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Gender and Humour: Reinventing the Genres of Laughter

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About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

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Editorial

By Annette Keck, University of Munich, Germany and Ralph J. Poole,
University of Salzburg, Austria

"To this day, you don't expect women to be funny." (Joan Rivers)

1 What happens when women laugh outright, seemingly out of control, making a spectacle of themselves? Ever since Freud claimed that it is woman being laughed at and man doing the laughing, On the tendentious joke in particular, i.e. the 'dirty' joke ("Zote"), Freud remarks: "Der tendenziöse Witz braucht im allgemeinen drei Personen, außer der, die den Witz macht, eine zweite, die zum Objekt der feindseligen oder sexuellen Aggression genommen wird, und eine dritte, an der sich die Absicht des Witzes, Lust zu erzeugen, erfüllt. [...] Durch die zotige Rede des Ersten wird das Weib vor diesem Dritten entblößt, der nun als Zuhörer – durch die mühelose Befriedigung seiner eigenen Libido – bestochen wird" (114). See, however, Michael Billig, who in discussing this passage concedes: "Freud's argument is theoretically interesting for the way that he links male sexual joking with both sexual frustration and aggressive degradation. It is also rhetorically interesting: the section contains not a single example. Freud did not want smutty talk in his book" (162). laughter has entered contested gendered territory. What, indeed, happens when Medusa returns the male gaze and laughs herself as Hélène Cixous famously suggested making fun of the Freudian theory of woman's notorious lack? "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing," claims Cixous (2048). But why, however, is it that whenever women (dare to) laugh, this laughter is considered breaking limits, rules and taboos? Does that mean, on the other hand, that male laughter necessarily remains within established boundaries of proper conduct and expected behaviour? What then happens when men become the objects rather than subjects of laughter, being ridiculed by women's humour? And above all we may ask whether humour *is* necessarily gendered, thus invariably reinforcing gender boundaries that otherwise have long been contested and overturned?

2 These were some of the questions we asked ourselves and which, accordingly, we sought the contributors of this special issue of *gender forum* to (re)consider. We as editors of this special issue of *gender forum* wish to take up Kathleen Rowe's notion of "genres of laughter" (8), who following Laura Mulvey regards such genres as forms of narrative and performance originally associated with the carnivalesque and to extend its range of meanings

and possibilities across genders and genres. We claim that women – though often forgotten or neglected – have indeed excelled as comediennes in theatrical and filmic comedies, in satirical prose and poetry, in music and art, as characters, writers, performers, and painters. And while it may be true that even for male humorists it is hard to claim accolade, as the editors of a classic anthology on American humour suggest, this is particularly true for female humorists: "[T]he world likes humor, but treats it patronizingly. It decorates its serious artists with laurels, and its wags with Brussels sprouts" (White and White xvii). Even feminist theory here has tended to be more interested in melodrama (i.e. in suffering and victimized women) than in comedy thus also neglecting victoriously laughing women.

3 When looking at the variety of representations of women in comic genres, 'woman' is often relegated to a single generic purpose: the butt of the joke (see Freud, once again). Writing about dramatic plays, Susan Carlson points towards these restrictions, which apply to other genres, such as romance novels, just as well: In the comic plays populated by women, two features proscribe what comedy's women can be: a basic inversion and a generally happy ending. To understand these two aspects of comic structure is to understand the limitations of comic women. Women are allowed their brilliance, freedom, and power only because the genre has built-in safeguards against such behavior. (17) Andrew Scott, thinking of Shakespeare's comedies but also of television sitcoms, similarly asserts that women's representation is limited to two purposes: "to provide an hysterical vision of a world-turned-upside-down, and to enable male order to be re-established through the subjugation of women in marriage" (76). Scott furthermore notes that it is the medium of the body "through which humanity's fascination with its instincts and animal nature is explored. The comic body is exaggeratedly physical, a distorted, disproportionate, profane, ill-disciplined, insatiate, and perverse organism" (83).

4 While Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, and Tom and Jerry are some of the many (male) examples that show, how physical comedy works by highlighting the fragile, yet indestructible corporeality of its actors, it is the grotesque female body – incarnated in figures such as *Das Kunstseidene Mädchen* or Bridget Jones (see Keck, Poole) – that is particularly sought out to be laughed at as failure to adhere to traditional standards of beauty and manners. Depicted as overtly sexual, inherently obscene, and invariably monstrous, the female body is linked to what Mikhail Bakhtin has called the "lower body stratum" (see *Rabelais and His World*) and Julia Kristeva defines as "abjection". John Limon sums up that abjection in stand-up comedy signifies "a psychic worrying of those aspects of oneself that one cannot be rid of, that seem, but are not quite, alienable – for example, blood,

urine, feces, nails, and the corpse" (4). Since, for Kristeva, abjection is about negotiating borders and ambiguity, it is in the end linked to the female body as that primal site of distinction between mother and child (see *Powers of Horror*), and the grotesque may be understood as – mostly gendered – embodiment of the abject. Moving between the real and the fantastic as well as the repulsive and the comic, the grotesque "is a form of exaggerated and ambivalent social commentary produced by the violent clash of opposites [...] existing in a state of unresolved tension" (Scott 87). It is here that the link between gender, humour and genre reaches out beyond the text and into socio-political realities, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have shown in their reading of Bakhtin. Playing with notions of "top" and "bottom", they claim that comic forms invert "the relations of subject and object, agent and instrument, husband and wife, old and young, animal and human, master and slave" (56). Sanctioned power relationship may – if only temporarily – be subverted, leading to a dialectics of antagonism and dependency: [T]he 'top' attempts to reject and eliminate the 'bottom' for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover, not only that it is in some way frequently dependent upon that low-Other [...] but also that the top *includes* that low symbolically, as a primarily eroticised constituent of its own fantasy life. (Stallybrass and White 7) The inversions produced by genres of laughter bring those hitherto marginalized to the centre, making them visible and thus reversing their exclusion from hegemonic power. With regard to the figure of the "unruly woman", Rowe insists that such a woman "too fat, too funny, too noisy, too old, too rebellious" (19) unsettles social hierarchies. Claiming "an alternative view of female subjectivity", Rowe calls for more work on "women as subjects of a laughter that expresses anger, resistance, solidarity, and joy" (5). The essays included in this double issue on "Gender and Humour" are theoretically inspired and historically grounded, looking into the silenced history of such 'funny women'. With varying approaches that at times reach across the gender divide to include camp, drag, and masquerade, the essays are, we noteworthy contributions counteracting the reluctance of feminist – and other – theory to engage in humour and comedy, we believe.

5 The first of two successive *gender forum* issues on gender and humour centres on historical and political perspectives of gender humour. In her essay on medieval biblical dramas, Lisa LeBlanc explores representations of Noah's wife as "shrew", i.e. as a rebellious, unruly woman. With this comic trope that leans towards slapstick humour (for example in her verbal *and* physical battles with Noah), this shrew is allowed to break conventional patterns of conjugal behaviour, and yet she is still worthy to be allowed onto the ark and thus saved from the flood. Michael Epp also looks at the power of female humour to challenge the

symbolic authority of patriarchy, here by choosing "the female Mark Twain", Marietta Holley, as exemplary case study. Holley not only enjoyed a huge popular success, as a literary humorist she also forged new ways of perceiving public humour. Epp shows that hers was a comic genre that included regional affairs as well as political notions at a time, when the American nation was in a process of a complex transformation.

6 Heather Graves and Natalia Pushkareva both focus on the politics of humour. Graves' essay proceeds from the suffragist movement in Manitoba, Canada, in the early twentieth century and the suffragists' dissatisfaction with (the lack of) the political action on behalf of women's voting rights. Turning to the stage and performing satirical burlesque shows that ridicule the leading politicians, these suffragists employed specific rhetorical strategies, Graves argues, to mobilize the public in favour of women's rights. Pushkareva looks at the presence of women particularly within post-Soviet academia analysing the mechanisms of misogyny and systemic discrimination of women in sciences. Comparing academic sexist humour to Russian folklore, this ethnological approach comes to an understanding of a deeply ingrained cultural practice of gender asymmetry that uses humour as strategy of devaluation.

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Noah's Uxor: A Shrew Worth Redeeming

By Lisa LeBlanc, Anna Maria College, Massachusetts, USA

Abstract:

This essay seeks to explore how humor is used in the medieval biblical dramas concerning Noah's ark to present a wife who is truculent but worthy of being saved. The character refuses to follow a typical medieval view of husband-wife hierarchy and instead asserts herself in a way that would be unacceptable to most husbands. However, because her tyrannous behavior is slapstick rather than offensive, her role as an unruly woman becomes more acceptable. The comic trope of the shrew allows her to break the conventional role of the wife, but still be saved from the flood.

1 When Lucy Ricardo sabotaged her husband's show in an attempt to perform in the show, everyone, with the possible exception of Ricky, laughed. Likewise, when Roseanne Arnold verbally abused anyone who tried to exert any authority over her, the response was again laughter. The trope of the shrew as a humorous character stretches far back in literary history, even arguably as far back as Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, where the wives withheld sex until the men ended their war. While shrewish behavior was rarely condoned in everyday life, in literature it was usually tied to comedy, and therefore the shrew became fun. Along with making her a sympathetic character, humor also allowed the shrew to safely overthrow widely held conventions, particularly that of the husband's control over his wife.

2 In the Middle Ages, one popular depiction of the shrew was Noah's wife, known by the Latin term for wife, Uxor. In several plays during this time period, Uxor shows herself to be a shrew, refusing to board the ark, insulting Noah, and physically striking Noah. This truculence, however, is humorous, so instead of being forbidden to enter the ship, she becomes a popular character. Instead of a threat to the community, her rebellion becomes acceptable, at least within the drama.

3 Medieval communities of England worked, played and prayed together. Religious festivals were celebrated throughout the year, and often involved elaborate rituals and entertainments. These festivals also had a social impact, using humor to develop social commentary and criticism. Medieval drama had a large role in these festivities, presenting, among other things, stories from the Bible which could, at times, allow the playwright to subvert contemporary conventions by placing his concerns in ancient biblical times.

4 Corpus Christi cycles started in Europe in the second half of the fourteenth century as a combination of religious ritual, education, and festival celebration. These plays were largely run by guilds, who funded and performed them. Taking place over multiple days, these cycles

traced salvation history from Creation to Doomsday. While educating a largely illiterate audience, these cycles also entertained, working humor in amongst the biblical drama. These cycles proved so popular that they lasted over 200 years, despite the amount of funding and time that went into producing them. The plays were performed outdoors on stage wagons that stopped at various points throughout the city, making the performances available to the entire populace.

5 Of the medieval cycles, only four, in addition to several single plays and a list of plays belonging to the Beverly cycle, remain. The surviving cycles, Chester, York, Wakefield¹, and Coventry, and the Beverly list give a clear view of the plays thought most important to a medieval audience. The plays, or multi-play pageants, that appear in the four cycles and the list are The Fall of Lucifer The Creation and Fall of Man Cain and Abel Noah and the Flood Abraham and Isaac The Nativity The Raising of Lazarus The Passion The Resurrection Doomsday (Kolve 51) These plays form the core of salvation history for a medieval audience. The plays either directly portray the salvation attained, such as in the crucifixion sequence, or provide a figural type for salvation, a character such as Abraham who prefigures Christ.

6 The play of particular interest to this study is the play concerning Noah and the Flood. The biblical passage concerning this event is rather brief, barely mentioning Noah's wife. In the Coventry cycle, also known as the N-Town cycle, Noah's wife's role is largely to prefigure Mary, the mother of Jesus, an obedient devotional female (Fitzgerald 351). In the remaining three cycles, however, as well as in the Newcastle fragment, Noah's wife assumes a very prominent role, that of the shrew. Despite her role as a shrew, however, she is one of only eight humans saved from the Deluge. This study will look at the depiction of the shrewish wife, and how the playwrights used humor to present a shrew worth saving.

7 Natalie Zemon Davis characterizes unruly women in the medieval and early modern period as falling into three types: "Women who are happily given over to the sway of their bodily senses or who are using every ruse they can to prevail over men" such as the Wife of Bath; women who have "license to be a social critic" such as Erasmus's Folly; and women who have "a temporary period of dominion, which is ended only after she has said or done something to undermine authority" such as Shakespeare's Rosalind (134-6). In the Noah plays, Uxor takes on all three roles, physically beating her husband to gain control, criticizing the damage idle men do to their families, and, on occasion, returning to the role of quiet wife after overthrowing Noah's *maistrie*, his authority over her as a husband. In all cases, the use

¹ It should be noted that the unity of the Wakefield cycle, also known as the Towneley cycle, has been called into question. It is clear that the cycle was composed by different authors, but Barbara Palmer has argued that the cycle should be seen more as a mosaic of plays than a unified cycle, based on city records available.

of comedy allows her to do such things and still be one of the few humans saved from the flood.

Background on the Shrew²

8 The origins of the characterization of Noah's wife as a shrew have intrigued scholars for nearly a century. In 1930, Millicent Carey published a book on the Wakefield plays in which she tries to account for the presence of the shrew in the Noah tradition. She says that the character did not derive from Biblical or Jewish tradition, nor was it present in contemporary non-dramatic literature, with the exception of Chaucer's "Miller's Tale" which likely derived its shrew from the cycle plays. She posits a possible development that draws from the relatives who mock Noah in the *Cursor Mundi* and *Cornish Creation*³ plays, the misogynistic tradition in ballads, French farces and fabliaux, and instructional materials for wives, as well as a parallel between Noah and his wife and Adam and Eve from the same cycles.

9 Katherine Garvin, however, argues that evidence of a shrewish Uxor before the dramas does exist in a manuscript illumination. Caedmonian MS Junius XI, a text of Genesis now in Oxford's Bodleian Library, contains an illustration which seems to present a scene not described in the biblical text. Garvin quotes the description given by Israel Gollancz, who edited an early text of the manuscript, "On the right hand, one of the women, whom we may assume to be Noah's wife, seems to be unwilling to mount the ladder, and is expostulating with one of the three sons" (89). As the illustration is usually dated from the eleventh century, Garvin argues that this provides evidence of the presence of the tradition of the shrewish wife in England several centuries before the dramas.

