and radicalism, using the same words as the anti-suffragists. In this way, Samantha can establish a connection with her audience, building a sense of unity on the basis of their shared antipathy. Once the anti-suffragists believed themselves aligned with Samantha, Holley then introduced Betsey Bobbet, a model of radical and unacceptable anti-suffragism designed to drive other remonstrants toward Samantha's kind of political moderation.

In one example, Samantha is subjected to the angry tirade of an outlandishly dressed woman's rights lecturer, "Of all the painted, and frizzles, and ruffled, and humped up, and laced down critters I ever see, she was the cap sheaf" (*My Opinions* 337). Preaching warfare against "tyrant man," the woman's rights lecturer harangues an increasingly agitated Samantha. Echoing the same criticisms leveled at suffragists by the remonstrants, Samantha refuses to support the woman's statements about the superiority of women and her disparaging remarks about men:

I don't wonder sometimes that men don't think that wimmin know enough to vote, when they see em' go on. If a woman don't know enough to make a dress so she can draw a long breath in it, how is she goin' to take deep and broad views of public affairs? If she puts 30 yards of calico into a dress, besides the trimmin's, how is she goin' to preach acceptably on political economy? If her face is covered with

paint, and her curls and frizzles all danglin' down onto her eyes, how can she look straight and keenly into foreign nations and see our relations there? (*My Opinions* 344-5)

Samantha sympathizes with anti-suffragists, but, at the same time, she models a kind of moderate female suffrage they might find compelling, encouraging women to be modest and reasonable and respectful so as to be worthy of the vote.

The woman's rights movement during this time was suffering under the charges of radicalism and immorality, so Holley sends Samantha to the headquarters of the suffrage movement in Washington, D.C. so she can highlight the good, wholesome works of womanly suffragists and berate those who are too radical for the mainstream public. Putting radical suffragists in the category of "Other" and portraying them as fringe elements within the movement, Samantha sets herself and the "true earnest wimmen who take thier reputations in thier hands, and give thier lives in the cause of Right" (*My Opinions* 346) as the exemplars of "megum" womanhood, moderate of belief, dress, and sentiment.

To accomplish this, Holley has Samantha meet and condemn Victoria Woodhull, a real person and one of the most famous and notorious suffragists, an outspoken advocate for divorce and free love. The press Woodhull had garnered had been very damaging to the Cause because both Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony had publicly allied themselves with her. The anti-suffragists, as a result, were able to point to Woodhull and declare that suffrage stood for rampant divorce and lax morality. The more publicity Woodhull received, and she was never shy with

the press, the worse it became for the Cause. As both a supporter of woman's rights and the embodiment of the conservative views of wedlock, Samantha must "give her a real talkin' to" and clearly express that Woodhull's views are not the views of mainstream suffragists.

At first, Samantha listens attentively as Woodhull defends her stance on divorce. Arguing that divorce should be more easily obtained and any love between two people is enough to make a sacred, covenantal marriage unnecessary, Woodhull gives several examples of cruel and unhappy partnerships and insists that no one should be forced to endure an abusive marriage, becoming quite emotional in the telling. Samantha seeks to soothe her saying, "'Hush up Victory,' says I 'wimmen must submit to some things, they can pray, and they can try to let their sorrows lift 'em up nearer to heaven, makin' angels of 'em,'" (*My Opinions* 321). Samantha's defense of marriage is the model of acceptable womanhood, advocating both piety and submission. As she continues to debate, however, her trademark horse sense asserts itself as she argues that although Josiah may be "dreadful tryin'," she married him "with both eyes open... I wasn't starved to it nor thumbscrewed into it, and it is my duty to make the best of him," (*My Opinions* 321).

Samantha's hard-headed practicality makes a strong contrast with Woodhull's emotionalism.

Says [Woodhull], "When a woman finds that her soul is clogged and hampered, it is a duty she owes to her higher nature to find relief."

Says [Samantha], “When a woman has such feelin’s, instead of leavin’ her lawful husband and goin’ around huntin’ up a affinitee, let her take a good thoroughwert puke.” Says I, “In 9 and ½ cases out of 10, it is folkes’es stomachs that are clogged up instead of their souls.” Says I, “There is nothin’ like keepin’ the stomach in good order to make the moral sentiments run good.” (*My Opinions* 327)

While Woodhull tries to make her actions seem like the natural welling up of strong emotions, Samantha punctures her overblown metaphors by taking them literally and offering a homely treatment. Samantha may seem foolish for not understanding the poetic language, but the true target is Woodhull and her pretensions toward poetic fancy as a way to excuse her behavior. Samantha has no patience with sentimentalism, especially when she believes women use it to excuse either immorality or foolishness.

Samantha’s clash with Woodhull on the subject of marriage is an important step toward reconciling pro and anti-suffragists. With her “cast-iron devotedness” to Josiah, Samantha can confidently echo the dominant ideas of the time and give voice to a conservative view of marriage. Samantha allies herself with both the suffragists’ support of the Cause and the anti-suffragists’ remonstrations of Woodhull’s unpalatable view on marriage. In this way, Samantha can bridge the gap between those who might support suffrage but not at the risk of seeming to support immoral behavior and licentiousness.

With Samantha as the model of acceptable suffragism, Holley can introduce her most memorable adversary, Betsey Bobbet, a man-hungry, desperate, unattractive, foolish, ignorant anti-suffragist meant to act as a deterrent to other anti-suffragists. With Betsey, Holley could launch an extended attack on all the ideas about women which undervalued and restricted them: sentimentality, True Womanhood, and anti-suffragism. For Holley, and for many later suffrage humorists like Miller, portraying female anti-suffragists in the most unflattering light possible became a central goal because they recognized what a potent argument against suffrage they were. A woman who argued against her own enfranchisement, who argued that that she was unfit for the ballot, was a woman to whom many men would have flocked, believing themselves rescuers and heroes. Recognizing this, many pro-suffrage humorists stressed what they viewed as the irrational nature of the anti-suffragists and argued that the root of this irrationality was a fundamental lack of clarity. A woman who would oppose suffrage, they argued, was a woman who because of her overweening selfishness and arrogance would commit any hypocrisy or foolishness to protect her own desires. Betsey, therefore, is specifically designed to be a foil to Samantha: she models inappropriate behavior, excessive emotionality, and foolish reasoning.

Betsey is the ultimate example of a woman so driven by her desires that she exposes herself painfully again and again. Desperate for marriage but unable to find any man willing to oblige, Betsey spends her time indecently chasing after all the

eligible men in town and writing insipid love poetry, such as “Wimmen’s Speah; On whisperin’s of nature to Betsey Bobbet”:

Two gentle sheep upon the hills;
 How sweet the twain did run,
 As I meandered gently on
 And sot down on a stun;
 They seemed to murmur sheepishly,
 “Oh Betsey Bobbet deah,
 It is matrimony! it is matrimony
 That is a women’s speah.” (*My Opinions* 233)

Despite her lack of success, she never hesitates to lecture the happily married Samantha on the true duty of womanhood, claiming that it is woman’s duty to “soothe, to cling, to smile, to coo” and her highest calling to act as a “sort of poultice to the noble, manly breast,” (*My Opinions* 62). In response, Samantha turns on Betsey and says:

“Am I a poultice Betsey Bobbet, do I look like one?... I had jest as soon soothe lacerations as not, Betsey, if I hadn’t everything else to do. I had just as lives set down and smile at Josiah by the hour, but who would fry him nut cakes?... I could coo at him day in and day out, but who would skim milk—wash pans—get vittles—wash and iron—and patch and scour—and darn and fry—and make and mend—and bake and bile while I was a cooin’, tell me? (*My Opinions* 62-3)

Betsey may revere marriage but only because she believes it will be the fulfillment of her dream of freedom from any care or drudgery, not a spiritual joining.

Having made Betsey the object of the audience's censure and mockery, Holley then makes her the mouthpiece of the anti-suffrage movement. Betsey repeats all the standard arguments against suffrage, but because she has such a weak understanding, she is no match for the insightful counterarguments of Samantha.

“It is so revoltin’ to female delicacy to go to the poles and vote; and most all of the female ladies that revolve around in the high circles of Jonesville aristocracy agree with me in thinkin’ it is real revoltin’ to female delicacy to vote.”

“Female delicacy!” says I, in a austere tone. “Is female delicacy a plant that withers in the shadder of the pole...Is it any worse for a female woman to dress herself in a modest and Christian manner, with a braige viel over her face, and a brass mounted parasol in her hand, and walk decently to the pole and lay her vote on it, then to be introduced to a man, who for all you know may be a retired pirate, and have him walk up and hug you by the hour, to the music of a fiddle and a base violin...”

“It would be such a public business Josiah Allen’s wife for a woman to receive votes.”

“I don’t know as it would be any more public business than to sell Episcopal pin cushions, Methodist I scream, or Baptist water melons, by the hour to a permiscuous crowd...”

But says Betsey, “t’would devouh too much of a female’s time, she would not have time to vote, and perform the other duties that are incumbient upon her.”

Says I, “Wimmen find time for thier everlastin’ tattin’ and croshain’... They spend more time a frizzin’ thier front hair than they would, to learn the whole constitution by heart...” (*My Opinions* 223-227)

By putting the standard anti-suffrage arguments in Betsey’s mouth, Holley undoes the power of those words. In a sense, Betsey is the anti-suffragist designed to drive other anti-suffragists away. Samantha has reason and moral character, but Betsey has only her irrationality and demeaning desperation. Her character works in the same way that the militant caricatures of suffragists did: to make one side of the argument so unattractive that no self-respecting woman could possibly support it. Betsey’s foolish and pathetic behavior is designed to be at odds with the audience. They laugh at her and pity her, but they do not wish to be associated with her.

One of the most powerful things that Holley did was to recast the caricature of the suffragette spinster. An instantly recognizable image, the unattractive, desperate spinster sublimating her romantic frustrations into suffrage work had been appropriated by the anti-suffragists to stand as the embodiment of ridiculous, pitiable

suffragism. Holley, however, took that stereotype and recast it with Betsey Bobbet, a ridiculous and pitiable anti-suffragist.

Betsey looks like the stereotypical spinster found in the cartoons of the day. She is the emaciated, knock-kneed, man-hungry image the anti-suffragists had favored in their suffrage attacks, but Holley undoes the power of that caricature by putting the most vapid anti-suffrage rhetoric in Betsey's mouth, as she, in an interesting reversal of the stereotype, sublimates her romantic frustrations into anti-suffrage work. In this way, Holley uses Betsey to warn away other anti-suffragists not by persuasion but by deterrence (Tickner 172).

The audience sees through Betsey and her foolish, belittling notions of womanhood and marriage, siding with Samantha. As a devoted wife and mother with a streak of practicality and rock-solid rationality, Samantha stands as an example of the good women could do with the ballot, in sharp contrast to Betsey who exemplifies the damage anti-suffragism can inflict on the weak.

In Miller's columns, her handling of the opposition moves from pointed criticism to outright attack as the suffrage movement made gains nationally, moving toward federal enfranchisement. Because suffrage had such a strong and growing base, Miller has no need to placate the opposition nor does she publicly criticize the Cause. Far more effective, her rhetorical strategy is to treat suffrage not as a potentially good idea but as a completely natural evolution, not so much invented as

organically created as education and progress naturally evolve as well. Suffrage is progress and it needs no defense; remonstrance is regressive and cannot be defended.

As one of her dominant strategies, Miller directly targets the anti-suffrage movement, but she does not concoct a fictional character such as Holley's Betsey Bobbet to ridicule. Instead, she often uses actual male and female anti-suffragists, never hesitating to use their real names. In two examples, she quotes Alice Chittenden, the president of the Morristown Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, as saying "women in this country have every opportunity open to them in every line that is open to men." Alongside this quote, Miller includes a list of states where women are not allowed to practice law, become doctors, act as notaries, or work at the post office.³³ By using the actual words of the anti-suffragists, Miller makes them seem as foolish as Betsey Bobbet with her ill-formed opinions on woman's rights. This contrast enables Miller to show the distance between the reality of women's lives and the false image the anti-suffragists propagate.

One of the reasons Holley used a stereotypical character rather than an actual person as the representation of anti-suffrage was to portray a generic anti-suffragist, not a specific one. Betsey can stand as any woman who becomes too befuddled by anti-suffrage, and that makes her appeal more widespread. Also, Holley can put whatever foolish words she likes in Betsey's mouth, the better to showcase Samantha's humble, yet airtight reasoning. Just as important, however, the use of a fictional character was also a necessity to Holley because during the rise of the anti-

³³ 8 February 1914 and 11 July 1915

suffrage movement among women, as Holley was publishing her first books, the remonstrants were very careful to keep their names out of the public eye, believing as they did in the sanctity of the domestic sphere, and their refusal to advocate publicly was considered consistent with their beliefs. Even if Holley wanted to use a real life “Anti,” she would have been hard pressed to find one whose name was well known enough to be instantly recognizable to the public at large.

By Miller’s time, however, anti-suffragists were as much in the public as any other political figure – addressing Congress, writing columns under their own bylines, and traveling the States on speaking tours. Miller, therefore, did not need to fictionalize her anti-suffragists because they were so well known to her audience. It is also clear that Miller did not attempt to fictionalize her anti-suffragists to achieve a kind of universality because she had a different rhetorical goal than Holley. Betsey Bobbet was presented as a recognizable type, a shortcut to humor because she embodies foolish notions and actions which the audience can recognize. Miller, however, did not want to universalize the examples; she instead sought to personalize them. She exposed them as foolish individuals, set apart from the rest of the rational crowd by their irrationality, and in a sense, she isolates both their revelatory, foolish utterances and themselves by quoting and naming them. Anti-suffragists are not always treated as a group in the works of Miller because she does not want them to hide behind their numbers. They lose their power when they are not the monolithic anti-suffrage lobby but merely national chapter Secretary Minnie Bronson who claims that women do not need the vote because they are represented by their husbands,

despite the fact that she, herself, is unmarried.³⁴ They are not a fearsome force of powerful women; they are merely a group of individuals joined together by fatuous, weak arguments. Miller deconstructs their power by naming them and makes them human, fallible.

Another important distinction between Holley and Miller is their handling of suffragists. Holley, as she attempted to placate her audience and align herself with their conservatism, was forced strongly to criticize and condemn any elements of the suffrage movement that had been labeled as radical or immoral. The anti-suffrage lobby was so powerful that Samantha had to seem more like an ally to them and less like an enemy.

Miller, however, does not care to cultivate the good will of her opposition nor does she need to. Suffrage had made so many public gains that it was no longer necessary publicly to compromise and soften the message. As more and more states enfranchised women, Miller had less and less need to placate those on the losing side. Miller's tactic, therefore, was to minimize the threat from the anti-suffragists and make them seem like so much less than they were. For Miller to treat the anti-suffragists as a serious threat would be to give them greater importance than she wished. Instead, Miller patronizingly treats them as political lightweights and gently mocks them as earnestly misguided and not quite smart enough. In one example, she gently tweaks the *Antis* for formulating such a weak argument. Under the title "Something Harder Next Time" she writes:

³⁴ 13 May 1917

“How comes it,” demands the woman’s protest [an anti-suffrage journal], “that the suffragists nearly all come from non-suffrage states?”

For the same reason that there are no votes-for-men leagues in all this broad democracy.³⁵

They seem foolish because they cannot understand that a fully enfranchised populace does not need to stump for enfranchisement.

The anti-suffragists in Miller’s early pieces are completely inept when it comes to any kind of intellectual work, and often their own arguments are so capricious and so contradictory that all Miller has to do was merely publish direct quote with minimal annotation from herself. In one instance she points out that despite the closely held anti-suffrage belief that public speaking is unseemly for women, the largest and most powerful anti-suffrage association has established a school to teach women public speaking.³⁶

In fact, anti-suffrage women were already out of their homes and into public life, as one anti-suffrage group unwittingly proved. Miller recounts one ill-conceived pamphlet in which the Man Suffrage Association argues that suffrage will pull women away from their duties at home. To support this point, the group includes a list of women who support this very position. Each woman’s name is followed by a list of the occupations, offices, and titles each woman holds, including one staunch

³⁵ 7 February 1915

³⁶ 27 June 1915

home advocate who holds eight different offices in various public organizations.³⁷

This attack exposes the main weakness in anti-suffrage argumentation, and, of course, the more vocal and organized the Antis become, the more the flaw is apparent: a competent, organized, clear thinking, educated female anti-suffragist who can understand and argue public policy with the best of them is actually an argument in favor of female suffrage, not against.

As time went on, Miller's writings began to evolve in the treatment of the anti-suffragists. Believing enfranchisement near when she started her column in 1914, Miller's tone turns dark after one particularly close suffrage defeat in New York in 1915. After this, Miller's attitude toward the Antis turns much more serious. Anti-suffragists move from ineffectual and foolish to privileged and hypocritical, concerned more with their own selfish desires than any moral imperative.

Miller argues that anti-suffragists do not revere women and their sacred sphere; they only reverence themselves and other privileged women like them. In Miller's later portraits, anti-suffragists loudly exclaim their reverence for all sacred womanly ideals and then viciously undercut them in their private lives. In her first column after the suffrage loss in New York, Miller has a particularly devastating example where she introduces a woman "safe...from want and suffering...safe by money and social position" who rejoices that the suffrage amendment failed to pass in New York.

She was glad that women had been defeated,

³⁷ 26 September 1915

That was the way they ought to be treated,
 Glad that women who toiled all day
 Were not to be equals in any way...
 Glad that since wisdom and wealth and power
 Guarded her children every hour,
 To know that tenement mothers and wives
 Couldn't help guard their children's lives,
 Glad since everything suited her
 That other women should stay as they were.
 Which shows that being secure, apart,
 Petted and sheltered by every art
 Doesn't develop the human heart.³⁸

Miller even goes so far as to argue that the anti-suffrage leadership has nothing but contempt for women in general. In Miller's view, the leaders of the anti-suffragists want to keep women from voting not because it would destroy perfect domestic harmony but because they think most women are inferior and can not be trusted to vote correctly. In her poem "The Lady 'Anti' to Mere Women," Miller accuses female anti-suffragists of holding a degrading view of all others while exalting themselves.