10 Anna Jean Mill continues the discussion by looking at possible shrew traditions from other parts of the world. Drawing on art and folklore, she found a tradition of a shrewish Uxor, particularly one tied to Satan. She looked at religious traditions, such as the Gnostic *Book of Noria* and the Koran and other Mohammedan traditions, non-Noah folk traditions of the Wogul (Australian aboriginal peoples) that influenced the Noah story of the "'late Russian' redaction of the *Revelations of Methodius*" (617), and the *Weltchronik* of Enikel from Vienna. She also explored artwork that references the shrewish tradition such as

² It is important to note that shrew is being used with its current meaning of an unruly woman, particularly a wife who exerts control over her husband through verbal or physical violence. In the Middle Ages, the term referred to any villainous person, male or female.

³ *Cursor Mundi* is a Middle English poem, written about 1300, that presents the salvation history of the world. The Cornish plays are a cycle of plays that, while similar to the Corpus Christi plays, do not have the same scope and therefore are not considered Corpus Christi plays by Kolve.

the illustrations of Queen Mary's Psalter from the early 14th century and Swedish church art from the 14th and 15th centuries. These sources present various aspects of the shrew tradition, from alliances with Satan to simple truculence. While widespread and sometimes occurring after the plays were written, these varied references do indicate the existence of a folk legend from which the various works drew.

11 Though her origins may be unclear, one factor concerning Uxor is very clear. She is only one of eight people (the other seven being her husband, three sons, and three daughters-in-law) from all of humanity who are saved from the great Flood. The character develops over time, and through this development Uxor is made humorous so that she can be saved, despite her conflict with Noah.

Newcastle

12 Because "The Newcastle Play" only survives in fragmentary form, analyzing it presents many difficulties. There are no manuscript copies of the play, and, while records identify twelve plays that were part of the Newcastle cycle, there were an additional ten to fifteen plays, the names and subjects of which are unknown, in the cycle.

13 The background of this play is the least available of all the Noah plays; furthermore, the least developed of all of the shrewish Uxors is that of the Newcastle fragment. It is in this play that she is least humorous and therefore least sympathetic. Millicent Carey refers to this play as a fragment that offers the Uxor character no possibility for development (90). In this play, Uxor does not act alone, for she is a friend and ally of the devil.

14 "The Newcastle Play," like most of the other Noah plays, starts with God deciding to destroy all of humanity, except Noah's family, because of humanity's sinfulness. He sends an angel to tell Noah to build the ark, which he is hesitant to do because of his age, 600 years, and his inexperience in shipbuilding, but he does finally agree to do it. Immediately after this, Deabolus enters and has his own talk, this time with Uxor, claiming, "In faith she is my friend" (111). Despite this friendship, Deabolus must resort to deception to convince Uxor to do his bidding, telling her that following Noah's instructions will cost her and her children their lives. Uxor, believing Deabolus is telling the truth, drugs Noah to discover what he has been doing, and then points out that he is no shipwright and curses him. He returns to his ship to finish building it with the Angel's help, and the play ends abruptly, with no reconciliation, but with a final curse from Deabolus on humanity.

15 There are several problems that arise when analyzing "The Newcastle Play." First is the fact that the earliest surviving copy is from the eighteenth century—no manuscript copies

survive, so we do not know if any Reformation revisions are in the drama. Furthermore, the play is very short and ends abruptly; the other Noah plays depict the flood and a reconciliation between Noah and his wife.⁴ Lastly, we have no context for this play. While Carey may suggest that the presence of a devil-tempter may be an attempt to create a parallel with the Adam and Eve play, without the actual play of Adam and Eve, it is difficult to see further significance of the parallel.

16 Despite these problems, Uxor is obviously a comical character. She has several ironic lines, such as referring to the devil as “*bewschere*” (good sir) because she doesn’t recognize him and asking Noah, “Who devil made thee a wright?/God give him evil to fayre” (“What devil made you a shipwright?/God give him evil to do” 172-3) when, in fact, God made him a wright and the devil is trying to give them evil. However, because of her lack of development and the lack of any reconciliation scene, how she does eventually get aboard the ark, much less why she is allowed to, remains a mystery.

Chester

17 The Chester mystery cycle survives in four manuscripts, the earliest dating from the late 16th century. The cycle very likely ran during the late fourteenth century, although the earliest surviving reference to it is 1422. This cycle consists of twenty-four plays which would have run over three days. The Noah play, “Noah’s Flood,” is the third play of the cycle and was performed by the guilds of Waterleaders and Drawers in Dye.

18 This play differs considerably from the less developed Newcastle play. As in York and Wakefield, Noah’s wife acts alone—there is no devil on stage to tempt her. As with the Newcastle play, “Noah’s Flood” opens with God’s monologue about the sinfulness of humanity and the need to punish the world. However, this speech is given to Noah and his family: “God speaketh unto Noe standing without the arke with all his familye (initial stage direction, p. 42). Therefore, in this play, Uxor is aware of the situation from the very beginning. Along with the rest of the family, Uxor helps with the building and provisioning of the ship, although she admits her help is limited because “women bynne weake” (“women are weak”) (67). Suddenly, for no apparent reason, Uxor becomes obdurate, refusing to board the just finished ship: “In fayth, Noe, I had as leeve thou slepte./For all thy Frenyshe fare,/I will not doe after thy reade.” (99-101 In faith, Noah, I would prefer you slept./For all your frantic activity/I will not do what you want.) She is reconciled with Noah only when he

⁴ The York cycle does divide the Noah story into two plays. The first deals with the building of the ark, and the second, which includes the reconciliation, focuses on the flood. It is possible that Newcastle also had a second play that dealt with the flood.

declares, “thou arte mastere” (111). Norman Simms makes the argument that this rebellion was caused by Noah’s own mistake as God had not ordered them to board and the animals themselves are not aboard yet, but Uxor says nothing to this effect. Nonetheless, God does order the loading of the ship with the animals after this point, and the entire family, Uxor included, help with the process.

19 Once the animals are on board, Uxor rebels once again. Noah tells her to board, showing his impatience with her for delaying and indicating that such rebellion is not a new characteristic: “Wyffe, come in. Why standes thou there?/Thou arte ever frowarde; that dare I sweare” (“Wife, come in. Why do you stand there?/You are forever brazen, that I dare swear” 194-5). She refuses, but unlike her first refusal, this time she has a reason:

But I have my gossips everyechone,
one foote further I will not gone.
They shall not drowne, by sayncte John,
and I may save there life.
The loved me full well, by Christe.
But thou wilte let them into this chiste,
elles rowe forthe, Noe, when thy liste,
and gett thee a newe wyfe. (201-208)
(Unless I have my every one of my friends,
I will not go one foot further.
They shall not drown, by St. John,
If I can save their lives.
They loved me very well, by Christ.
Either you will let them into this ark,
or row forth, Noah, when you like,
And get yourself a new wife.)

While Noah’s concern is to get himself and his family aboard, Uxor is also concerned for her friends who will drown in the flood.

20 Uxor’s reasoning has sparked debate among scholars, some seeing it as a sign of worldliness, others as more caring and humane than Noah. Simms argues that the good friends, who then enter the play, lamenting their impending doom, represent local guilds and also all of humanity. He sees the wine they drink and share with Uxor as prefiguring communion wine as well as representing the *compotatio*, or ritual shared drink, of the guilds. Christina Fitzgerald, however, sees Uxor’s connection with her friends as representing the corruption of the town; the sale of drink was one occupation women were allowed, therefore the drink represents one source of power women had outside of the local patriarchy. Virginia Schaefer Carroll argues that the concern for her friends could give Uxor a kind of generous spirit not afforded Noah, but that the gossips’ speech/song, which involves their drinking, “reveals the motives of Noah’s wife, reducing her reluctance from magnanimity to petty

selfishness” (86). These arguments, however, ignore the action of the drama. The gossips would likely have entered from the audience. While Noah and his sons and daughters-in-law would be on the wagon/stage, Uxor and the gossips would be on the ground level with the audience. Thus, the townsfolk would have seen Uxor reluctant to leave them behind; the destruction of all of humanity would include the audience as well. Certainly Uxor’s disobedience would have been seen as wrong, especially since she heard the command of God herself, but a medieval audience would likely have felt great sympathy for the woman who was arguing for mercy for them.

21 Uxor remains stubborn, refusing to board without her friends, so her sons physically carry her aboard. She then, in response to his welcome, strikes Noah. While the blow releases her aggression and adds humor to the play, we must note that her blow is still disobedient, and yet the playwright sees no need for her to be punished. The blow is directly in response to her being dragged on board against her will, but for the audience, it likely provided a “punishment” for not being concerned about their fate—it is easy to see a medieval audience cheering on such a blow.

22 The reconciliation in the play is not as clear as it is in York and Wakefield. In fact, Uxor’s role in the play is over once she strikes Noah and he accepts the blow. The remainder of the play consists of Noah and God speaking, re-establishing the covenant between God and man and ignoring that between husband and wife.

York

23 The York cycle, which dates from the latter half of the fourteenth century, consists of fifty plays in one surviving manuscript. The earliest recorded performance occurred in 1376, and the cycle continued to be presented until 1572. This cycle is the only surviving cycle in which the Noah episode is divided into two plays, “The Shipwrights: The Building of the Ark” and “The Fishers and Mariners: The Flood.”

24 Uxor does not appear in the first play, “The Shipwrights: The Building of the Ark,” in which God again laments the sinfulness of humanity and decides to send a flood to destroy them. Uxor’s absence does become significant in that, unlike the Chester play, she is kept in ignorance in this play—she is not present when God sends his commands. Furthermore, when the second play opens, Noah is in his ark, talking to his sons and daughters-in-law, and his wife is still not present, thus implying that even the children were better informed than she was of the oncoming flood. The second play opens with Noah reviewing the actions of the previous play and then sending his son to fetch his wife, whom he had previously referred to

as his “worthy wiffe” (5). At first, in typical Uxor fashion, she refuses to go, telling her son “And telle hym I wol come no narre...We bowrde al wrange, I wene” (And tell him I will not come near...We play idle games, I think 62,66). Eventually, she does decide to go, but only because she wants to know what Noah’s been doing. When she reaches the ark, she not only refuses to board, but she declares she will return to town because she thinks “Pou [Noah] arte nere woode” (You are near mad 91) when Noah informs her of the impending flood. He continues to explain the situation to her, and eventually she does accept what he says, although unhappily: “Allas! þat I þis lare shuld lere” (Alas, that I should learn this information 105). When her children, along with Noah, attempt to force her on board, she fights them, arguing that she has “tolis to trusse” (household items to pack 110) in town. At this point, she does accept the news, but she criticizes Noah, telling him that he should have informed her of what was going on earlier:

Noye, þou myght haue leteyn me wete;
 Erly and late þou wente þeroutte,
 And ay at home þou lete me sytte
 To loke þat nowhere were wele aboutte. (113-116)
 (Noah, you might have let me know;
 Early and late you went out,
 And always at home you let me sit
 To see that nowhere I knew what you were about.)

When he tries to excuse the secrecy by saying it was God’s will, Uxor makes it very clear that this excuse is not acceptable, that he should have thought of her as well.

25 As in the Chester “Noah’s Flood,” York’s Uxor is concerned for family and friends. She tells Noah that she wishes “My commodrys and my cosynes bathe” (My comrades and my cousins both 143) were with them, but when Noah tells her it is too late for them, she laments for the loss, apparently the only one on board concerned with those who are dying. She quiets down, allowing her family to praise God for saving them, but once they have landed, she once again asks where her family and friends are, only to be told by Noah that they are dead and she should “Late be thy dyne” (Stop your noise 271). Her only other line in the play is to lament, once again, when Noah informs his sons that the world will be stricken again in the future, but with fire instead of water.

26 The York Uxor seems the least shrewish of all of the Uxor characters. While her rebellion would still be quite humorous, particularly her anger at Noah for excusing his not telling her by saying it was God’s will, her reasons for rebellion are perhaps the most sympathetic. Her concern for family and friends is not mitigated by a round of drinks, nor is it forgotten at the end of the play (in fact, Noah’s “Dame, all ar drowned, late be thy dyne,/And

sone þei boughte þer synnes sore./Gud lewyn latte vs begynne” (Dame, all are drowned, stop your noise/And at once they paid for their sins dearly./Let us begin to live well 271-3) seems callous even though it is what God wants). It is also important to note that God does not appear at the end of this play. At the end of the Chester play, God has the final speech, promising to never again flood the world and to put the rainbow in the sky to remind him of his promise not to destroy the world. While God acknowledges his justice in destroying the world, there is certainly also the promise of future compassion for humanity. Such a speech does not appear in the York play—instead Noah promises that God will destroy humanity again. The only compassion seen in the York play comes from Uxor.

Towneley/Wakefield

27 The Towneley cycle is sometimes referred to as the Wakefield cycle, but in fact, the Wakefield Master wrote just five of the Towneley plays, although he did seem to revise others. The five he wrote are *Noah*, *The First Shepherd’s Play*, *The Second Shepherd’s Play*, *Herod the Great*, and *The Buffeting*, and he greatly revised *The Killing of Abel*. He is arguably the greatest playwright of the middle ages, incorporating great humor into his plays.

28 The Towneley cycle exists in only one manuscript, which is incomplete, missing twenty-eight leaves. The surviving cycle consists of thirty-two plays, but the Creation play, Abraham, Isaac, Purificacio Marie, and Pagina Doctorum, Ascencio Domini, Descent of the Holy Spirit, and Iudicium are all incomplete and it is likely that plays about the Assumption and Coronation are missing entirely. Again, references to the cycle indicate that it was staged as early as the first half of the 15th century. The name Wakefield adds confusion to analysis, however, because it appears twice in the cycle manuscript, introducing the Creation and Noah plays. Barbara Palmer successfully argues, however, that Wakefield was not the location of these performances, as its civic records show this town could not have supported a great cycle. Consequently, the cycle is often referred to as Towneley, after one of the families who owned the manuscript.

29 Unlike Chester and York, the Wakefield Noah begins with Noah lamenting the sinfulness of humanity. Richard Daniels argues that by beginning with Noah, the Wakefield Master opens a play that is “more human” than the other Noah plays. After Noah’s soliloquy, God enters and warns Noah of the impending deluge. Noah says he must return home to tell his wife everything he has learned; however, he is afraid of her reaction:

My [wife] will I frast
What she will say,
And I am agast

That we get som fray
 Betwixt us both,
 For she is full tethee,
 For litill oft angré;
 If any thing wrang be,
 Soyne is she wroth. (265-73 change is in original)
 (My wife will I ask
 What she will say,
 And I am afraid
 That we will get into a fight
 Between us both,
 For she is full vicious,
 Often angry over little things,
 If anything is wrong
 Soon she is wrathful.)

This tendency to fight does not reflect God's earlier comment, that he will spare Noah and his wife "For thay wold neuer stryfe/With me then me offend" (For they would never strive/With me to offend me 155-6). While they do not fight with God, they quite obviously do fight with each other.

30 As Noah predicts, Uxor is already cross and looking for a fight when he gets home. This aggressive behavior has brought criticism about her true nature from scholars. Jeffrey Helterman points out that this Uxor is malicious and the closest of the three full cycles to Newcastle. On the other hand, this wife presents arguments that would most clearly resonate with the medieval audience. She tells Noah

Do tell me belife
 Where has thou thus long be?
 To dede may we dryfe,
 Or lif, for the,
 For want.
 When we swete or swynk,
 Thou dos what thou think;
 Yit of mete and of drynk
 Haue we veray skant. (278-86)
 (Tell me, by your life,
 Where you have been this long?
 We may be driven to death,
 Of life, because of you,
 For want.
 While we labor or work,
 You do what you want;
 Yet of meat and drink
 We have a great lack.)

Helterman argues that "the audience would be expected to sympathize with the wife's worry about having enough to eat, but it must also realize that man's purpose on earth is not to feed

only his body” (66). While this distinction is true, a medieval audience, for whom food becomes scarce in the winter and for whom a head of household who does not provide can destroy his family, should greatly appreciate her argument, especially as she has not been told of any greater purpose yet.

31 At this point in the drama, Uxor goes into a tirade against “ill husbandys” (301). She even generalizes this argument to “We women” (300) who must lament useless spouses. But she will not stop with just criticizing husbands; she also informs her husband that she intends to “smyte and smyle” (311); she will quite happily strike him. This threat leads to the first physical conflict of the play. While both spouses are striking and insulting the other, the result is more slapstick than upsetting. Finally, this first altercation ends when Noah announces, “Bot I will kepe charyté,/For I haue at do” (But I will keep peace/Because I have work to do 339-40). He does have more important things to do, but at the same time, the Wakefield Master has given the first victory to Uxor, who tells Noah upon his departure: “Here shall no man tary the;/I pray the go to!” (Here shall no one delay you;/I pray you go away 341-2).

32 While Noah leaves to complete his ark, which he still has not told Uxor about, Uxor sits down to spin. J. W. Robinson points out that spinning was the punishment assigned to Eve after the banishment from Eden, thus tying Uxor to Eve, but in this drama there are two significant differences: Uxor’s spinning is self-assigned and, in the Middle Ages, the proper role of women. Noah may neglect his duties as a husband, but Uxor does not neglect hers as a wife.

33 Noah completes the ark and gathers his family to prepare to board, and he finally informs his wife about what God has told him. She is understandably shocked and confused, but regains her stubborn nature once she sees the ark. She tells Noah that she is greatly concerned about the ark; she cannot even tell which end is the front and which the back. She then informs him that she will not enter the ark until she has “Spon a space” (spun [wool] for a while 489) and threatens to strike anyone who tries to move her. Unlike the other cycle plays, Wakefield’s Uxor’s family fear her enough to not try to force her onto the ark. Her family try to convince her to board, but it is only when the water actually reaches her that she chooses to board the ark of her own volition. When Noah criticizes her for waiting until the last minute, she refuses to move further into the ark than the entryway.

34 A second conflict begins at this point. Noah threatens to whip Uxor if she doesn’t move into the ship, but she taunts him, telling him, “Thise grete wordys shall not flay me” (These great words will not hurt me 549). The more he threatens, the more Uxor refuses to budge. This time, both spouses deliver a lecture on the evils of the opposite sex. Uxor informs

Noah that she wishes she had a “wedows coyll” (widow’s apparel 563) and that many “Of wifys that ar here” (of the wives that are here 568) wish their husbands were dead. One must keep in mind that at this point in the story, the flood would have taken over their world, so the wives present likely refer to the audience. Noah, however, gets his own tirade in, also addressing the audience (“Yee men that has wifys” (You men who have wives 573)) and advising that they gain control over their wives while young. This leads to physical violence and insults once again.

35 This altercation ends when Noah suggests “In this hast let vs ho,/For my bak is nere in two (In haste let us stop/For my back is nearly broken in two 595-6). Uxor agrees, “And I am bet so blo/That I may not thryfe” (And I am beaten so blue/That I may not thrive 597-8). Even their sons get involved, recommending the couple end their dispute and pay attention to the flooding. This scene marks the changing point in the play; Noah and Uxor work together to maintain the ark and do not fight anymore. Noah has his wife take the “stere-tre” (625), or ship’s wheel, while he plumbs the depth of the flood. The remainder of the play sends the audience a mixed message about the Wakefield Master’s opinion of Uxor. When Noah releases the birds to see if any land is available yet, it is Uxor who suggests, at Noah’s request, the raven, the bird that fails them. Noah chooses to release a dove as well. Kolve points out that the raven, in the Middle Ages, was often associated with worldliness (66). On the other hand, it is Uxor who first sees the end of the flood, telling her family, “Methynk, bi my wit,/The son shynes in the eest” (I think, by my senses/The sun shines in the east 654-5). Furthermore, she is the first to see the returning dove and bear the news to her family. The play ends with the family exploring the empty land and praising God for sparing them—there is no mention of a future judgment that will destroy the world.

Redeeming Uxor

36 Much discussion of these plays has looked at the character of Noah’s wife from various perspectives. The criticisms of the wife range from labeling her as malicious (Helterman 64) or evil (Carroll 31) to being a Mary-figure (Simms 23) and fighting due to genuine concern for her family (Marx 118). The conflicts are seen as making the couple more human (Carroll 90), paralleling the disobedient relationship man has with God (Robinson 34-5), reflecting the corruption of medieval towns (Fitzgerald 365), and attempting to show the importance of persistence and charity on Noah’s part (Daniels 29). These varied criticisms, whether positive or negative, tend to ignore the fact that ultimately, Uxor is one of the saved. Furthermore, even when humor is mentioned, it is not linked to mitigating her fault.

37 When discussing the use of humor in the cycle play, Kolve says, “The comic surfaces of these plays are, of course, valuable in their own right, and it is our first privilege as audience to respond to them” (146). He sees the humor as making Uxor popular among medieval audiences, although he clearly presents her shrewish behavior as unjustified. He says she was a very popular character in Middle English literature and “became a kind of paradigm of human character: she was the root-form of the shrewish wife and her relationship with Noah became the archetype of everyday marital felicity” (146). In his view, the comedy is present for the sake of entertaining the audience.

38 That Uxor was popular is indicated by the guild records of Hull. Mill points out that the payment records for the 1513 performance, unless there is a clerical error, show that the actor playing Noah’s wife received “substantial fees” (624), even more than the actor playing Noah received. Carroll also indicates that the Uxor is a popular character, despite her wicked ways, because Noah is weak and therefore less sympathetic than she is (31).

39 But while the Uxor can be popular with the audience, she also must be saved by God, and in a play where God is destroying all of humanity except for eight people because of humanity’s sinfulness, her truculence must be addressed. The signs of her stubbornness and aggression are generally tied to comedy. Her shrewish behavior is comic, and this mitigates her maliciousness. One of the purposes of humor is to “absorb and defuse emotions that threaten fertility and community” (Wilt 177). Uxor can be stubborn and even violent, but as long as it is presented humorously, it is not a threat to society, and therefore she need not be destroyed in the flood.

40 Kathleen Rowe, while concerned with how women have used humor to subvert male authority, does acknowledge that when women are the objects of humor, they are “vulnerable to ridicule and trivialization” (3). This trivialization acts to neutralize the threat they pose. Uxor, even while physically attacking her husband, is not a threatening character because these attacks are humorous. In Wakefield particularly, the fighting becomes slapstick and the anti-marriage speeches are addressed to the audiences, not to the other characters. This humor trivializes the attacks, therefore mitigating Uxor’s behavior, making it possible for her to be saved.

41 The comic disobedience can also, however, serves to subvert the husband-wife hierarchy and establish social power for the wife. Kolve may argue that Noah must establish authority over Uxor for the flood to recede (150), but, as Campbell counterargues, there’s really no evidence in the play, particularly Wakefield where they work together, that this occurs (80). Campbell claims “the theme of Noah is love and that the dramatic tension, very

comically worked out in the family arena of domesticity, revolves around man's mistaken notion 'maistre'"(76). She argues that the concept of *maistre* must be overcome before the couple can live peacefully. This new balance of power can be achieved through the subversive role of humor, particularly as it is tied to the concept of carnival and misrule.

42 Carnival was a popular tradition in the Middle Ages, and the overthrowing of hierarchy was a common practice. Natalie Zemon Davis lists the carnivals as occurring according to the "calendar of religion and season (the twelve days of Christmas, the days before Lent, early May, Pentecost, the feast of Saint Jean Baptiste in June, the Feast of Assumption in mid-August, All Saints) and timed also to domestic events, marriages, and other family affairs" (98). These occasions allowed the lower classes to celebrate in ways that overthrew common social conventions. Inversion of sexual roles was a common topos in such festivities (Davis 129). There is some debate about the purpose of this overthrowing of conventions however. Davis points out that anthropologists see these festivities as "ultimately sources of order and stability in a hierarchical society" (130). Ultimately, the festivity serves to allow negative emotions to be exorcised thus allowing the conventional hierarchy to continue. Davis points out, however, that the comic inversions can also undermine society, particularly in carnival and drama, by allowing the oppressed to see an example of someone overcoming oppression (131). The Corpus Christi plays were not the same as these carnival festivities; however, the upside-down view of marriage clearly parallels the overthrowing of social authority common to these festivals.

43 In addition, the humor in these plays allows Uxor to take control. Katie Normington points out the similarity between the conflict in the drama and a common carnivalesque practice. Uxor's stubbornness reflects similar practices that occurred after the Twelve Days of Christmas, a time well-known for carnival festivities. Similar battles of the sexes are to be found in the Spinner's St. Distaff's Day. Held on 7 January when women returned to their spinning after Christmas, this festival involved men setting fire to women's flax, and the women then dousing both the flax and their husbands with water. Obviously this rite has much relevance to the Noah pageants: the retaliation of a woman against her husband; a spinner commencing her work; and the throwing/flooding of water. (qtd. in Normington, 124) Normington sees this play as reflecting the desire of the time period to do away with women's cottage industries because these industries allowed women a certain autonomy. This desire is particularly relevant to the time period the dramas were developing as the plays were likely composed at the same time that rights established by the plague, which gave women more freedom in industry, were being recinded (130). The connection between the plays and the

ritual of St Distaff's Day may also reflect the subversion of the husband-wife hierarchy—while men are trying to stop women's industry, it is the men that are eventually doused and the women who symbolically have the last word.

44 Humor helps Uxor to gain and even maintain power in her relationship with Noah in several ways. First, rather than being meek and subservient, as she is in the Coventry cycle, Uxor is very outspoken in these plays. Newcastle presents difficulties in reconciling the character to her being saved, largely because we do not see her on the ark, but the fact that she does not recognize her "friend" Deabolus and that her misstatements indicate that her drugging her husband is done in ignorance helps to mitigate her guilt. In the Chester play, Uxor's arguments can be quite moving, as her concern for her friends is touching, but the drinking song the gossips break into as they are about to be drowned is clearly humorous. A general audience would likely find this entertaining. Because they could identify with the drinking, singing gossips, this scene would cause the audience to identify more with the Uxor, stubbornly refusing to desert her inebriated friends, rather than the perfect but serious Noah. The arguments themselves become more humorous in the York cycle. While Uxor is still very concerned about her friends, her accusation that Noah is mad and her concern for her household goods must have struck an audience as comic. More specifically, the argument between Noah and Uxor as to whether or not he should have told her would have seemed recognizable to a medieval audience familiar with the comic fabliaux trope of the shrew. Whether or not Noah was correct in hiding the truth from his wife, a shrew would not allow him to get away with such a deception. The fact that Noah is not humorous in these plays also makes Uxor more sympathetic to audiences. Carroll points out that "The discernible whining tone of the speaker [Noah] undermines his virtue and places the negative image of the old man at the center of the action" (72-3). Noah may be in the right, but because he is whining and not humorous, the audience is less likely to side with him. The Wakefield Master, as mentioned, excelled in adding humor to his dramas, and this play is no exception. The fact that Uxor is a shrew is apparent before she even appears, due to Noah's fear of his wife. Her verbal attacks, while inappropriate for a Biblical wife, are very funny, particularly in light of the reconciliation at the end of the play. Her comment that she wishes she were a widow may seem malicious, particularly since this follows her accusation that Noah's lack of responsibility starving their family, but their teamwork at the end of the play shows that this is simply an outburst, not genuine ill-feeling between the two of them. Furthermore, the insults are slung on both sides; in Wakefield the humor is expanded as Noah joins in the sparring and fighting, thus leaving them both on a more even field. What is significant in this humor,

however, is that because it makes her more sympathetic, and more popular, with audiences, it makes her subversion of her husband's authority more acceptable.