Home is woman's place, you see
 But that don't apply to me

³⁸ 7 November 1915

I can serve on a committee,
I can sketch a campaign plan,
I can make a speech as witty—
Wittier than any man.
I have public work to do,
But I'm cleverer than you.³⁹

Miller's anti-suffragists show themselves to be the enemies of women rather than their selfless guardians. By presenting an entire group of women contemptuous of their own sex, Miller manages to turn the focus away from their ideas and arguments and to the anti-suffragists themselves. She insures that no one can hear an anti-suffragist's speech about the natural delicacy of women and their rightful place at home without also hearing an arrogant condescension.

Miller's carefully constructed criticisms make it seem as if suffrage is the natural consequence of thoughtful reasoning. She portrays herself as a thinking individual, committed to rationality, so naturally she becomes a suffragist. Anti-suffragists, however, are made to seem misguided at best and blatantly amoral and hypocritical at worst. Using their own words against them, Miller presents anti-suffragists in the worst light possible. Inevitably, the more irrational anti-suffragists appear, the more attractive suffrage appears. No one wants to be on the side of the foolish or the censured, and suffrage, Miller makes clear, is on the side of clear thinking and common sense.

³⁹ 10 September 1916

Joined by their advocacy of the Cause and their use of commonsensical arguments, Holley and Miller both rejected the dominant suffrage ideology of their time, choosing instead to build a new dialectic as a way to enfranchisement. Holley, the first American writer of feminist humor, used traditional notions and methods to advocate a progressive, almost radical reordering of society. Miller bridged the gap between current realities and progressive ideals, pushing for a reordering of society's attitudes to bring them more in line with the reality of twentieth-century women's lives.

Holley used her heroine, Samantha, as an example of how a woman could be politically active yet still domestically focused. Samantha argues forcefully for the vote but also for the preservation of the home. By asserting the innate domesticity of Samantha, Holley espoused an ideal that contradicted other contemporary suffrage humorists who offered appeals based on simple justice and common humanity, not gender distinction. In a sense, Holley's emphasis on Samantha's womanly attributes shared closer ties to the anti-suffrage ideal of womanhood. Her notion of the family-oriented woman bringing her innate womanliness to the polls looks ahead to the next century of suffragists who would also argue that a domestic angel is the best one to vote in needed reforms.

Miller's persona, in contrast, dismisses the idea of domesticity as a trap for women, a distraction from larger, more important world issues. Women should have the vote, Miller argues, not because they are perfected beings but because they are

law-abiding, tax-paying citizens and deserve fair representation. In arguing on the basis of simple justice, Miller echoes the suffrage ideology of the previous century but also presages the women's movement to come when late twentieth-century feminists would fight for equal not special representation.

Chapter 5

The Rhetoric of Marietta Holley and Alice Duer Miller

I

Humor theorist Alvin Kernan claims that while the personality of the satirist has some control over the type of satire created, it is the time that dictates the type of satirist.

Changes in satirists seem to come about in conjunction with major shifts in thought, and perhaps the best way of describing this process is to say that the satirist is always an amalgamation of the basic characteristics which develop whenever satire is written and of the ethos of a particular age. (31)

Marietta Holley's age, with the ascendancy of the True Woman and the familiarity of homely wisdom, called for a satirist who could embody those principles. Holley's rhetoric, therefore, is predicated on both Christian principles and on the homespun moderation of rural philosophy. Alice Duer Miller's age, in contrast, had begun to reject both the sacred separation of the sexes and the privilege of horse sense.

Miller's rhetoric, therefore, is based on the virtues of modern, cynical society and, if not a Christian faith, a faith in the right of progress and rationality.

Holley and Miller, as a result, built their rhetoric on very different platforms, approaching their unique rhetorical situation in widely divergent ways. Holley's rhetorical vision included men and women foolishly misguided by sentimentality, excess, or weak reasoning but always redeemable through rational thought and moral

action. Miller's rhetorical vision was populated by hypocritical and willfully ignorant men and women who would not be redeemed, only exposed. The rhetoric of suffrage humor as expressed by Holley, therefore, was one of moderation and redemption, and she embraced the Horatian notion of satire with its emphasis on temperance and social correction. The rhetoric of suffrage humor as practiced by Miller utilized both aggression and exposure, so her approach adopted the Juvenalian ideal of satire as she was less concerned with the cure than the symptoms.

II

Holley's emphasis on moderation, what Samantha would call "megumness," is one of the tenets of Horatian satire: the belief that most people are foolish rather than purposefully hypocritical. In her satire, therefore, the laughter was not always malicious, and it served a purpose beyond the expression of hostility. Her rhetorical vision, in fact, views both men and women as foolishly misguided, whether by outside influences or by personal excesses, but her vision also contains the ultimate hope that both can be redeemed by common sense. Samantha favors good men and women, heaping praise on displays of modesty and advocating her own idea of "megumness."

For example, through Samantha, Holley criticizes immoderate and unnecessarily polarizing views of men and women, advocating a more moderate and balanced view. In response to the bitter "Wimmen's Righter" and her tirade about "tyrant man," Samantha argues, "Men haint the worst critters in the world, they are as

generous and charitable agin, as wimmen are, as a general thing... There are mean men in the world as well as good ones” (*My Opinions* 343). Samantha may disagree with her husband on many things, particularly his propensity for shady schemes and irrational rants, but she always treats him with loving respect, insisting that “for all his back slidin’s [he] is oncommon dear to me” (*Josiah Allen’s Wife* 192).

Samantha’s temperance, in this way, serves as a counterpoint to her opposition’s intemperance and also paves the way for redemption.

To bolster her case for suffrage, Holley utilizes Christian imagery and metaphors as a way to ground her heroine in acceptable belief. Samantha, for example, argues against the immodesty of female enfranchisement by claiming that a woman would vote modestly and morally, “goin’ with a thick veil over her face, and a brass mounted parasol, once a year, and gently and quietly dropping a vote for a Christian president, or a religious and noble minded pathmaster” (*My Opinions* 28). Because women are naturally pious and innately feminine, Samantha insists, “men and women votin’ side by side, would no more alter their natural dispositions than singin’ one of Watts’es hymns together would. One will sing bass, and the other air, so long as the world stands” (*My Opinions* 239). For Samantha, her Christian reasoning of right and wrong ensures that her political activity would be guided by her deep faith, and her rightful place will be kept intact by her pious adherence to the word of God.

Holley uses Christian metaphors to argue her case knowing, of course, that Samantha’s piety and biblical reverence would mollify her detractors who believed

that suffrage and true Christian feeling were incompatible. When she visits the national headquarters of the suffrage movement, everyone she encounters there, with the notable exception of the notorious Victoria Woodhull, is described in glowing, spiritual terms. She calls one suffragist “God’s own anointed” (*My Opinions* 315) and another an angel from heaven (*My Opinions* 316). She saves her most effusive Christian metaphors for Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who, as Samantha claims, is

“an earnest noble woman, who had asked God what He wanted her to do, and then hadn’t shirked out of doin’ it... She was givin’ her life for others, and nobody ever did this since the days of Jesus, but what somethin’ of his peace is wrote down on thier forwards” (*My Opinions* 313-4).

Samantha bestows upon Stanton, one of the most famous suffragists of the time, near-sainthood, painting her as a Christian martyr giving her life and soul to the movement. Holley is very careful to depict Stanton’s work as a noble Christian sacrifice, not a self-serving endeavor, and even more pointedly as God’s plan for women. In Holley’s hands, the suffrage leadership is not only admirable, they are blessed by God.

As in all Horatian satires, Holley goal isn’t only to target the irrational, she also presents an alternative way of being, what scholar Ronald Paulson calls, “a practicable code of conduct” (29). Holley is interested in the cure, so she uses her satires as a social corrective, offering up not only an example of the errors of irrationality but an overt model of acceptable behavior. The idea of social correction

is completely consistent with Samantha's Christian ideal of redemption, as she believes in both common sense and upright moral action.

During one of her many disagreements with her beloved husband Josiah on the subject of woman's rights, Samantha presents a portrait of men who support suffrage, proposing an appealing example of proper conduct:

I can tell a man that is for wimmin's rights as fur as I can see 'em. There is a free, easy swing to thier walk – a noble look to thier faces – thier big hearts and soles love liberty and justice, and bein' free themselves they want everybody else to be free. These men haint jealous of a woman's influence – haint afraid that she won't pay him proper respect if she haint obleeged to – and they needn't be afraid, for these are the very men that wimmin look up to, and worship, – and always will. A good, noble, true man is the best job old nature ever turned off her hands, or ever will..."