45 The physical violence in the plays also add to the humor. In all three full cycle plays, blows are struck. In Chester, Uxor is the only one to strike a blow, but she does this after she has been physically dragged away from her friends, who would have been scattered in the audience. Her being manhandled onboard would have been humorous to watch, and her blow, because it is tied to her loyalty to her gossips, would likely be received as popular and humorous rather than evil. Because she is sticking up for the audience, her subversive behavior would become acceptable. In York, Uxor, once again, is the only one to strike a blow, and again it is after she is forced on board the ship. This blow, however, comes in the midst of the argument over Noah's keeping the ark a secret. While in Chester the entire family is informed of the upcoming flood right away, in York, Uxor is the last to know, and her displeasure at this fact is both comic and justified. In Towneley, the fighting is greatly expanded, but made slapstick. In each case, the "skirmishes immediately follow misogynist speeches, from husband and wife alike" (Epp 229), but these speeches criticize idle men as much as they do upstart wives. Furthermore, in both cases, it is Noah who backs out of the conflict first. The Wakefield Master seems to go out of his way to give Uxor the upper hand in these battles. The fact that he ends the play with the two working together reinforces not so much her *maistre*, but the fact that neither Noah or his wife has *maistre*. In all three cases, the very inappropriate behavior of striking a spouse is either made sympathetic or humorous to justify the behavior. She is a truculent, shrewish wife, but the audience is made to see this as acceptable. There are times when it is acceptable, at least in comic drama, for a wife to not be subservient.

Conclusions

46 Noah's wife, according to Kolve, "was the root-form of the shrewish wife, and her relationship with Noah became the archetype of everyday marital infelicity" (146). However, because this is presented through humor, she is also a popular character whose subversion is acceptable rather than something that must be punished. Rowe says of such unruly behavior: "The tropes of unruliness are often coded with misogyny. However, they are also a source of potential power, especially when they are recoded or reframed to expose what that composure conceals" (31). By revealing herself to be compassionate to humanity, concerned about the well-being of her family, and justifiably angry over a husband who neglects his duty to his family, Uxor can be a shrew that the audience can accept. Alan Nelson points out that all

other rebellions in the cycle plays preceding Noah—Lucifer, Adam, mankind—were punished (396). He excuses Uxor as not rebelling against God but against Noah, but perhaps the real excuse is that she is simply too entertaining for us to really be offended.

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A Republic of Laughter: Marietta Holley and the Production of Women's Public Humour in the Late-Nineteenth-Century United States

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Abstract:

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Marietta Holley enjoyed massive success as one of the most popular American humourists. Known as “the female Mark Twain” (Curry xiii). Holley blended dialect and regional humour into a new, democratic and transformative genre that challenged conventional representations of women's emotional life and their relation to public and political spaces. In this paper, I define the genre of humour writing Holley helped to fashion, “women's public humour,” and situate it in relation to political and social notions of the public, especially those fractured along gender lines, that were of key interest to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century U.S. humour industry.

1 In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Marietta Holley enjoyed massive success as one of the most popular American humourists. Known as “the female Mark Twain” (Curry xiii). Holley blended dialect and regional humour into a new, democratic and transformative genre that challenged conventional representations of women's emotional life and their relation to public and political spaces. Although Holley is often criticized for profiting from damaging gender stereotypes – or alternatively praised for combating these stereotypes through reversal – her engagement with such forms of representation in fact marks her participation in a democratic, popular discourse that articulated affective practice to performative participation in a nation perceived as a massive public fractured by gender. Stereotypes were, in this often misunderstood genre, instruments for imagining gender in relation to contested, emerging forms of identity that situated democratic subjectivities in relation to the nation. Holley's lucrative and popular writing sought to fashion a place for women in the forms of emotional and political life that were key to the forms of national and political life that were becoming crucial to the nation in the nineteenth century.

2 In this paper, I will define the new genre of humour writing Holley helped to fashion, and situate it in relation to political and social notions of the public that were of key interest to humour writers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century U.S. humour industry. Holley's most popular books were written in the voice of Samantha, who often identified herself ironically as “Josiah Allen's Wife.” The humor of such identification was two-fold: Holley was saying that such humility on the part of women writing in the public sphere was hopelessly old-fashioned, and was also pointing to the ridiculous nature of abstract hierarchical gender distinctions (since Josiah was much smaller, weaker, and ignorant than

Samantha). Such ironic humility also contrasted with Samantha's very modern mobility: many of her books were written about her travels to fairs and events of national significance held across the country. Novels such as *Samantha at the World's Fair*, *Samantha Rastles the Woman Questions*, and *Samantha at the St. Louis Exposition* sutured popular events and popular stereotypes to expression and mobility, marking new possibilities for women, emotionally and politically, in a historical moment characterized by radical transformations in democratic government and democratic subjectivity. This moment, however, was also characterized by radical contradictions that always mark transformation, in modernity, as a process of conflict rather than consensus. For instance, though Holley's fictional character traveled extensively, Holley herself rarely left her home, and almost never visited the fairs and expositions she described. Moreover, her status as "the female Mark Twain" indexes the overdetermined position of women writers at the turn of the century; always the subordinate, "female" equivalent of another writer, women humorists received praise and success, but were still positioned unequally in a public space fractured by gender.

Marietta Holley and Women's Public Humour

3 Women's humour writing in the late-nineteenth-century United States was political in multiple ways, each characterized by struggles articulated to women's prescribed place in hierarchies linked to gender and capital. Implicitly, women's writing itself was a threat to these hierarchies that worked to establish a position of dominance for men in relation to forms of economic, social, intellectual, and political power. Specifically, women's humour writing worked to situate women as contributors to forms of power that were newly forming with the emergence of mass culture.

4 What is often forgotten in accounts of women's humour writing at the time is the implicit struggle for power (inherent in such publishing) within the expansion of the humour industry, which, like other cultural industries, was expanding as mass culture took shape. Humour writing for profit in the United States was always an activity with a double significance; it functioned as an effort to secure capital and as an effort to direct one dimension of a public discourse working through the contradictions of nineteenth-century democratic government.¹ Women humour writers challenged boundaries established by patriarchal interests, and inevitably brought to light deep contradictions between patriarchy and democracy. Consequently, women's humour writing, which was always in its own

¹ One might add a third dimension to humour's significance at the time, since it can also function as what Alenka Zupancic calls "an internal condition of all ideology" (4).

specific way liminal, almost always took up political issues explicitly, such as suffrage and labour, operating as it did in a very different context from men's humour writing, which was not under the same burden to justify itself and to explain its own contradictions.

5 Holley's humour writing needs to be understood, then, in a specific historical context that transformed even the most light-hearted writing into a charged confrontation with powerful social and political forces. The genre that she invented itself can only be understood in such terms. What appears strange to us about the genre, when we read it today, marks how women's place in the humour industry, and in political culture, has changed; and what appears familiar marks what has remained durable.

6 The first point to note about Holley's humour genre is precisely what made it familiar, and therefore conservative, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Her character Samantha, for instance, who dominates most of her writing, was represented through a first-person narrative that drew on established regional and dialect traditions in the U.S. humour industry. Two of the most popular humour traditions, these genres, which were indeed usually blended together, made humour out of working primarily through matters of identity. Where you were from and how you talked were understood, much as they are today, to index how you thought and, in many ways, who you were in any context that mattered. As historians of these genres have shown, the political significance of regional and dialect humour was always at least double: while such writing gave "voice" to identity groups considered marginal geographically and politically, they also generally sought to place that voice in a safe place that did not threaten the established hierarchy of identity in the United States, or even to explain the supposed inevitability of the places occupied by these marginal identities.

7 In keeping with such generic and political conventions, Holley's character Samantha writes in a voice that is both challenging and submissive. By virtue of writing in a thick dialect, Samantha immediately positions herself as the classic "other" of regionalist writing, who may be interesting for her "surprising" wit but who is also always placed low on established hierarchies of literary and social value by virtue of her wit being precisely "surprising." In the preface to *Samantha at Saratoga, or Racin' After Fashion*, Samantha opens with a classic conversation between herself and her pathetic, but loving, husband Josiah:

When Josiah read my dedication he said 'it wuz a shame to dedicate a book that it had took most a hull bottle of ink to write, to a lot of creeters that he wouldn't have in the back yard.

But I explained it to him, that I didn't mean tramps with broken hats, variegated pantaloons, ventilated shirt-sleeves, and barefooted. But I meant tramps with diamond ear-ring, and cuff-buttons, and Saratoga trunks, and big accounts at their bankers.

And he said, 'Oh, shaw!'

But I went on nobly, onmindful of that shaw, as female pardners have to be, if they accomplish all the talkin' they want to.

And sez I, 'It duz seem sort o' pitiful, don't it, to think how sort o' homeless the Americans are a getting'? How the posys that blow under the winders of Home are left to waste their sweet breaths amongst the weeds, while them that used to love'em are a climbin' mountain tops after strange noseays.' (1-2)

This opening establishes in remarkably efficient fashion the conventions of Holley's democratic humour genre, the two principle characters, and the basic nature of their relationship. Samantha speaks – and writes – in a thick, folksy dialect immediately recognizable in its diction, and even in its look on the page. She is also immediately engaging in a disagreement with her husband, who, one gathers, has no chance of winning the debate, despite Samantha's strategic submissive positioning of herself as a "female pardner" who must put up with bad language, and mistaken thinking, from her male pardner.

8 The democratic nature of the genre is multiple. First, the conversation, though gendered and subject at least on the surface to patriarchal conventions, is in fact an actual debate that could be won by either partner. Second, it considers issues of social and political significance, rather than issues strictly limited to the domestic sphere. Third, it is specifically national in its subject matter, considering as it does the state of America and its people, a state implicitly subject to critique.

9 Beyond these straightforward democratic qualities, however, the passage also captures the contradictions that accompanied political thought in the late-nineteenth-century United States, and it is especially these contradictions that drive the humour, the drama, and the action throughout most of Samantha's adventures. The apparently innocuous discussion is precisely about the political implications of mobility and capital for Americans and for their sense of place at home and in the world. Here, Samantha playfully, but also critically, figures middle-to-upper-class Americans as tramps, who have been transformed into homeless people precisely by taking part in new forms of mass mobility provided by emerging travel and tourist industries (Holley here is also taking part in the humour sub-genre that Mark Twain famously engaged in much of his early travel humour writing). Class, nation and home are all being refigured by these new forms of mobility, and Samantha is trying to work through the implications of these new practices by playfully reversing the identity of the wealthy by figuring them as tramps without a home, though they are still "American."

10 This theme also plays into the political contradiction for the United States as a kind of democracy that was also a kind of empire, and a kind of democracy that also figured women consistently as incomplete citizens. Amy Kaplan's theorization and historicization of what she

calls the “manifest domesticity” of nineteenth-century, gendered, public and private discourse is relevant here. Kaplan puts forward the concept to question “how the ideology of separate spheres contributed to creating an American empire [and] how the concept of domesticity made the nation into home at a time when its geopolitical border were expanding rapidly through violent confrontations,” arguing that “domesticity is a mobile and often unstable discourse that can expand or contract the boundaries of home and nation” (Kaplan 26). Holley’s preface, and the genre she writes in, clearly participates in precisely this form of political practice. The key point to note here is that the generic conventions she deploys are gendered according to the specific historical moment in which she writes, and bound up with the contradictions of the politics of the time.

11 The fact that Holley writes in a humour genre, and in a historically and politically located humour industry, adds some new dimensions to Kaplan’s influential theory of manifest domesticity. For Kaplan,

[t]he notion of domestic policy makes sense only when distinguished from foreign policy, and, uncoupled from the foreign, national issues are never labeled domestic. The concept of foreign policy depends on the idea of the nation as a domestic space imbued with a sense of at-homeness, in contrast to an external world perceived as alien and threatening. Reciprocally, a sense of the foreign is necessary to erect the boundaries that enclose the nation as home. Domesticity, furthermore, refers not to a static condition, but to a process of domestication, which entails conquering and taming the wild, the natural, and the alien. ‘Domestic’ in this sense is related to the imperial project of civilizing, and the conditions of domesticity often become markers that distinguish civilization from savagery. Domestication implies that the home contains within itself those wild or foreign elements that must be tame; domesticity monitors the borders between the civilized and the savage as it regulates the traces of savagery within its purview.” (Kaplan *The Anarchy of Empire* 25-26)

Samantha’s opening worry about the loss of home for wealthy Americans participating in emerging modes of mobility wrestles with the problems of the relationship between empire, nation, “away” and “home” that Kaplan identifies as key points of conflict for the period. As a humourist, however, rather than a specifically political, historical, or travel writer, Holley’s intervention opens up new forms of worry and new forms of conflict. Samantha’s position in this discourse is intimately bound up in her identity as a rural, working-to-middle-class woman who challenges standard identity roles as a writer and as a humourist, but who also accepts those roles through communicating in dialect and regionalist conventions. Her worry is humorous partly for its incongruity; what business does such a woman have concerning herself with such matters? And it is humorous, too, because of the incongruity that obtains in a supposed democracy where everyone should be able to participate in any discourse without raising any kind of incongruity at all.

12 What should be clear in the discussion so far is that Holley was writing, through Samantha, in a special kind of humorous genre that is specifically gendered and public, what I call a kind of women's public humour. The public-ness of the humour is both trivial and substantial. Simply publishing is inherently a public act – though even this trivial point is loaded with all of the significance for women at the time, when doing anything public in a social context was understood through a gendered distinction between the public and private spheres. More substantially, Holley was participating in a public, political debate in an effort to transform that debate and the social and political conditions that positioned women as inferior to men.

13 Below I will discuss some of Holley's rhetorical strategies for participating in, and transforming, public debate, through humorous writing that advocated for women's suffrage. First, however, it is important to identify and discuss Samantha's carefully chosen political position of "megumness," or mediumness. Samantha consistently argues that though she is political, and seeking changes in U.S. society and politics in the interests of "female pardners" or "wimmen," she is not a radical. This position functioned rhetorically in two ways, as a humorous incongruity (Samantha was in many ways clearly a radical) and to demonstrate her liberal democratic political credentials (liberal democracy since the eighteenth century has usually identified itself as the not-radical political position occupying space between more "extreme" forms of political organization). Jane Curry has argued that Holley and Samantha actually participated in a conservative politics:

Like the suffragists of the 1890s, Holley was optimistic about what female suffrage could accomplish, and she was essentially conservative in ideology. The argument that women who vote would be better wives certainly implies no radical change in sex roles. Though she considered herself "megum" in all things, Samantha was rejecting only the frivolous, overdone, and sentimental characteristics of the genteel tradition. The morality and conservatism were still hers. Like the suffragists, who were primarily white, middle-class Anglo-Saxon Protestants, she encouraged social reform, not social revolution. The basic structure of society was not attacked, merely women's lack of representation in it. (11-12)

Although Curry is correct in many ways to say that Holley was conservative ideologically, it is incorrect to claim, broadly, that Holley's notion of women's suffrage is not radical. Like Holley, many women's suffragists argued that suffrage would not change established gender hierarchies, but this was always either a naïve argument or, more often, a carefully considered, disingenuous position taken rhetorically to push through new suffrage legislation. Although expanding suffrage is no radical assault on parliamentary democracy, which it may be argued is inherently conservative and patriarchal, still, within the context of the late-

nineteenth-century political situation in the United States, women's suffrage necessarily meant a significant change in gender roles, since it granted women increased participation in the public sphere. This is why securing women's suffrage was a major goal for what would have been called "conservative" elements at the time, even as it was viciously attacked by other conservative interests.