(My Opinions 85-86)

In a sense, the very presence of Josiah and his selfish, ill-informed opposition to suffrage can serve as a deterrent by inference, modeling an example of how not to act. Holley, however, included overt examples of admirable males, inviting her readers not only to congratulate themselves for not behaving as Josiah but also to align themselves with the admirable behavior.

It would be easy to assume that Samantha, too, merely serves as the model of acceptable suffragism, able to bridge the gap between True Womanhood and political

activism. Holley, however, in the mode of Horatian satire, uses Samantha in the same way that Horace used his persona: as a figure central to the satire (Paulson 29).

Samantha, by her participation in the action, elicits her opposition's feelings toward suffrage and, by engaging them in debate, exposes their irrationality and double standards, such as when she and Betsey Bobbett argue over woman's rightful "spear." Horace's satire often used dialogues to draw out the folly being targeted, and Holley echoes this with the character of Samantha. While she is prone to "episodding" or sermonizing on her favored topics of social justice, Samantha is also used by Holley as a *naïf*, the better to draw out the unconscious hypocrisies inherent in her opposition

In one chapter, Samantha and Josiah are on their way to town so that she can buy material from the general store to make Josiah's shirts. Josiah remarks offhandedly that, because the town hall is under construction, the poll has been set up in the store so she can do her shopping while he casts his vote. Samantha is shocked by this proposal, having been warned by him time and time again that the poll is too brutal a place for women.

"Wouldn't be revoltin' to the finer feelin's of your sole, to see a tender woman, your companion, a crowdin' and elboin' her way amongst the rude throng of men surroundin' the pole; to have her hear the immodest and almost dangerous language, the oaths and swearin'; to see her a plungin' down in the vortex of political warfare, and the arena of corruption?" Says I, "How is the shrinking modesty and delicacy of my sect a goin' to stand firm a jostlin' its way amongst the

rude masses, and you there to see it?” Says I, Aint it a goin’ to be awful revoltin’ to you, Josiah Allen?”

“Oh no!” says he in calm gentle axents, “not if you was a goin’ for shirt buttons...”

And so I kep’ s’posen things till we got clear to the store door and Josiah went to help me out; and then thinkin’ what my companion had warned me about so many times – about how dangerous and awful it was for wimmin to go near the pole – I says to him, in middlin’ quiet tones:

“Josiah, I guess I’ll set in the buggy till you hitch the old mare, and then you can go in with me, so’s to kinder keep between me and the pole...”

“Oh shaw! Samantha; what fools wimmen can be, when they set out to! Who do you s’pose is a goin’ to hurt you? Do you s’pose Elder Minkley is a goin’ to burgle you, or old Bobbet asalt and batter you? There haint a man there but what you have been to meetin’ with. You wasn’t afraid last Sunday was you? Go in and get your buttons and things, so’s to be ready by the time I am for *once*, – wimmen are always so slow.”

I didn’t argue with him, I only said in cold tones: “I wanted to be on the safe side, Josiah.” (*Josiah Allen’s Wife* 145-148)

The irony of this scene lies in the fact that Josiah's previous protestations about the terrible dangers of the poll are meaningless in the face of his need for shirt buttons. Samantha, by repeating back to him all of his dire warnings, reveals his hypocrisy because she takes him seriously.

The use of contrast between the opposition's pretense and their reality is a favored technique of Holley, and she often uses Samantha to make clear the distance between what people say and what they do. Significantly, though, Holley must walk a fine line because, as discussed in the previous chapter, female satirists who indulge in criticism and derision violate the notion of proper female submissiveness. Samantha, therefore, can draw out her opponent's contradictory views, but, as in the example above, she cannot mock or belittle them when they expose themselves. Holley, instead, allows the reader to make the connection and indulge in the criticism.

Incongruity abounds in the work of Holley, and she invariably resorts to the contrast between the ideal and the real to make her point. During Samantha's visit to the store where the election is being held, she encounters the wife of the editor of the local paper. At the order of the editor, his wife has come to the store to purchase cigars in honor of the momentous article he is writing, "The Imprudence, Impurity, and Impiety of Woman's Appearance at the Pole" (*Josiah Allen's Wife* 153). In another example, Samantha attends the speech of an anti-suffragist who declares his intention of protecting women not only from the ballot but from even a summer's breeze lest it blow too hard on their delicate frame. Afterward, Samantha meets the speaker's wife who has missed his speech because she couldn't get her farm chores

done in time to walk the three miles into town (*My Opinions* 167-9). Many, many of Holley's characters recite strong, emotionally evocative speeches about their devotion to delicate, sainted woman and their instinctive urge to protect her from the perils of public life, only to be undone when an actual woman appears and is rudely treated by this same speaker's thoughtless hypocrisy.

Another example of Holley's use of contrast is where she reveals the ironic distance between the ideal and the real by pretending not to understand the symbolic connotation of the opposition's speech. For example, when Betsey Bobbett begins to rhapsodize on the glorious duty of women to be a figurative "poultice to the noble, manly breast," Samantha argues that she has no time to be a poultice, preoccupied as she is by the menial chores that are her wifely duty (*My Opinions* 62). When Victoria Woodhull defends her unorthodox lifestyle as necessary for the health of her soul, Samantha counters with a homely medical remedy (*My Opinions* 327).

Samantha's misunderstandings are purposeful as Holley uses her to undercut nonsensical, elevated ideals. Samantha deflates the pretensions of her opposition not only through her commonsensical reasoning but also through her absolute inability to understand or respond to their poetical flights of fancy. The audience may laugh at her simple-minded and literal speech, but her straight-forward, plain-spoken manner never fails to undo the posturing of the speaker. If, as satire theorist Matthew Hodgart claims, the aim of satire is to reduce everything to simple terms so as to appeal to the common sense of the audience, then Holley's satire, which consistently

undercuts the elevated ideals of the targets, is a clear example of the unsophisticated triumphing over the grandiose (126).

One of the most telling things about Holley's satire is how she carefully uses language to construct a heroine with the proper amount of foolishness and submissiveness while at the same time advocating a decidedly unpopular reform. She does this in the Horatian strain by utilizing vernacular speech which, on the one hand, confirms Samantha's lack of education but, on the other hand, displays her considerable intellectual power. As with Holley's works, many scholars have commented on Horace's use of plain language and everyday imagery. Satire theorist Howard Weinbrot calls Horace's style plain but sprightly (319), and others contend that despite the complex implications underlying Horace's choices, his vocabulary runs to the colloquial, even the vulgar in his early works. Holley's Samantha shares Horace's same informality, a requirement not only of the style of the Literary Comedians but also of her position in society. Compelled by the strictures on women's behavior to use an uneducated, laughable female narrator, Holley purposefully uses misspellings and mispronunciations not just for humorous relief but for purposeful, albeit blunted criticism.

In many cases, Samantha's rustic vocabulary is used not as a joke on herself but as pointed commentary on others. Betsey Bobbet, as the self-appointed poetess of Jonesville, prides herself on proper elocution and complex grammatical structure, but Samantha's characteristically blunt assessment of Betsey's speech diminishes Betsey's pretensions to gentility.

She thinks she talks dreadful polite and proper, she says, “I was cameing” instead of “I was coming,” and “I have saw” instead of “I have seen,” and “papah” for paper, and “deah” for dear. I don’t know much about grammar, but common sense goes a long ways. (*My Opinions* 29)

Samantha’s protest that she may not be book learned is belied by her grasp of correct grammatical structure. In clear contrast, Samantha is both smart and commonsensical, while Betsey, the representative anti-suffragist, is neither.

For Samantha to function as a rustic sage, she cannot indulge in literary allusions, beyond references to the Bible, nor can she use foreign or archaic words to add weight to her judgments. Instead, Holley puts an ostentatious vocabulary in the mouths of Samantha’s opposition, using classical language references to show the distance between the pretentious language of the speaker and the homely diction of Holley. During an anti-suffrage lecture, one orator grandly says, “I deny her the right *in tato toto*.” Samantha replies, “That was Latin, and I s’pose he thought it could scare me, but it didn’t a mite; for I don’t s’pose he knew what it meant no more’n I did,” (*Josiah Allen’s Wife* 41). Not only does the anti-suffrage speaker mispronounce the foreign phrase, he does so during a speech on the mental inferiority of women. By using the speaker’s affectation against him, Holley privileges Samantha’s plain-spoken language. His weak command of complex language may reflect a weak understanding of complex issues, but Samantha’s homely diction coupled with her homely wisdom allows her to see clearly.

Samantha's malapropisms, another example of Holley's linguistic strategy, are more than merely comic relief. Just as Horace's colloquialism masked a much deeper complexity, Holley's use of the vernacular connects her with the audience's reverence of the old-fashioned values dialect humor often articulated. In her hands, as Holley scholar Jane Curry points out, the conventions of informal dialect are transformed (xviii), and the traditional is pressed into serving the progressive. Even further, Samantha's malapropisms move beyond funny to what Curry calls an "elucidation of social criticism" (xviii).