14 Curry's error underscores the value of thinking through Holley's writing and politics in generic terms as women's public humour. The issue is not only that such terms guarantee a historical specificity when gauging the relationship between gender, humour, and politics. More to the point, seeing women's humour in such terms grants us the opportunity to appreciate the multiple dimensions in which women's political and popular writing seeks to transform social relations. Simply by writing humour for profit within the humour industry, Holley was taking part in a form of affective, or emotional, labour emerging with mass culture that was typically figured as masculine (though this had been challenged many times throughout the nineteenth century by sentimental women writers, like Harriet Beecher Stowe, and humor writers, like Fanny Fern).² The act itself, then, was transformative even in its economic dimension. By writing a politically charged humour, often focused on specific issues like race or suffrage, Holley was taking part in a major public debate. Also, by writing about less overtly political issues such as home and mobility, issues typically considered of traditional "feminine" interest by virtue of their relationship to the private sphere, Holley was participating in the manifest domesticity that was intimately bound up with the nation and with empire. And finally, by grafting together familiar literary genres, such as regional and dialect humour, Holley was leading the transformation of a recognized, popular, and profitable genre.

15 In *Samantha on the Woman Question* the themes of mobility, politics, and women's rights (which were bound to gendered issues of labour, ownership, and freedom) come together in a particularly important, and particularly significant, encounter Samantha has with a senator. Here, Samantha travels to Washington, D.C., in order to secure justice and improved living conditions for a friend, Serepta, who suffers in material and social ways due

² Holley's writing can also be understood historically through the emergence of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call "affective labour," or what Arlie Russell Hoschild calls "emotional labour." Although it is usually argued that such labour became increasingly dominant later in the twentieth-century, it is clear that such labour was already of great significance to the public sphere, and to mass culture, in the late nineteenth century. For analyses of affective labour and its relation to the public in a U.S. and global context, see, among the many works available today on affect and emotion, Ann Cvetkovich *An Archive of Feeling*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Arlie Russell Hoschild *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Eva Illouz *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*, and Daniel M. Gross *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science*.

to patriarchal citizenship laws. The senator parrots political clichés that were used to justify the distinction between the public and the private that was itself used to justify women's lower status as citizens in the United States. For instance, after hearing some of Samantha's position, the senator says "I would love to oblige Serepta.... because she belongs to such a lovely sect [sex]. Wimmen are the loveliest, most angelic creatures that ever walked the earth; they are perfect, flawless, like snow and roses" (85).

16 But he is humourously unprepared for Samantha, who, though marked by her rural-regionalism, her femininity, and her dialect, as inferior to the senator, has in fact been participating in political marches, and political debate, for a long time. After Samantha rejects the angelic feminine stereotype, and false references to the manly character of her husband, the senator notes:

"Ah, your husband! Yes, wimmen should have husbands instead of rights. They do not need rights; they need freedom from all cares and sufferin'. Sweet lovely beings! let them have husbands to lift them above all earthly cares and trials! Oh! Angels of our homes,' sez he, liftin' his eyes to the heavens and kinder shettin' 'em, some as if he wuz goin' into a spazzum. 'Fly around, ye angels, in your native hants; mingle not with rings and vile laws, flee away, flee above them!'" (85-6).

In the immanent structure of the narrative, the senator's position is ridiculous for its simple errors; neither Serepta nor Samantha are angels, and Josiah is a weak and foolish, if devoted, man who has no real understanding of politics or the world. But as a confrontation between Samantha and an urban, powerful man, the passage is significant for its generic qualities as women's public humour. The senator's larger error is to either parrot, or to actually believe, the oppressive clichés of the dominant, patriarchal, and stereotypical understanding of women's identity.

17 Samantha's reply underscores, with ferocity, the political nature of the senator's errors:

Cease instantly, or my sickness will increase, for such talk is like thoroughwort or lobelia to my moral and mental stomach. You know and I know that these angelic tender bein's, half-clothed, fill our streets on icy midnights, huntin' up drunken husbands and fathers and sons. They are driven to death and to moral ruin by the miserable want liquor drinkin' entails. They are starved, they are froze, they are beaten, they are made childless and hopeless by drunken husbands killin' their own flesh and blood.... If men really believed all they say about wimmen, and I think some on 'em do in a dreamy sentimental way – If wimmen are angels, give 'em the rights of angels. Who ever hearn of a angel foldin' up her wing and goin' to the poor-house or jail through the fault of somebody else?.... You ort to keep the angels from bein' tormented and bruised and killed, etc." (87-9)

Significantly, Samantha's voice seeks to take away the voice of the senator. Here, Samantha is not only securing a voice for women in the public sphere, but also trying to shut up the voice of an elected, masculine official. Moreover, she does it not with flowery language – and here is the great transformative virtue of Holley's genre – but with an ugly dialect that *matches* the ugly details she lists to make her political point. Her rural identity, her dialect, and her gender cross boundaries of publicness by virtue of resisting change (Samantha would lose all her subversive power, and humour, if she became urbanized and genteel), and it is their contrast to urban, dominant rules of publicness that reveal the contradictions inherent to the gendered, political and public culture of the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Modern Contradictions: Mobility, Gender, and the Nation

18 One of the contradictions that runs deep through Holley's writing about Samantha is the diametrically opposed mobility of the character and the author. While Samantha travels to fair after fair, and meeting after meeting, Holley rarely left her home, gathering details for her accounts by reading guide books and other forms of documentation produced by and for the events. The temptation is to read this contradiction as a biographical curiosity and hypocrisy, or simply as a mark of individual conservatism that contrasts with individual radicalism; the differences between Holley and Samantha seem to point, on the surface, back to Samantha's declared "megumness" and what Curry claims is Holley's basic conservatism. But investigating the truth of the contradiction reveals much about women's public humour at the time, and the gendered nature of writing, humour and mobility in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century United States.

19 Almost all of Samantha's books engage, even in their titles, issues of mobility; this is one of the most striking qualities of women's public humour as a distinct genre. *Samantha in Europe*, *Samantha at the Centennial*, *Samantha at the St. Louis Exposition*, *Samantha at the [Chicago] World's Fair*, *Samantha at Coney Island and a Thousand Other Islands*, *Samantha at Saratoga*, and *Samantha Among the Brethren*, among others, speak directly to Samantha's exciting and, by the generalized standards of women's place in the public sphere at the time, challenging will to move about the nation outside of her home and private sphere. These are accompanied by titles that register a concomitant political mobility, such as *Samantha on the Woman Question*, *Samantha on the Race Problem*, and *Samantha on Children's Rights*. Clearly, such titles were designed to sell books within a humour industry that sought to secure profit by participating in timely events and issues of national significance. Holley's books

could sell as humour books, as travel books, as political books, and as women's books. They could even sell as gift-books and as "perennial" or timeless records of the fairs and events Samantha attended.³ Even the genre itself, then, was characterized by its own kind of generic mobility, crossing almost as many boundaries as possible within the popular book industry in order to sell the maximum number of copies.

20 The financial interests that motivated much of the genre, it is important to note, do not separate or contradict the democratic qualities of Holley's writing, but rather mark just how much democracy at the time was contradictorily caught up in capital. If the fact that this democratic and politically transformative genre was bound to capital is contradictory, it is not only a contradiction of the genre but a contradiction of democracy at the time, and a contradiction worth exploring. The significance of Holley's writing as an instance of the humour industry at the time is precisely that women's public writing was as bound up with the interests of capital in the emerging mass culture of the time as men's writing, even though dominant representations of women's participation in public life, including those circulated by women's political movements (such as suffrage), might emphasize the "purity" or "angelic" dimension of women's participation in the public.⁴

21 The democratic qualities of Holley's writing, and women's public humour, then, register in multiple political and social dimensions. The very fact of Holley's participation in writing for money marks a transgressive (though by no means news) participation in traditionally masculine dimensions of public activity. Moreover, as Mark Simpson notes in *Trafficking Subjects: The Politics of Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America*, Samantha's material mobility (as opposed to her social or political mobility) also marks a certain potentially transformative challenge. Simpson writes, in his discussion of forms of "fugitive mobility:"

At stake is an understanding that, in Lora Romero's words, 'divides the world into (on the one hand) a public and masculine sphere of abstract rights and (on the other hand) a private and feminine sphere of affective bonds,' and that typically associates masculinity with motion and femininity with stasis.' (76)

³ A contemporary advertisement for Samantha at the World's Fair, held by the Downs collection at the Winterthur library in Delaware, brags that "no home library should be without a copy," claiming collector status for the book and implying a probably exaggerated literary and historical significance for the text.

⁴ See Margaret Finnegan's *Selling Suffrage* for a rigorous account of the relationship between capital, mass culture, and women's politics in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. For reasons of space, I have not provided a detailed theorization of the public in this paper. Important texts in the field, for my understanding of the public, include Jurgen Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, and the critical, feminist reply to Habermas of Nancy Fraser in "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." Of interest generally, but also specifically for issues relating to the United States, are Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* and Mike Hill and Warren Montag's collection *Masses, Classes, and the Public Sphere*.

Samantha's life is marked by a complicated interplay of (sometimes only mildly) transgressive public mobility and "conservative" private stasis. She travels again and again to places and events of popular national significance and expounds upon them in an exaggerated, humourously opinionated voice, a voice that contrasts incongruously (and again humourously) with her stable home life.

22 For though the public life she participates in is full of the modern wonders of world fairs, and the democratic excitement of political contests and debates, her private life is a relative rock of stability, much like Holley's own writing career registers in tension with her intensely immobile home life. Josiah and Samantha fight and disagree, but at the end of the day they always love each other and their emotional family life, we can be certain, will always remain essentially the same. Even her nominal status as "Josiah Allen's Wife," which often graces the title of Holley's books as the name of the author, registers this dual relationship to public, democratic mobility and private, familial stasis. The arch-patriarchal name, already somewhat outdated by the time Holley was writing, signifies in multiple ways. First, it is humorous insofar as it is old fashioned, a quality that plays incongruously off of the many ways in which Holley's women's public humour genre is characterized by so many of the hallmarks of modernity. Second, it is humorous insofar as its piety is clearly ironic; the loud, opinionated, politicized Samantha is not so demure or naïve as to truly assume such a subservient role to old-fashioned patriarchy. Third, and perhaps most significantly, the name, which is essentially a kind of double pseudonym (operating as a playful pseudonym for Samantha and a real pseudonym for Holley), sets up one extreme of subservience to patriarchy against another extreme of commitment to feminism that is supposed to situate Samantha right in the middle, in the ambiguous liberal space of "megumness" that captures the inconsistencies of idealized liberal democratic subjectivity in the nineteenth-century United States.

23 The rhetorical position of megumness, as it relates to women's public humour, must be understood historically in terms of the bonds that obtained between publicness, emotional life, and gender at the time. Glenn Hendler explains in *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* that novels conducted multiple forms of cultural and political work that intersected with dominant and subversive models of emotional life at the time. He argues "that nineteenth-century American writers, critics, and other cultural arbiters operated under the assumption that novels had public implications.... and that they embedded these assumptions into their novels" (22). In generic terms, such writers often

participated, directly or indirectly, in the sentimental discourse that was popular throughout the century. He explains,

[t]he novel was thus not just part of an institution of the public sphere, providing an occasion for ‘rational-critical discussion’ [a formulation made popular by Habermas in his classic discussion of the public sphere], it was also an instrument of subject formation, producing, through acts of identification, a publicly oriented form of subjectivity. This conjunction of the psychic and the public, the emotional and the political, is what I have been referring to as the sentimental politics of affect. (22)

Hendler’s articulation of the role of the novel in the period is borne out by my analysis of Holley’s writing of women’s public humour, except that, while Holley does indeed participate in sentimental discourse, she primarily draws on humour over sentiment, producing a slightly different “politics of affect” from that discussed by Hendler. Moreover, because she writes in the first person through the character of Samantha, her books not only function as instruments of subject formation, but also as fictional *instances* of such formation

24 One discussion in *Samantha at the World’s Fair*, which takes place prior to her trip, engages diverse political positions through the humourous, down-home dialect-driven dialogue of Samantha, and her common-sense, megum, and yet somehow radical, political engagement with serious social issues. A self-made millionaire relative of her husband’s, “Elnathan Allen, Esquire” visits the couple’s home, and promotes for his child elements of a fresh-air health cure fad popular at the time. Having put his daughter up in a very expensive hotel, he proceeds to brag, somewhat hypocritically, about how good she is to the poor. The hypocrisy is doubled, however, when we discover that he owns tenements houses in “the very lowest part of the city.... Miserable old rotten affairs, down in stiflin’ alleys, and courts, breeders of disease, and crime, and death” (28). Samantha’s thoughts on the matter are extremely critical, though still couched, somewhat, in the generous language of megumness:

And while he wuz talkin’ to such great length, and with such a satisfied and comfortable look onto his face, about the vital necessities of pure air and beautiful surroundin’s, in order to make children well and happy, my thoughts kept a-roamin’, and I couldn’t help it. Down from the lovely spot where [his daughter] wuz, down, down, into the dretful places that [Samantha’s friend] Barzelia had told me about. Where squalor, crime, and disease, and death walked hand in hand, gatherin’ new victims at every step, and where the children wuz a-droppin’ down in the poisinous air like dead leaves in swamp. (29)

The passage is a classic example of Samantha’s approach to political and social issues, and a fine example of how women’s public humour also engaged sentimental discourse and contemporary politics. Holley consistently represents Samantha’s “thoughts;” indeed, Samantha always thinks before she speaks. Her thoughts, however, are not only rational and

critical, but also joined to emotions; this is emphasized through aesthetic terminology such as “lovely” and “dretful,” and by figurative language and melodramatic imagery, such as “death walked hand in hand.” Samantha’s thoughts may be only “roaming,” but such self-characterization by Samantha of her own position should be familiar by now: “roaming” is a humble way to figure her thoughts, even as it brings into view the gendered, modern mobility she participates in. Only here such mobility is democratic not in a material, traveling sense, but in an intellectual, political, and manifestly public sense.

25 After thinking, always Samantha’s second step (the first step is conversation), in engaging public discourse, Samantha engages Elnathan in critical discussion, and receives initially the traditional, patriarchal response to women’s thinking: laughter.

I kep a-thinking’ of this, and finally I tackled Elnathan about it, and he laughed, Elnathan did, and begun to talk about the swarms and herds of useless criminal humanity a-cumberin’ the ground, and he threw a lot of statisticks at me. But they didn’t hit me. Good land! I wuzn’t afraid on’em, nor I didn’t care anything about ‘em, and I gin him to understand that I didn’t.

And in the cause of duty I kep on a-tacklin’ him about them housen of hisen, and advisin’ him to tear ‘em down, and build wholesome ones, and in the place of the worst ones, to help make some little open breathin’ places for the poor creeters down there, with a green tree now and then. (29)

After some more debate, and some more “statisticks,” Elnathan, rather than taking Samantha’s argument seriously,

kinder laughed agin, and assumed something of a jokelar air – such as men will when they are a-talkin’ to wimmen – dretful exasperating, too – and sez he - ‘You are a Philosopher, Cousin Samantha, and you must know such housen as you are a-talkin’ about are advantageous in one way, if nin no other – they help to reduce the surplus population. If it wuzn’t for such places, and for the electric wires, and bomb cranks, and accidents, etc., the world would git too full to stand up in.’ (30)

This is too much for Samantha to take, and she proceeds to the fourth step in her form of public discourse, a political speech. Explicitly indignant, and calling on Elnathan to “come down on the level of humanity and human brotherhood,” Samantha asks Elnathan a classic democratic question in response to the administrative language of statistics, which, in modernity, have always held a contradictory relationship to the public practice of rational-critical debate. She asks him to imagine himself having been born into such a tenement, where he too might be figured by a privileged, wealthy landlord as a problem of “surplus population.” But Elnathan is unmoved.

26 What does ultimately move Elnathan is the illness of his daughter. After visiting his tenements, she becomes ill from the conditions and from the shock of witnessing those conditions. Samantha imagines that the sick girl dreams, in her illness, of a better world that is

a little more radical than one that might be expected from a woman who figures herself as megum:

She might have pictured in her dreams the drama that is ever bein' enacted on the pages of history – of the sorely oppressed masses turnin' on the oppressors, and driving' them, with themselves, out to ruin.... [and pictured] When co-operative business would equalize wealth to a greater degree – when the government would control the great enterprises, needed by all, but addin' riches to but few – when comfort would nourish self-respect, and starved vice retreat before the dawnin' light of happiness. (43)

Shocked by his daughter's illness, Elnathan changes and does what he can to see this kind of world emerge: "He said it wuz a vision" (44).

27 The incident captures the key elements of women's public humour that I have identified in this paper, and that mark the genre as participating transformatively and performatively in the politics of affect discussed by Hendler. Samantha's dialect, personality, and gender contrast humourously, and politically, with the serious issues she engages critically. Her observations track the emotional politics of rational-critical debate, noting with informed insight and indignation the patriarchal function of laughter in democratic political debates that were always gendered in multiple ways. However, even as Samantha crosses gender boundaries between the public and the private, she still follows the generic script of sentimentality, in which people are transformed politically not so much through thought and debate as through emotional insight and even trauma. Subject formation, here, is figured also as subject transformation, and this is the basic, though often most invisible, function, purpose, and insight of women's public humour in the late-nineteenth-century United States. Holley's commitment to the generic qualities of women's public humour inevitably kept her characters locked in dominant forms of political patriarchy, but her public, emotional, literary, and political labour also broke fresh ground for women's expression in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century United States.

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“The Women’s Parliament:” Political Oratory, Humor, and Social Change

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Abstract:

Why does humour change minds in politics when logic cannot? This article explores this question in the context of the suffragist movement in Manitoba, Canada in 1914, when the Women’s Political Equity League found logical arguments ineffective in persuading provincial legislators to grant women voting rights. When the provincial premier rejected their petition, the Political Equity League staged a series of burlesques around the province of Manitoba in which they reversed the roles of men and women to make the issue of enfranchisement more salient to voters. These satires of the reigning premier have been credited for making women in Manitoba among the first to vote in the Western World. I draw on several rhetorical theories of humour, including those of Cicero, Campbell, Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, to account for the societal shift in support of votes for women as a result of this parody. I conclude that when well-supported and trenchant logic proves ineffective in bringing about social change, innovative emotional appeals can provide the impetus for listeners to laugh uproariously and then rethink what may have been entrenched political or ideological beliefs.

“Do you not know of the disgraceful happenings in countries cursed by manhood suffrage? [. . .] Although it is quite true, as you say, the polls are only open once in four years—when men once get the habit—who knows where it will end [. . .] Politics has a blighting, demoralizing influence on men. It dominates them, hypnotizes them pursues them even after their earthly career is over. Time and again it has been proven that men came back and voted—even after they were dead” - Pearl Watson in Purple Springs by Nellie McClung, (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1921): 285.

1 In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many citizens of North America and Europe were working to secure voting rights for women, driven by the recognition that without them, women were unable to participate fully as citizens: they had no recourse to change bad laws to which they were subject. Women’s desire for the vote grew out of social activist work that many undertook in response to social conditions they found abhorrent. In the U.S., the recognition that women were relatively powerless in the social and political sphere grew out of the abolitionist movement, when speeches and rallies failed to persuade male voters to support either the cause of abolition or candidates who supported it. In Canada and Britain, women were moved to argue for full participation in society in response to the poor working conditions of women in low-paid service jobs, the unequal treatment of women

before the law, and their inability to effect change to improve women's lives generally. Isabelle Bassett describes the situation:

Based partly on a belief that women possessed a higher moral sense than men, a form of feminism developed that aimed to harness this morality and apply it to the good of society in general. However, when reform-minded women tried to institute social changes, they discovered that they had little hope of making any progress without the effective power of the vote. (129)

By the second decade of the 20th century, the suffrage movements in North America and Britain had taken divergent paths towards achieving their goal. In the U.S., organizations worked to secure the required number of signatures on petitions in the early steps of having the American constitution amended to give women the right to vote. In Britain, suffragists had engaged violent protest to attract attention. In Canada, the suffrage movement focused its efforts at the provincial level, with activists—both male and female—speaking at rallies in support of their cause. Nellie McClung, president of the Political Equity League in Manitoba, directed the campaign for women's enfranchisement in that province. Of her leadership, Grant MacEwan notes,

Mrs. McClung, with no less zeal [than the British suffragist Emmeline Pankhurst], believed it was not necessary to go on window-breaking sprees in order to gain attention. Her oratory and logic were the best of all instruments[,] and she and her friends resolved to carry their cause directly to the Premier of Manitoba with an orderly show of strength. (163)

McClung felt that persuasive argument was the best tactic for achieving their goal. As a popular speaker, she believed the power of rational argument would be most effective in showing the provincial leadership the advantages of extending the franchise to women.

2 But what happens when logical argument fails? In Britain, suffragists turned to violent demonstration. In Canada, suffragists turned to humor. Rebuffed by a patronizing and ideologically entrenched provincial government, McClung and the Political Equity League of Manitoba staged a public burlesque or satiric stage performance called "The Women's Parliament," in which a delegation of men petitioned the all-female legislature for voting rights. When the same arguments used against women were refashioned to apply to men, the audience was hugely entertained by the absurdity. Even more remarkable, they changed their minds. What is the persuasive effect of humor? Why was the parody of the Premier of Manitoba in 1914 effective in swaying public opinion on the issue of votes for women when logical argument went nowhere?

3 In response to an earlier version of this paper, Jamie MacKinnon argued that the Mock Parliament was an instance of "those with little power refusing to take seriously the huffing

and puffing and posturing of those with (or who are mouthpieces for) real power.” Several rhetorical theorists would seem to support MacKinnon’s contention that humor is the tool of the powerless, and this may be true with rhetoric generally but humor’s relationship to politics and political rhetoric, I would argue, is different. As Nellie McClung and the delegates to the Manitoba Legislature were to discover, logic is not effective for changing political belief because it is ideological, part of a system of belief. Humor, a disarming emotional appeal, may be effective against ideology in a way that logic cannot be because it approaches the topic in a non-threatening way, cajoling listeners into considering alternative viewpoints that they are likely to reject out-right if presented logically. If people can be made to laugh at a parody of their beliefs, they start see how those beliefs may need amendment: certainly many of the spectators at the performances of the Women’s Parliament would have been sympathetic to Premier Roblin’s beliefs at that time, but within two years of the performances many fewer of those spectators still shared his beliefs.

4 In this article, I analyze this historical event—the staging of a “Women’s Parliament” in Winnipeg, MB—to try to account for the persuasive power of humor in the suffragist movement in Canada in the early 20th century. Historical accounts credit the staging of “The Women’s Parliament” as a tactic that contributed directly to women in Manitoba being among the first in the Western World to vote. First, I draw on two historical theories of rhetoric—those of Cicero and George Campbell (both of whom tried to account for the persuasive power of humor)—to identify what made the perspectives of opponents to the suffragist movement in Manitoba in 1914 a suitable target for humor. Then, using the concepts of dissociation and reversal as defined by Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, I analyze several examples of humor from the Women’s Parliament to account for the shift in societal attitudes in favor of the enfranchisement of women as an eventual result of this parody. Finally, I examine how the Women’s Parliament constitutes a form of subversive political humor based on the level of authority that it targeted.

5 But before the suffragist movement in Manitoba resorted to humor, supporters took their best shot at persuading the government of the day based on logic and persuasive oratory. In January 1914 Nellie McClung lead a delegation of several hundred women and men before the Manitoba legislature to present arguments as to why then-premier, Rodmond Roblin, and his majority Conservative government should support a bill being introduced to grant provincial voting rights to women. The delegates had five speakers, including McClung (the president of the Political Equity League); the president of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.); the secretary of the Grain Growers’ Association of Manitoba; and several

prominent activists, one identified as Rev. R.W. Martinson. These speakers were selected to demonstrate to the Premier and the government that this legislation had support from a diverse cross-section of the populace.

6 Canadian suffrage arguments in the early twentieth century were based on two somewhat contradictory assumptions: “the one, that women were more moral than men, and the other, that they were equal to men” (Bassett 139). These assumptions were evident in the arguments laid before the Premier and the Manitoba legislature. *The Winnipeg Free Press*, reporting on the interchange between the Premier and the delegates, reported on Jan. 27, 1914, that

all [of the delegates] emphasized that the women of the province should have votes in order to better the conditions, not only in political circles, but to extend the influence of women over the homes. It was claimed by the speakers in favor of the movement that the influence of the mothers ceased when the young man or woman left the home, but with women having votes in the political life of the province the refining influence of the home would be felt everywhere. (53)

This summary invokes an underlying belief in the superior moral influence of women: the moral training of young people should not end when they leave home, but the current conditions under the purview of men did not provide this much-needed guidance.

7 In his reply Roblin also drew on this assumption of the moral superiority of women when he responded that “the early training he had received from his mother . . . had instilled into him a great respect for women that placed them on a much higher plane than man” (*The Winnipeg Free Press*, Jan. 27, 1914). He acknowledged the worldwide movement in English-speaking countries for the enfranchisement of women, and he implied that the violent approach favored by the suffrage movement in Britain should provide compelling evidence that women everywhere were not ready for the vote: “But if a few short days of disappointment as in England, caused such hysteria as to endanger human life and result in the destruction of millions of dollars worth of property, is there not cause for the authorities to hesitate in extending the suffrage to women?” (*The Winnipeg Free Press*, Jan. 27, 1914). He points to the behavior of women and the response of legislators in Britain to justify his own rejection of the delegation’s arguments and his maintenance of the belief that “the extension of the franchise would be a backward step” (*The Winnipeg Free Press*, Jan. 27, 1914). He also noted that he would vote against any resolution because “at present he could not see what the women would gain” (*The Winnipeg Free Press*, Jan. 27, 1914). Clearly, the reasoning laid out by the delegates in their presentation, however sound, did not persuade Roblin to rethink his position that the status quo served women well.

8 The delegation was disappointed but not discouraged by their lack of success, although they believe that they had exhausted the traditional routes using logical argument. In response the Political Equity League, one of the organizations that had attended as part of the delegation, rented the Walker Theatre in Winnipeg where they staged “a burlesque skit¹ in which an all-woman Parliament debated whether to give men the vote” (Labarge 17); that is, a delegation of men approached the all-female legislature to petition for voting rights and were turned away with arguments resembling those offered by Roblin.² The burlesque was performed for several nights running to packed houses. McClung, president of the Political Equity League, assumed the role of Premier, creating a “wickedly witty parody of Roblin” (Labarge 17). How witty was it? The conservative newspaper and pro-government organ, the *Telegram*, reported of her performance, “Mrs. McClung’s reply to the appeal for ‘votes for men’ was the choicest piece of sarcasm ever heard locally” (Qtd in Bassett 140). In her later literary recounting of the experience published in *Purple Springs* in 1921, McClung reprised her speech. Here is an excerpt that captures the flavor of her satire. She has her main character, Pearl Watson, playing the Premier, imitating his voice, phrasing, and physical mannerisms:

But, gentlemen, you are your own answer to the question; you are the product of an age which has not seen fit to bestow the gift you ask, and who can say that you are not splendid specimens of mankind? No! No! Any system which can produce the virile, splendid type of men we have before us today, is good enough for me, and, if it is good enough for me—it is good enough for anybody! (282)

In this passage, the female Premier (and parody of Roblin), Pearl Watson economically frames a complex, sexist argument. First, she objectifies the men by focusing solely on their physical attributes and suggesting those are sufficient to justify their existence (they don’t need to *do* anything). Second, she turns this objectification into evidence to support the status quo—a system that produced these good-looking men needs no change. Finally, she arrogantly offers herself as the measure of the world: “if it is good enough for me—it is good enough for anybody!” Such arguments are specious when directed toward women; the way that McClung has Watson recast them to apply to men highlights their absurdity. In the argument framed here, McClung has exemplified Cicero’s point in *De Oratore* regarding humor in oratory: “men [and women] are most delighted with a joke when the laugh is raised by the thought and the language in conjunction” (154). In this passage, the source of

¹ Walter Blair notes that burlesques were immensely popular in 19th Century [North] American culture. When considering a means for critiquing antiquated ideas, the Political Equity League would have been aware of this popular tradition for puncturing over-blown sentiments and arguments, and they adapted it to their needs.