Samantha, in other words, may misspell and mispronounce words such as "spear" for "sphere" and "sect" for "sex," but Holley means more than that. Men and women are not just a different sex, they belong to different sects. They are separated by different doctrines and traditions, not merely biology. Even further, the use of the word "sect," with its negative connotations of deviant or heretical "otherness," indicates a much larger chasm between the sexes than merely a difference in anatomy. Samantha's malapropisms, in this way, have much more import than mere comic diversions; they function as social commentary on the issue with women clearly functioning as the other "sect." When Samantha mistakes "adulteration" for "adultery," she evokes the image of not only the breaking of the sacred bond but the pollution of it with an impurity. According to Blair, Samantha's malapropisms are indicative of her foolishness as she mistakenly uses one word that sounds like another but makes less sense (*Horse Sense* 231). Samantha's errors, however, don't always make less sense; sometimes they make different or deeper sense.

Her colloquial misunderstandings even become larger in the books as Samantha attempts to analyze and expand them, making them into metaphors. Samantha misspells “poll” as “pole” and, to prove a point, extends that word out into a revelatory comparison. When Josiah argues that women are too delicate for the poll, Samantha argues:

“There is one pole you are willin’ enough I should go to, Josiah Allen, . . . and that is the hop pole.” (Josiah has sot out a new hop yard, and he proudly brags to the neighbors that I am the fastest picker in the yard.) “You are willin’ enough I should handle them poles!” . . .

“There is another pole you are willin’ enough for me to handle, and that is our cistern pole. If you should spend some of that breath you waste – in pityin’ the poor wimmin that have got to vote – in buyin’ a pump, you would raise 25 cents in my estimation, Josiah Allen. You have let me pull on that old cistern pole thirteen years, and get a ten quart pail of water on to the end of it, add I guess the political pole wouldn’t draw much harder than that does.” (*My Opinions* 92-3)

This is a telling example, one that refutes Josiah and the other anti-suffragists, as Samantha compares the labors of the franchise with the labors of the farm, arguing that protestations of women’s inability to handle the “pole” are hollow.

In another example, she declines to engage in a public debate with an anti-suffrage orator, explaining to her readers that she has no skill as a public speaker. In her explanation, however, she confuses “forte” with “fort.”

I let 'em fight it out, and didn't say a word, They fit, and they fit, and I sot calmly there on my seat a knitten' my Josiah's socks, and let 'em go on. I knew where I stood in my own mind; I knew I shouldn't git up and talk a word after they got through fightin'... But everybody has their particular fort, and they ort in my opinion to stick to their own forts and not try to git on to somebody else'es... But when folks leave their own lawful forts and ty to git on to somebody else'es fort, that is what makes trouble, and makes crowded forts and weak ones, and mixes things. Too many a gettin' on to a fort at one time, is what breaks it down. (*Josiah Allen's Wife* 34)

The implicit comparison here is between Samantha's refusal to engage in a public debate and her declination using images of strife and conflict. She refers to the debate as a fight and metaphorically explicates "forte" with words of aggression. It was considered unseemly, in Holley's time, for a woman to engage in a debate or any public disagreement, and Samantha's homely explication of what is essentially the wrong word supports that stricture.

Because her heroine followed the dictates of acceptable womanhood, Holley had to satirize in very careful ways; therefore, her adherence to Horatian satire reflects the constraints of her rhetorical situation. Samantha's advocacy of a Horatian "megumness" functions as a counter to those who had long accused women of intemperance and excess. Horatian satire also targets the sin rather than the sinner, and this allows Holley to target both men's and women's foibles without censure. As

long as Samantha treats her opposition, particularly her husband, with respect, Holley is able to indulge in gentle, humorous criticism. Her favored satiric techniques, in fact, come out of this constraint. Her conscious use of contrast exposes the hypocrisy and irrationality of her targets, but it ensures that the harsh, critical judgment would come from readers, not from Samantha.

III

In her satiric works, Miller takes a much more aggressive stance than Holley, aligning herself with the Juvenalian ideal of satire which tends toward criticism rather than humor (Feinberg 4). Miller paints a much harsher view of the world, and, instead of using gentle admonishment to bring her targets back to acceptable behavior, she uses much rougher language to expose them and shame them back to compliance. Miller's satire seeks no balance between the bad behavior but good intentions of its targets, unlike Holley's, and makes no excuses for its subject's failings. Holley's moderate stance can evoke both laughter and sympathy, but Miller's satire evokes only contempt and derisive laughter.

Juvenalian satires do not seek to cure their targets but rather punish them, offering only the vaguest notion of proper conduct and choosing exposure over redemption. To make the punishment even more severe, Juvenalian satirists often directly attack their targets either by naming them or by leaving such obvious clues that the reader is inevitably lead to the target. In "A Song of Senators," for example,

Miller gleefully names her opponents, using rhyme to fix their names in the minds of the public:

Fifteen Senators, fond of leisure,
 May not come back at election time.
 They voted “no” on the suffrage measure,
 And we set their names to a little rhyme:
 Oliver, Page, DuPont and Johnson,
 Bryan, of Florida; Reed, Martine,
 Catron, Lodge, McLean, Lee, Swanson,
 Williams, McCumber and Pomerene.⁴⁰

Miller was a strong proponent not only of naming names but also of quoting them word for word. One of her favorite targets was congressmen, and she often reprinted excerpts from their anti-suffrage speeches, the better to emphasize the contrast between their lofty ideals and their hypocritical, sometimes slightly mad utterances.

In her poem, “Lines for Mr. Bowdle of Ohio,” Miller mocks a congressman’s outburst during an anti-suffrage speech and points out the irony of his stance.

(“The women of this smart capital are beautiful. Their beauty is disturbing to business; their feet are beautiful, their ankles are beautiful, but here I must pause.” – Press report of Mr. Bowdle’s anti-suffrage speech in Congress.)

You, who despise the so-called fairer sex,

⁴⁰ 6 August 1916

Be brave. There really isn't any reason
 You should not, if you wish, oppose and vex
 And scold us in, and often out, of season;
 But don't regard it as your bounden duty
 To open with a tribute to our beauty.
 Say, if you like, that women have no sense,
 No self-control, no power of concentration.
 Say that hysterics is our one defence,
 Our virtue but an absence of temptation;
 These I can bear, but oh, I own it rankles,
 To hear you maundering on about our ankles...⁴¹

Out of context, his remarks seem incredibly ill-conceived and inappropriate. With just that short quote, Miller manages to present an esteemed member of the legislature as both slightly besotted with women and unable to control himself in public.

Miller's response to him includes a recitation of all the shortcomings commonly attributed to women that have kept them from enfranchisement: a lack of self-control, a tendency toward hysteria, etc. Yet it is the honorable Mr. Bowdle who has exposed himself with his oratory on the beauty of women's ankles. Using the contrast between his words and his ideals, Miller both exposes him and manages to undo the criticism so often leveled at women. In this case, the man has lost his self-control and that gives lie to all his words against suffrage.

⁴¹ 24 January 1915

One of her most famous and well-lauded poems is “To *The Times* Editorials.” In this extended example of invective, Miller criticizes the *New York Times* intractable stance against suffrage and seeks to discredit them with charges of obsolescence and decline.

Lovely Antiques, breathing in every line
 The perfume of an age long passed away,
 Wafting us back to 1829,
 Museum pieces of a by-gone day,
 You should not languish in the public press
 Where modern thought might reach and do you harm,
 And vulgar youth insult your hoariness,
 Missing the flavor of your old world charm;
 You should be locked, where rust cannot corrode
 In some old rosewood cabinet, dimmed by age,
 With silver-lustre, tortoise shell and Spode;
 And all would cry, who read your yellowing page:
 “Yes, that’s the sort of thing that men believed
 Before the First Reform Bill was conceived!” (*Are Women People?*
 40)

Miller accuses the venerable *Times* of being out of touch with modern life, insisting that it belongs in a cabinet alongside the silver-lustre and the Spode. The incongruity

of listing the *Times* alongside knick knacks and the good china renders the editorial page obsolete with no real purpose besides ornamentation or novelty.

No longer is the *Times* a vital, modern daily; now it is nothing more than a quaint relic of years gone by, something the previous generation might have prized. Through her use of words like “antique” and “museum pieces,” Miller undoes the power of its reputation, not by accusing it of falsehood or discrimination but by declaring it old fashioned and quaint. Hers is a very powerful attack because had she accused the *Times* of a serious breach of public trust or of deliberate misrepresentation, the paper could have answered her charge and, indeed, would have been compelled to fight back. What she attacks, however, is the paper’s dignity, tweaking its nose and relegating it to irrelevancy.

Along with invective, another of Miller’s favored techniques is parody, and, in one case, she employs the playful distortion of another’s literary work to great effect, using it as a regular feature of her column. One of the books offered for sale by anti-suffrage advocates was Grace Duffield Goodwin’s *Anti-Suffrage: Ten Good Reasons* (1913), an extended defense of the anti-suffrage movement and a complex, detailed exploration of ten objections to female enfranchisement, including her arguments that most women do not want the vote, voting would cause women to abandon their rightful place and, in the passage below, voting is not a natural right:

In considering this question fairly, we must understand that there is no such thing as a “natural right” to the ballot. Natural rights are rights to life, property, etc.; the ballot is a man-devised instrument for the

peaceful expression of the popular will in government. It is conferred as a serious responsibility upon men who have fulfilled certain well-known conditions. Women are *exempt* from the exercise of the political responsibility in view of the duties toward home and family which they are performing for the benefit of the state. *The ballot is not a right denied; it is a burden removed* [sic]. (18)

Inspired by Goodwin's book, anti-suffrage organizations summarized her arguments, added others, and published them in pamphlet form as campaign literature for the remonstrants (Chapman 72). These pamphlets were widespread, and some of their most frequently used arguments were contradictory or illogical.

By 1914, however, the concept of a quick reference list of anti-suffrage reasons had become popular enough that Miller was able to parody it in her own column under the heading "Our Own Twelve Anti-Suffrage Reasons."

1. Because no woman will leave her domestic duties to vote.
2. Because no woman who may vote will attend to her domestic duties.
3. Because it will make dissension between husband and wife.
4. Because every woman will vote as her husband tells her to.
5. Because bad women will corrupt politics.
6. Because bad politics will corrupt women.
7. Because women have no power of organization.
8. Because women will form a solid party and outvote men.

9. Because men and women are so different that they must stick to different duties.
10. Because men and women are so alike that men, with one vote each, can represent their own views and ours too.
11. Because women cannot use force.
12. Because the militants did use force.⁴²

Her use of actual anti-suffrage arguments enables Miller to use the contrast and inconsistency of them to highlight the weakness and circular reasoning of anti-suffragists. Doing so in a format already familiar to the audience because of the ubiquity of anti-suffrage pamphlets helps undo the power of the original because it deconstructs the sense of the original. Her parody invites the audience to recall the remonstrants' pink pamphlets and, with the reflected light of ridicule, causes the audience to rethink its serious consideration of the original.

Miller followed this parody with several others. In "Why We Oppose Votes for Men," Miller offers these reasons:

1. Because man's place is in the armory.
2. Because no really manly man wants to settle any question otherwise than by fighting about it.
3. Because if men should adopt peaceable methods women will no longer look up to them.

⁴² 29 March 1914

4. Because men will lose their charm if they step out of their natural sphere and interest themselves in other matters than feats of arms, uniforms, and drums.
5. Because men are too emotional to vote. Their conduct at baseball games and political conventions shows this, while their innate tendency to appeal to force renders them particularly unfit for the task of government.⁴³

Exaggerating the stereotypical qualities of men for effect, Miller's parody accuses the original work as suffering from the same falsehood – exaggerating the stereotypical qualities of women for effect. Miller also attempts to imitate closely the original form of the arguments as much as possible, making it seem as if she is merely substituting the word “man” for “woman” and thereby proving the arbitrary nature of the argument.

Miller offered many more parodies on this same theme such as why she was opposed to votes for babies,⁴⁴ National Guardsman,⁴⁵ and actors.⁴⁶ She went even further with her parody offering facetious lists to explain why she opposed women traveling by train – “Because a woman's place is the home, not the train,”⁴⁷ – and why she opposed pockets for women – “Because pockets are not a natural right.”⁴⁸

⁴³ 10 May 1914

⁴⁴ 7 March 1915

⁴⁵ 13 September 1916

⁴⁶ 9 July 1916

⁴⁷ 7 June 1914

⁴⁸ 3 May 1914

Miller's aggressive parody of the lists offered in anti-suffrage pamphlets, and by extension Goodwin's work, is significant because Miller manages to defuse their impact. Ignoring the complex, structured arguments Goodwin presents, which the remonstrants themselves did, ironically enough, when they condensed her work for their own purpose, Miller reduces the entire scholarly work down to a list of pithy reasons. Through the use of repetition and contradiction, Miller makes the arguments seem arbitrary and nonsensical. To the reader, it seems as if any combination of words could be inserted into the list, rendering it essentially meaningless.

Miller, like Holley, used language to construct a very specific persona, but, unlike Holley, Miller's goal was not conciliation but resentment. Her aggressive stance, verging on rancor, was permissible not only because modern women were claiming much more public roles and voices but also because her anger echoed Juvenal's own uncompromising tone.

Juvenal's satire has been called not only harsh, but bitter and savage; yet, as Juvenalian scholars have pointed out, his harshness and cruel words have generally been accepted as a just response to rampant vice (Weinbrot 325). In fact, Juvenal's vulgar, bitter criticisms could be called an example of extreme virtue, coming as they do from his righteous fury. Miller, too, indulges in harsh criticism and her tone often crosses the line from righteous indignation to outright misandry. After one particularly difficult suffrage defeat in New York, her home state, Miller allows her anger to show, "Not easy, oh, not easy to forgive / The scorn, the lie, the ridicule, the

spite...”⁴⁹ She goes on in the same column to actually warn men to guard their lives lest they disappear. Normally such behavior from a woman might have been universally reviled, but, like Juvenal, Miller’s anger is the anger of the just, “so transported by fury” that she has no space for conciliation (Weinbrot 325).

With the title of her column, ever combative, Miller proposes a battle over synecdoche, first with President Woodrow Wilson and eventually with anyone who implies an inclusivity they don’t really intend. Miller’s question, “Are Women People?” is inspired by a famous speech by Wilson in which he claims to want to bring the government back to the people. In reprinting part of his speech, however, Miller makes clear who is included in his definition of people:

“I tell you the men I am interested in are the men who, under the conditions we have had, never got their voices heard...who went silently and patiently to their work every day, carrying the burden of the world. That is what I mean when I say: Bring the government back to the people.”⁵⁰

At first glance, Wilson’s penultimate statement seems to embrace the entire populace, but he sets a definite limit in the first line when he specifically designates “men” as his chosen people. Miller’s title question, then, forces his synecdoche out in the open: he is using the whole to represent a part. Other legislators and public figures

⁴⁹ 7 November 1915

⁵⁰ 1 February 1914

are caught in this too as Miller quotes the same synecdoche of former president Taft,⁵¹ Daniel Webster,⁵² and the editors of the New York Times,⁵³ among others.

Miller uses this particular technique to point out the insincerity of their grand statements. They use the word “people” to imply an expansiveness, an inclusivity founded in universal democracy, but this is empty rhetoric if they cannot answer Miller’s title in the affirmative. Miller’s poem, “Introduction,” makes this hypocrisy apparent:

Father, what is a Legislature?

A representative body elected by the people of the state.

Are women people?

No, my son, criminals, lunatics and women are not people.

Do legislators legislate for nothing?

Oh, no; they are paid a salary.

By whom?

By the people.

Are women people?

Of course, my son, just as much as men are.⁵⁴

Miller’s common use of hyperbolic language is probably the most Juvenalian aspect of her satire as she uses rhetorical exaggeration to heap scorn on her victims, amplifying their failures of reason and sense. Her poem, “A Consistent Mother to her

⁵¹ 1 February 1914

⁵² 4 July 1915

⁵³ 10 October 1915

⁵⁴ 2 August 1914

Son,” is a good example of this. In response to the anti-suffrage warnings about the dangerous nature of the polls, Miller argues that if women are truly dedicated to the anti-suffrage cause, they will protect their sons from the poll as well.

You must not go to the polls, Willie,
 Never go to the polls,
 They're dark and dreadful places
 Where many lose their souls...
 I've guarded you always, Willie,
 Body and soul from harm,
 I'll guard your faith and honor,
 Your innocence and charm
 From the polls and their evil spirits,
 Politics, rum, and pelf;
 Do you think I'd send my only son
 Where I would not go myself?⁵⁵

Taking common anti-suffrage arguments and extending them to the furthest reaches of reason, Miller uses hyperbole to undo the opposition's rhetoric.

With hyperbole, Miller can also take an exact, innocuous quote from her opposition and exaggerate it to the point where it loses both its innocuousness and its sense. During a suffrage hearing in Congress, Chairman Webb dismissed suffrage

⁵⁵ 21 March 1915

lobbyists, saying “Why do you come here and bother us?” Miller’s response is particularly scornful.

Girls, girls, the worst has happened

Our cause it at its ebb.

How could you go and do it!

You’ve bothered Mr. Webb!

You came and asked for freedom,

(As law does not forbid)

Not thinking it might bother him,

And yet, it seems, it did...

Send word to far Australia

And let New Zealand know,

And Oregon and Sweden,

Finland and Idaho;

Make all the nations grasp it,

From Sitka to El Teb.

We never mention suffrage now.