² According to Isabelle Bassett, the idea of the mock parliament had originated with suffragists in Ontario who had “used [it] so successfully before the turn of the century” (139).

humorous incongruity arises through conjoining the patronizing appreciation of the delegates' physical appearance (the language) with the recognition that our culture doesn't (or didn't in 1914) objectify or infantilize men so blatantly (the thought).

9 One of the central tools of burlesque is parody (Blair, 241). The Mock Parliament used parody or ridicule to highlight the absurdity of the arguments posed by proponents of the status quo. George Campbell notes that ridicule is "a potent engine" (20) to erroneous perspectives. While he asserts that ridicule is generally "confined to questions of less moment" (20), Campbell articulates the circumstances under which ridicule can be particularly effective:

Ridicule [. . .] is fitter for refuting error than for supporting truth, for restraining from wrong conduct, than for inciting to the practice of what is right [. . .]. it is not properly leveled at the false, but at the absurd in tenets [. . .] it is not the criminal part which it attacks, but that which we denominate as silly or foolish [. . .] it is not falsity or mistake but palpable error or absurdity (a thing hardly confutable by mere argument), which is the object of contempt; and consequently those dogmas are beyond the reach of cool reasoning which are within the rightful confines of ridicule. (20-21)

Campbell notes that ridicule is effective for pointing out error or discouraging wrong conduct, and Premier Roblin's objections to enfranchising women fit Campbell's description. They are not criminal, rather they are foolish and absurd because they rest on sentimental, upper-class, and unrealistic conceptions of women's lives. In fact, the women that Roblin was addressing at this time had settled Manitoba side-by-side with the men, breaking sod, tilling soil, caring for livestock, giving birth in sod-covered shacks carved into the hillsides, and surviving the harsh prairie winters where snow storms in spring and fall could be less than 90 days apart. The implication that such women were too mentally frail and sheltered to engage in politics is delusional. The delegation had attempted the path of "cool reasoning" with its presentation to the legislature, but it found Roblin's objections were, as Campbell notes, "hardly confutable by mere argument," making them an appropriate target for ridicule.

10 In fact, by selecting ridicule as their response, the Political Equity League and its suffragist supporters recast Roblin's arguments—from principled objections to ludicrous maundering. This is the kind of unexpected twist that Campbell notes is the crux of an effective use of humor: "it is the design of wit to excite in the mind an agreeable surprise [. . .]. This end is effected [. . .] in debasing things pompous or seemingly grave" (8), making the surprising deflation of pompous arguments a potent source of humor.

11 Here is another excerpt from McClung's "barely fictionalized account" which sets out several pompous arguments:

But my dear young friends, I am convinced you do not know what you are asking me to do, you do not know what you ask. You have not thought of it, of course, with the natural thoughtlessness of your sex. You ask for something which may disrupt the whole course of civilization. Man's place is to provide for his family, a hard enough task in these strenuous days. We hear of women leaving home, and we hear it with deepest sorrow. Do you know why women leave home? There is a reason. Home is not made sufficiently attractive! Would letting politics enter the home help matters. Ah no! Politics would unsettle our men. Unsettled men mean unsettled bills—unsettled bills mean broken homes—broken vows—and then divorce. Man has a higher destiny than politics. What is a home without a bank account? The man who pays the grocer rules the world. (McClung 283)

The pompous arguments in this passage are several: 1) men (i.e., women) don't think (literally), and therefore don't know what's good for them; 2) allowing men to vote will go far beyond upsetting the status quo (it might "disrupt the . . . course of civilization"; 3) men should not seek to rise above their appointed station (providing for the family); 4) allowing men to vote would distract them from their real work in the home, leading to bankruptcy, and then divorce; 5) individuals who pay the bills/raise children already have the ultimate political and social power (they rule the world), so they don't need any *real* political power. These arguments happen to be as false as they are patronizing.

12 Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's theories about the dissociation of pairs and the persuasive power of reversal are helpful here in identifying Watson's argumentative points and illuminating their speciousness to her listeners. The concept of dissociation involves the "refusal to recognize the existence of a connecting link [between interdependent elements that could originally be considered independent]" (411); in the present case, "Premier" Watson has associated the pair "child/man," in her assertion that the delegates "do not know what you ask. . . with the natural thoughtlessness of your sex" (283), as did the real Premier Roblin two days earlier when he equated child/woman as an associative pair. In other words, they both construct a "natural" and "essential" connecting link between the two entities, child and woman/child and man. In recasting the argument, the suffragists intended to dissociate these ideas by representing the connecting link between child and man as also "natural" and "essential." They relied on listeners to reject the link between the two ideas because child and adult are binary opposites. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue that once the concepts have been dissociated and restructured, listeners do not return to the old association of the two ideas because they see the dissociation as "the inescapable solution" (415). The Political Equity League hoped the Mock Parliament would have this effect on the way viewers thought about women and their relationship to children—they are binary opposites.

13 A second concept that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca identified, reversal, explains why Watson's argument in this example was effective. Reversal refers to the tactic of transposing the established pairs rather than rejecting their association: "The significance of such reversals arises precisely from the fact that they are inserted into an aggregate that is otherwise accepted" (427). In this case, the audience's unquestioned acceptance of an inferior role for women is made salient by reversing the original pairing of child/*woman* vs. adult/*man*. When "man" is aligned with "child" and juxtaposed against "woman/adult," the audience must reconsider their acceptance of the original pairing.

14 Of course, the Mock Parliament used the tactic of reversal on a large scale too, systematically replacing men with women in the re-staging of the government and judiciously replacing *woman* with *man* in revised versions of all of the standard arguments opposing women's enfranchisement. Ultimately, the point of this reversal, at least where the Mock Parliament was concerned, was to transform the issue of votes for women so that members of the audience could no longer hear these standard arguments—the Premier's arguments—without remembering the parody and feeling superior to these ridiculous claims. As Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz note of ridicule, "Naturally, one doesn't want to associate with people or ideas one finds ridiculous" (217). Consequently, the Mock Parliament forced citizens to begin to distance themselves from their current government and its policy about votes for women. A parody is successful because it "makes its case by transforming the familiar [. . .] into something new. The argument sparkles in the tension between the original work and its imitation" (Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz 223). While the effect of a parody may be brief (when the context is lost, so is the effect of the humor), it can be powerful: "The object of a successful parody [. . .] is never seen in quite the same way again" (223). We can no longer take the original seriously.

15 Another way in which the humor may have contributed to a shift in the audience members' ideological stance is to consider how the event used reversal to disarm the sexist arguments of the opposition. The views that Roblin expressed rely on sexist stereotypes to characterize (and insult) all women, including those in the delegation to the Manitoba legislature. When the stereotypes are recast in terms relating to men's lives, humor arises from the resulting incongruity—the infantilizing of men. It also prompts audience members to contemplate the implications of these sexist attitudes from the inside: what if this joke were reality? Merrie Bergman argues that episodes of sexist humor work by creating insult to the individual (usually a woman) who is the butt of the joke. She notes that the insult arises from the necessity that such humor demands of "finding fun in an episode

when part of the stage-setting that we have contributed to the episode, and that is necessary to the fun, hurts someone” (79). While men were likely not hurt by the sexist humor created by the Mock Parliament because they do not inhabit the world characterized by the parody, the reversal does enable them to glimpse a sexist world that objectifies or dehumanizes them and limits their possibilities and opportunities. In this particular case, the Mock Parliament uses sexist humor against fictional men to highlight the plight of real women limited by sexist attitudes and stereotypes.

16 David Paletz identifies four different types of political humor based on the target of the attack, the exact focus of the humor, and its level of seriousness. He notes that the humor moves from supportive through benign and undermining to subversive as the level of political authority targeted increases from an individual occupying the position to policies the individual supports, to the authority position itself, then to the institution with which that authority is associated, through to “the political system as a whole” (485). For example, when the policies supported by a political authority are the target (i.e., Roblin’s opposition to enfranchising women), the political humor can undermine the status quo. When the humor attacks the political system as a whole, the humor is considered subversive because it targets cherished beliefs and ideals rather than political authority figures. Paletz describes three characteristics of subversive humor: 1) it targets figures or concepts of “relatively high authority,” 2) it can contain “disturbing foci,” and 3) it may “[exacerbate] tension in the audience by [a] lack of satisfactory resolution” (491) of the humor. In fact, the Women’s Parliament targets ever-increasing levels of authority as its critique unfolds, but by focusing the critique around the authority figure of Premier Roblin and personalizing the critique of widespread political ideals as policies that he “espouses, promotes, is identified with [in the province], [and] takes responsibility for” (485), the participants mitigate the disturbing focus on legally-enshrined cultural beliefs that only men (of European descent)³ were capable of voting intelligently. Another area that elevates the level of the Mock Parliament’s satire from “benign” or “undermining” to “subversive” is its focus on why women should have the vote: the unexpected shift in focus from votes for women to votes for men in an alternate universe serves to “challenge the audience, bringing to its members truths about authority they might rather not know or actively avoid” (Paletz 486), that is, that women are adults and should be treated as such by institutional authority.

³ Not all men were allowed to vote in 1914; in fact anti-Chinese legislation prevented the enfranchisement of all Canadians of Asian descent until the mid-twentieth century (Audette A1).

17 Although Paletz suggests that audiences may find subversive political humor uncomfortable (he uses the example of Lenny Bruce in the U.S. in the 1960s), in the case of the Mock Parliament in Manitoba in 1914, the crowd appeared to love the political humor and embrace the ideas behind it. Perhaps the Political Equity League chose a propitious or kairotic moment in history when society generally was growing more favorably disposed to the idea that women should vote. The play continued to be performed beyond January 1914 to packed theatres across the province, and the subversive humor had its intended effect: Roblin's stranglehold on the provincial government was reduced to minority rule in a subsequent election, and he was defeated the following year. The Liberal party that replaced him, using the enfranchisement of women as a platform in their campaign, expedited a bill through the provincial legislature to give women full voting rights in January 1916. Historians note, "the evening [at the Walker Theatre] was later given some of the credit for the defeat of Roblin's government the following year" (Labarge 17). While the audiences were mightily entertained by McClung's performance as the paternalistic Premier Roblin, they were also convinced that the women had a legitimate and important argument.

18 This historical event, the Women's Parliament, shows that humor, especially parody or satire, can have a powerfully persuasive impact on topics of significant societal importance. When well-supported and trenchant logic proves ineffective in bringing about social change, innovative emotional appeals (such as incisive satiric commentary) can provide the impetus for listeners to laugh uproariously and then seriously reconsider or even rethink what may have been entrenched political or ideological beliefs. The suffragists who participated in the Women's Parliament used the rhetorical strategy of reversal to recast the enfranchisement debate in terms that made the issues salient to audience members. The depiction of a fictional world in which men were judged too incompetent to vote enabled suffragists to engage the imaginations and the will of their audience members in support of their cause. This satire was an early step in the long process of subverting the status quo, changing male voters' minds so that they embraced the idea of enfranchising women and the political party that identified this issue as central to its election platform. Rather than the iron fist of violence chosen by some British suffragists, the velvet glove of persuasive humor was a most effective strategy for Canadian suffragists.

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«Women scientists resemble guinea pigs...» Anecdotes about women-scientists in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia

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Abstract:

The thematization of the history of gender discriminations, the analysis of changes of their character in Russia after 1985 became possible owing to the collapse of the so-called “soviet scholarship”. From that time on the author collected the anecdotes, that reflect the inequities in the employment status, compensation, and reputational standing of women in the sciences. The tools of folklore studies (folkloristic) have been a crucial resource for understanding the nature, impact, and prospects for changing gender-based forms of oppression. The author hopes that in this spirit this text actively draws on, and contributes to elimination of asymmetry in Russian sciences.

1 The anthropology of professionals, including academics, is a new branch of social and cultural anthropology. It lies at the intersection of ethnology, and qualitative sociology, using in-depth interviews, included observation, and case studies as principal methods and types of research. Although the application of the term "ethnology" to professional academics may seem odd, their traditions can be analyzed in similar terms, with subcultures defined by their presenting features, symbols, attributes and folklore, and social and behavioral norms, forms of communication and stereotypes. I will explore scholars' community, establishing the official standards and the unofficial codes of behavior, lifestyles, forms of routine discourse, symbols, attributes, and practices.

2 The gender focus in my research project emphasizes the examination of the practice of power relations in the academic community, rather than a conventional description of the social and professional lives of men and women. By emphasizing power, my project draws upon feminist theory to provide methodological approaches.

3 Specifically, my analysis relies upon the opposition between *traditional* and *feminist* science, as enunciated by the American cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo. Traditional science is marked by: objectivism – the claims of scientific objectivity, political and emotional neutrality; imperialism - the objectivization of the subject, in which the researcher ‘looks down’ upon the observed phenomenon, in the imperialist manner that the ‘white traveller’ observed indigenous people; monumentalism - the assumption that such phenomena as the structural parameters of the social equilibrium and ethnic culture are unsusceptible to change (Rosaldo 400). Feminist anthropology adopts the opposite methodological basis. The claims of objectivity are replaced by empathy and

involvement, recognizing that respondents' ethnographic and social-psychological information has its own worth, as do the analysts' personal experiences, even though traditional academic discourse have tried to marginalize them. It eschews imperialism and the denigration of the culture being studied, in favor of an analysis of the superstitions and prejudices the analysts bring from their own culture with the same care as the analysis of the culture under study (Rosaldo, *Culture* 30).