It bothers Mr. Webb!⁵⁶

Miller’s hyperbolic language exaggerates his peevish complaint, making it seem much more significant. She furthers this amplification by insisting that worldwide suffrage movements must be halted for the comfort of Chairman Webb. No longer is

⁵⁶ 26 December 1915

he an annoyed bureaucrat; he is now a selfish, self-aggrandizing despot who wants the entire world ordered to his comfort. His peevish words are to resound worldwide, and the larger Miller makes the issue, the smaller the chairman seems. Hyperbole works by exaggerating the target to make it seem smaller. Amplifying the victim's transgressions reduces him in stature because of the reflected light of ridicule – making heroic men seem self-important and righteously angry men seem petty and bickering – thereby reducing the stature by increasing the vice.

Miller's techniques are grounded in what scholar Mary Chapman calls Miller's dominant rhetorical tactics: quotation and ventriloquism (61). Miller uses the actual words of anti-suffragists and she adopts their voices in articulating their positions, the better to ridicule and distort those utterances. Exact quotation offers her the opportunity to deconstruct the sense of the original by placing it in a context where it seems ridiculous, such as Mr. Webb's petulant statement. Ventriloquism, where she literally speaks as an anti-suffragist, such as in her parodies of their lists, offers her the opportunity to frame the argument any way she wishes, sabotaging it by its own authority (Chapman 73).

According to Chapman, the use of quotation and ventriloquism in suffrage literature was a common technique, arising as it did out of a sense of the voicelessness of historical femininity (63). Women, traditionally, without access to the lectern, the pulpit, or the press, were spoken of and spoken for by men. Even further, women's lack of access to the poll resulted in a literal ventriloquism as men voted on behalf of the women in their lives. Suffrage literature, therefore, often

utilized ventriloquism as a way to reverse this “by rewriting patriarchal statements that deliberately or unconsciously exclude[d] them” (Chapman 64) or even misrepresented or distorted them.

For Miller, patriarchal ventriloquism was untenable and patronizing. In her poem, “The Revolt of Mother,” she disparages the common technique of congressmen to begin their anti-suffrage speeches with the phrase “Every true woman feels—”

...I a little bit rebel
 At finding he knows my job as well.
 At least he’s always ready to expound it
 Especially in legislative hall,
 The joys, the cares, the halos that surround it,
 “How good wives feel” – he knows that best of all.
 In fact his thesis is that no one can
 Know what is womanly except a man.
 I am old-fashioned, and I am content
 When he explains the world of art and science
 And government – to him divinely sent –
 I drink it in with ladylike compliance.
 But I cannot listen – no I’m only human –
 While he instructs me on how to be a woman.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ 7 March 1915

In rejecting the “congressional” assumption that these legislators know women well enough to speak for them, Miller also implicitly rejects the assumption that the current political ventriloquism can stand for the voice of women.

As a way to combat the notion of a single gender representing the whole, Miller uses the rhetorical techniques of quoting and ventriloquism to turn the remonstrants’ words against them and to emphasize the limitations of single-sex suffrage. Through invective, she makes them seem irrelevant; through parody, she makes them foolish; through hyperbole she makes them irrational. In almost every case, however, she turns the remonstrants’ words against themselves. The fight over enfranchisement was, at its heart, a fight over the right of a public voice, of “who can speak, for whom, and for what purpose” (Chapman 60). Miller, therefore, in the fight over her right to have a public voice, adopted the voice of a number of anti-suffragists, mercilessly turning their words against themselves.

In the Juvenalian spirit, Miller attacks her targets with vigor and liberally uses rhetorical devices such as the harsh language of invective and the heaping scorn of hyperbole to skewer them. She does not seek to provide an overt code of conduct; she does not write to a constructive purpose. She simply seeks to expose the hypocritical, not for their edification but for their humiliation. Miller’s rhetorical vision, unlike Holley’s contains purposefully selfish and ignorant men and women, and she does not advocate adherence to suffrage as a cure or a social corrective. She merely counts it as a wrong that must be righted.

In her satire, Holley is concerned with reform, and she holds up examples of enlightened men and women as models to emulate. She believes in the power of reason and moderation to cure people of foolishness and excess. Miller, however, does not offer suffrage as the cure for anything. In the Juvenalian strain, Miller uses her satire to expose and to force people to change their behavior not because they see a better way of being but because they want to avoid her lash. There are no exemplars in Miller's work, only people who expose themselves foolishly for want of reason. While Holley advocates moderation by example, Miller advocates reason only by inference: the reader can infer what acceptable behavior is by eschewing the behavior demonstrated in her column.

Holley's focus on domestic humor and her use of Samantha's personal life as both an indictment of society's strictures and as a model of happy housewifery stands in sharp contrast to Miller's focus on the public life of her targets and her refusal to mine her own domestic life for material. Both humorists, however, exemplify Burke's notion of historical documents functioning as strategic, stylized answers to their particular rhetorical situations. Samantha, as an example of True Womanhood, engages previous arguments about the proper place for women and directs what is to come by modeling a woman who successfully embodies the domestic and the political. Miller's aggressive engagement of her opposition and erudite, urbane sensibilities function within the rhetorical boundaries of the conflict, building consensus through derisive laughter. Rather than modeling an acceptable version of womanhood, Miller assumes a position of superiority based on her literate, powerful

reasoning, a stance that renders gender irrelevant and gender distinctions inconsequential.

The years of the fight over suffrage, 1848-1920, were years of great upheaval in United States, a time of questioning and re-evaluating long-held assumptions and cherished notions of what it meant to be a woman. Certainly the suffrage question forced many people to reconsider or publicly defend their stance against enfranchisement, and there was a profound shift in attitudes toward gender distinctions as a whole and the most proper, reasonable construction of womanhood. Therefore, the evolution of the use of humor by pro-suffragists and the rhetorical strategies they employed reflects the progress of twentieth-century notions of womanhood. Suffrage humor, as it moved from ineffectual pleas for simple justice to popular domestic arguments to aggressive, mocking satire illustrates the much larger battle over woman's proper place in society.

Early suffragists worked hard to present coherent, conservative arguments in favor of the Cause but were completely hampered by the public perception of themselves as radicals. Constrained by the requirements of submissiveness and piety, early suffragists crafted their presentation of suffrage to sound like common sense and a natural extension of their current lives, not a radical reordering. To counter the anti-suffragists' insistence that enfranchisement would fundamentally destroy family life, suffragists had to paint suffrage as a minor, commonsensical addition to women's lives and, therefore, no threat to the home. Yet, they also had to argue that,

even as a minor addition to women's duties, it was a vitally important step toward parity. Instead of arguing against what was widely believed to be the natural order of things, suffrage humorists argued in favor of the natural rights of women, equal in humanity and, therefore, deserving of all the same human rights that men enjoyed.

As detailed earlier, the years after the Civil War brought many changes in women's lives as they began to function outside the home as reformers, educators, and breadwinners. Pro-suffrage humorists, seizing the opportunity, began to bridge the ideals of suffrage and the causes of the middle-class female reformers, presenting heroic images of working women and nurturing images of mothers using their vote to protect and purify. Pro-suffrage humorists, in this way, took the force of anti-suffrage rhetoric away from the remonstrants by agreeing with their basic premise: women alone have the power to engage moral judgment and fight evil influences. Actively seeking to build consensus with their audience, they recast the dominant suffrage stereotype with praiseworthy women embodying the American ideals of morality, patriotism, and social justice. Such an approach to the suffrage question built a clear bridge between the socially active woman of the middle class who had already accepted the premise of her inherent goodness and moral authority and the concept of enfranchisement with the power to enact legislative support to her deserving causes.

Marietta Holley's *My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet's* actually represents one of the earliest examples of the argument of expediency which became so prevalent after the turn of the century. Samantha Allen, as a devoted wife and mother, does not wish to be liberated from her domestic life, but she goes to great lengths to show that

suffrage and domesticity are not mutually exclusive, bringing her knitting to a town hall meeting on suffrage and refusing to consider the arguments of a pro-suffrage speaker who disparages her husband. With her conservative Christianity and pride in her domestic role, Samantha can function as an example of acceptable suffragism – domestically inclined but socially engaged.

As more and more women were enfranchised across the United States, suffrage advocates turned their attention to the notion of political expediency, arguing that women are not only angels of mercy, they are also a powerful voting block. In pro-suffrage humor, the rhetoric of political expedience revealed itself in mocking, unapologetic caricatures of anti-suffragists and strong statements of political power and advancements of the modern woman. Alice Duer Miller, widely considered the poet laureate of the latter part of the suffrage movement (Kraditor 238), is probably the best example of the humorous use of political expediency, and her use of the gainfully employed, politically active female is a calculated rejection of the stereotype of the domestically-minded woman.

Miller rejects the domestic sphere as the basis for women's lives, arguing instead for a conception of womanhood that encompasses not social justice but intellectual pursuits and political power. Female voters, she insists, can legislate more than just morality because they are people, not saints. Many times in her columns, Miller mentions the growing number of women with the vote, always highlighting the actual number of voters and naming the legislation these same voters

have passed or defeated. Such a blatant numbering serves as a reminder to everyone about the growing influence of women voters.

In the end, the battle over the definition of acceptable womanhood came down to whose definition was considered not only the most accurate but the most commonsensical. Suffragists, struggling from the beginning of their movement to wrest away their notion of an enfranchised woman from those who would classify her with all the other radical fringe elements, emphasized the utility of their conception of womanhood. Woman, as posed by the suffragists, could encompass all manner of ideals – mother, citizen, reformer, voter – and so they set about painting her as such. Suffragists were able to capture the anti-suffrage notion of acceptable womanhood and bring all the elements together in one shared goal – universal female enfranchisement – taking what was once the most radical idea imaginable, an idea so unthinkable that it caused an uproar at the first woman’s rights convention, and making it seem so inevitable, so mainstream that the public was convinced it was merely the necessary evolution of society and no more than a natural extension of their shared interests.

Appendix A



"The American Costume, as Represented by Punch," *The Carpet-Bag* 1851: np.



Dick Hartley, *Life* 16 November 1911: 859.



Life 13 May 1915: 840.

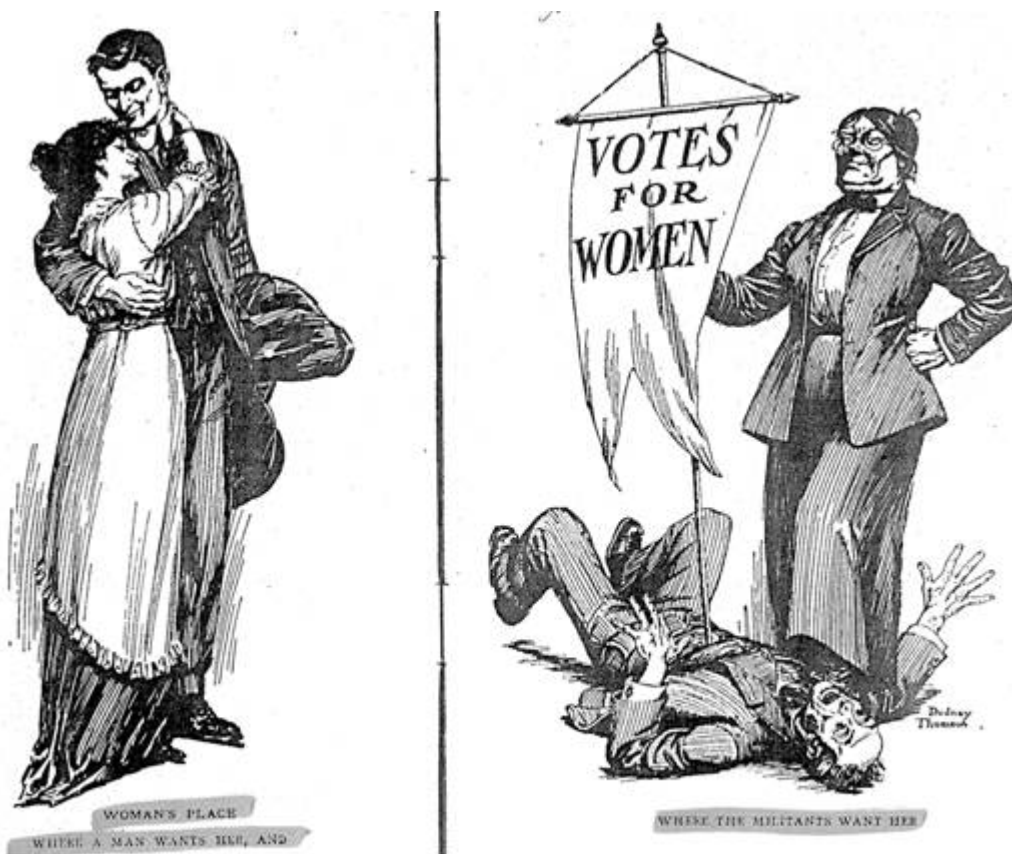


McKee, *Life* 13 May 1915: 861.



The Amazon: DON'T TALK TO ME OR I'LL—I'LL BREAK A WINDOW WITH YOU.

R.M. Brinkerhoff, *Life* 10 March 1912: 1907.



WOMAN'S PLACE
WHERE A MAN WANTS HER, AND

WHERE THE MILITANTS WANT HER

Rodney Thomson, *Life* 25 September 1913: 517.



Clara thinks it ladylike,
Merely with the fist to strike.
"Only axes" she maintains,
"Penetrate their wooden brains!"

Nelson Harding. *Ruthless Rhymes of Martial Militants.*



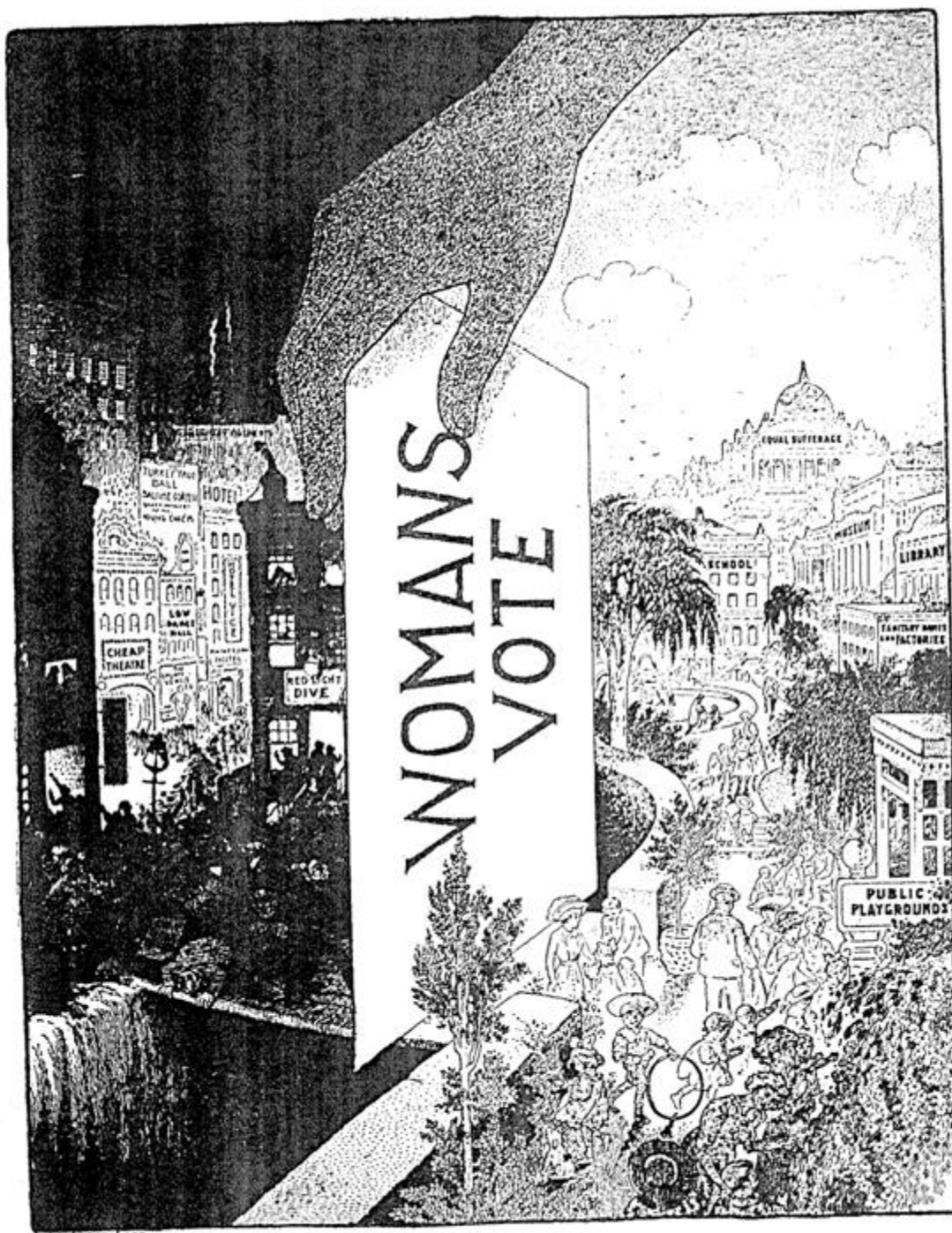
"I think," said Belle, "I did my share
By blowing up Trafalgar Square,
For hardly more than four or five
Old Fogies left the place alive!"

Nelson Harding. *Ruthless Rhymes of Martial Militants.*



Spokesman— "We Have Called to Express Our Extreme Gratchude fer the Bee-utiful Fight You are Making in Our Behalf"
Reprinted from the Saturday Evening Post. Copyright 1915 by the Curtis Publishing Company

Herbert Johnson, rpt. *The Woman Voter* May 1913: 17.



BARRED OUT

WHEN WOMAN HAS HER VOTE

Harrison Cady, *Life* 16 October 1913: 646.



Any man who loves and reveres his mother and his country should idolize, if he worship at all, the three graces Suffrage, Preparedness and Americanism.—Nell Brinkley.

Nell Brinkley, International News Service 1916.

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