4 Investigation of women academics' everyday life provides fertile soil for validation of the methods adopted in the feminist anthropology. Responding to the appeal of German historians researching *everyday life*: "Grabe, wo Du stehst!" (Lindqvist 295). Bulgarian, Belorussian and Russian researchers have developed a project focusing on women scholars' routine realities in the socialist and post-socialist periods. Specifically, the project focuses on women employed in the institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences who have managed to succeed in their professional advancement and creativity.

5 This project is not focused merely on a description of the observed phenomena, but on gaining insight into the mechanisms of change, utilization of time, and modes of the replication of gender asymmetry. For that purpose, the research has compiled both typical and atypical cases. We address these specific questions: What creates women scholars' routine practices? What are the specific meanings assigned to the women scholars' activities within specific social interactions? How does academic community treat women's work and scholarly success? How do other women treat such women?

6 Our initial inquiries allowed us to conclude that first of all scholarly success meant recognition received at the *early* stage in one's professional career, specifically, defense of the second dissertation (Both in Russia (as well as the Soviet Union) instead of a PhD there existed a system of two level dissertations. It was possible to only earn one degree – that of a Candidate of Science (in a specific field). Its level seemed to be comparable to the western PhD). However there was a possibility to move to the next level and earn the so-called Doctorate degree (the corresponding requirements would be different) before reaching the age of forty. At the same case, a subjective estimate of other factors relating to scholarly success (citation index counts, number of grants, invitations for guest lectures, numbers of graduate students (in case of USSR and RF those, pursuing Candidate degree), etc.) reveals their insignificance. Project participants work from the hypothesis that even successful women who have doctoral degrees and the rank of professor (an equivalent of tenure) experience discrimination. Discrimination mechanisms are reproduced via ethic and cultural stereotypes that suppress both overt and latent forms of female dominance in the academic environment.

7 All our respondents consented to narrate their professional and private lives. Usually, professionals observe taboos with regards to working with members of the groups to which they belong: doctors are reluctant to operate on doctors, and psychoanalysts avoid undergoing analysis themselves. However, I did not experience a similar polarization from the subjects of my research. On the contrary, my female respondents wanted to know how their own stories correlated with those of other women and how they fit into the larger study. This was not only a manifestation of curiosity (so often regarded as a female trait), but of professional inquisitiveness. For many of these women, their professional work, even when it is low-paid (underpaid) and is of low prestige, is a means of self-realization. One respondent even termed it a "diagnosis": "Medieval studies for a woman is not a profession, it's a diagnosis."

8 Even in Moscow, the potential pool of respondents is rather small, but their stories are particularly revealing, exhibiting a certain typology based on age, discipline, social and psychological makeup and other factors. This group can serve as a basis for studying how the subordinate, marginalized social status of women in the academic community replicates the existing cultural stereotypes.

9 Three anecdotes about women scientists are particularly revealing:

- Women scientists resemble guinea pigs. Like guinea pigs, they are neither Guinean nor pigs; and so women scientists are neither scientists, nor women.

A man in an elite dressmaker's says:

- I want you to sew multilayered underpants for me!

- What for?

- My wife is a scientist: she prefers researching things to attaining the final result.

A woman parasitologist says, while looking in the microscope:

- Is there some reason you, pest, have been absent for so long...?

10 The first and second texts reveal an *object-based approach* towards women. The author of the first text, a man, claims for himself the right to judge women both as specialists (*neither scientists*) and as bearers of a certain gender role enjoined upon her by society, at which she fails (*nor women*).

11 In the second text, the very essence of women scientists' work is ridiculed; her "scientific research" is reduced to the butt of a joke. The comic effect is intensified through the conflict between women's traditional gender role of attaining a "result" (that is, fulfilling her reproductive function) and her scientific activity of research. Thus, this second anecdote deprecates both the woman's role as a scholar and her status as a "real" woman. A participant in an Internet chat room posted a comment pertinent to this anecdote: "If a woman lacks

humor, she should be a scientist." One should also note that in Russian the same word is used to describe scientists in any field, including those who deal with social sciences.

12 The third text shows the woman acting in her capacity as a scientist, but her scientific objectivity is replaced by a subjective, "feminine" subjectivity. Instead of a capable scientist, the anecdote features a common cultural stereotype: the nagging housewife waiting for her husband, who (as usual) comes home late from work. Although the wife is annoyed with her husband, she does not throw him out. In Russia, women are supposed to be afraid of being left alone; the social role of a married woman is more prestigious than that of a single one and especially divorced.

13 All three of these anecdotes about women scientists appeared in the post-Soviet period, amidst the *third wave* of female entry into the Russian scientific academic community. The first wave occurred in the 1920s, under the auspices of Soviet policy aimed at eliminating the gender asymmetry in science. The second wave occurred in the 1960s, when additional employment opportunities in academic institutions were created. The third wave came about in the so-called post-Perestroika period; it was connected with the outflow of men into more lucrative activities, and with brain drain abroad. At present, women make up 33.7% of academic employees, although this overall figure includes the over-representation of women in humanities institutions, where they exceed 50% (Pushkareva 128).

14 The increasing presence of women in academic institutions has resulted both in positive accomplishments and in a backlash of the sort exhibited in the anecdotes above.

- Women have shown improved performance in academic endeavors. However, the success has spurred the creation of denigrating terminology, such as "educational impostor" (*samozvanka-obrazovanka*) and 'educated proletarian' (*nauchennye rabotnitsy*), that undercuts the value of women scholars and teachers. Women's profession organizations appeared spontaneously at the beginning of the 1990s, such as the Center for Gender Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the unions of women-mathematicians, and physicists, the union of women of Moscow State University. These organizations countered the Soviet Women's Committee of the Soviet period, which had remained inactive.

15T The androcentric Russian culture responded to these innovations with new jokes aimed at deprecating women's organizational abilities and their sense of solidarity: Resolutions carried by the International Women's Congress.

- 1) All women are sisters!
- 2) All men are animals!
- 3) There is nothing to wear...

16 The "double standard," so common in male-dominated communities, is found in the academic world, too. If a woman scientist wants to improve her professional standing, she is considered a 'drudge', and if she tries to look attractive in a feminine way, she needs to dispense with the goal of gaining recognition as a scholar. In response to the increase of women's influence in the academic sphere (especially in gender studies), male scholars created the following snide comments, which quickly gained wide circulation: "Women seem to have a lot of sex until they are 40 years old; and then they prefer 'gender'." (Another version: "Why are you interested in 'gender'? You are married, aren't you?").

17 These comments are marked by both sexism and ageism. It is not coincidental that women scholars tend to positions of prominence in their fields after the age of forty.

18 The scientific community, made up mostly of men, treats attractive women scientists as sex objects, as illustrated in the following joke: "Women biologists drink until they lose their pulse (or, until they become petrified and pass out), women mathematicians drink to infinity, women chemists drink until they have no reaction, women physicists drink until they lose resistance."

19 "A woman scientist is like an unbroken horse: interesting, but nobody needs one." ("A woman physicist is like an unbroken horse: rare, but useless.") Clearly, in this product of the neo-patriarchal Russian culture, it is only the antithesis of a woman scientist – that is, a woman without any academic credentials – who qualifies as "useful." Such a *simple woman* would not care about epistemological ambiguity or the discursive chaos of postmodernism; she is *simpler* and that makes her *more useful*. Other jokes (which I will omit here) contain still more overt sexual connotations, all reflecting a discourse of superiority common in the dominant (male) culture.

20 Male culture underpins the academic establishment of Russia. Women have been taught their place in it, making themselves useful through their stereotypical devotion to duty, their exceptional capacity for work, their discipline. A typical joke speaks to the dominant conception of women's place in scientific research:

- Hey, babe! You've got such long fingers... Do you play the piano?

- No, I wash test tubes in the institute...

21 Women's value, then, rests in their diligence rather than in their knowledge or talent. The statistics bear out the manifestation of prejudice: 52 % of women employees of academic institutions do not have an academic degree, and 57 % of junior research assistants in academic research institutes (SRI).

22 Women are abundant in the lower stratum of scientific research, where their roles mimic those of domestic housewives. It is in service professions – cleaner, cook, teacher, physician, psychotherapist – that women play the major role. Women secure *the rear* for their husbands or chiefs. From the home to the workplace, the notion that women belong in supporting roles prevails, becoming even an obsession within the academic community. This attitude is enunciated overtly at in the semi-private setting of parties after presenting and defending their theses, which often feature toasts of this type:

It is not only these Atlantes who support the sanctuary of science, but also the caryatids, the wives of scientists, too. The tender arms of these women do not yield to strong male arms, but the scientists' wives take care of their husbands, give them moral support, allow them to immerse themselves in science and free them from external concerns. How would the science advance, if scientists got stuck in household duties? Let's drink to the caryatids of the sanctuary of sciences! Promote the advancement of science and your husbands to new frontiers!

23 In post-Soviet Russian, many businessmen have wives who are scholars. However, these men treat their wives' achievements as their own property, to be flaunted whenever an opportunity occurs. When both spouses are scholars in the same field, though, the men do not brag about their wives' scholarly accomplishments. In a biographical interview, one woman lamented:

My scientific achievements did not help me to become happy... We had been married for 17 years, when I defended my second dissertation. My husband was in a dismal mood at the party, and the next day he said to me that he decided to divorce me, because he "didn't want to be the husband of a Margaret Thatcher." I burst into tears. But what could be done in such a situation? That was how he showed which of us was the master.

24 Women who attained the highest academic degrees do not envy their female coworkers, who gave up academic work and pursuit of the doctorate during perestroika, and turned into so-called "consumption managers" – housewives to "New Russians." These wives of businessmen see to the building of huge country mansions and discourage their daughters and granddaughters from intellectual pursuits. Unlike their former coworkers, women academics are preoccupied with the preservation of child-rearing techniques that were widespread from the end of 1950s until the beginning of 1970s, which foster girls' scholarly interests. In the 21st century, they still adhere to the intellectual values their parents taught them. They hold that the flexibility in time scheduling, the fulfillment of intellectual work, the

opportunities of personal advancement and self-realization, and friendly relationships with other intellectuals will offset the miserable salaries.

25 The respondents in our interviews recounted stories of obstacles being swept from their paths to scholarly achievement, but in reality demonstrate their moral courage and the success of their coping strategies. None of respondents claimed that she had not earned her doctoral degree through hard work. On the contrary, each account speaks to how academic achievements came as a result of independent and self-sacrificing work. (Only in some cases did there happen to be the support of a husband or an institute (research center) administration.) At the time of our interview, most respondents tended to romanticize the time when they started their research and had to overcome great difficulties (one of them recalled a German saying "Anfang ist immer schwer"). Although most of these women came from academic families (evidence of status replication), no respondent thought that her social origin gave her a better opportunity to start with. Their reticence can best be seen as an attempt to excuse and legitimize their intense study and their ability to achieve, on their own and not at their teachers' behest. While telling their stories about 'all the difficulties of youth', women scholars tried to hide the fact that as children of upper-level academics, they had a sort of social launching pad. Instead, they pointed out that they had had no more than equal opportunity with their classmates, and therefore they attributed their success to hard work and self-denial. This biographical narrative is typical of women of the academic elite and it differs from those of women from other social strata, for example, business-men's wives, who seem to have traded their communal apartments for fashionable seaside villas without the least internal angst. The other difference lies in academic women's disinclination to attribute their success to divine intervention; the scholarly environment tends to promote a certain level of religious skepticism. Business-men's wives, in contrast, are prone to explain their unexpected wealth by "It was so ordained..."

26 Strange as it may seem, women scholars tend to downplay their administrative activity, saying such things as "I never aspired to power," and "I never asked the administration for a promotion." In this way, they prefer to emphasize "other more important factors" in their lives. Among these 'other' factors, the first is the husband, or an academic advisor, department head or director, especially among unmarried women. They took on the role of promoters, as defenders and bread-winners. The American anthropologist Sherry Ortner, who laid the foundations for feminist anthropology, recognized the ideological practice latent in such relationships and coined the term *refusal to act* to describe women's roles.

27 It is characteristic of academic women to attribute their scholarly achievements (such as the doctoral degree, professorial rank, department head, membership in international organizations) to a favorable conjuncture of circumstances and the help of "other important factors." None of women respondents admitted that she *had been pressing* for official recognition of her achievements. Quite the contrary; all of them realized that "they had been placed under artificial constraints, but they did not resist them, waiting for some day in future when somebody would come and offer them a better opportunity."

28 Women scholars' biographical narratives reveal their fear of losing reliable protection, of being left by husbands, of being unable to cope in such volatile situation. They did not boast of personal achievements, even in the academic sphere. This discourse reflects the impact of the Soviet-era concept of the *working mother*, who was valued not for her success in the professional arena, but rather primarily as a wife who reared her children and earned extra money. A sizable majority (75 %) of respondents who had accomplished significant prominence in the academic sphere were not married at the time of our interview. Thus, they had no obvious motive to adopt such a deferential attitude towards marital obligations. But married women scholars tend to value family preservation; sometimes they placed it ahead of their professional achievements (Tichenor 212-221).

29 Women academics' own reluctance to acknowledge constraints might explain why the "glass ceiling" continues to obstruct the progress of many women in science? Even though officially it does not exist, an impenetrable barrier remains. At present, women scientists trying to gain official recognition in their scientific communities encounter practically the same obstacles as her sisters thirty years ago. In the registers of second (doctoral) degree holders in Russia, women made up 20 % in 2000 (compared with 14 % in 1980); associate members of the Russian Academy of Sciences – 15 %, academicians – 1.3 %. The Presidium of the Supreme Certification Commission that authorizes the approval of resolutions by academic councils is comprised of 26 men and only 1 woman. There is only one woman on the Council of the Russian Foundation for Humanities, which manages the financing of new scholarly projects. In the institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences, only 1/5 of the posts of laboratory heads are held by women; only 4% of deputy directors are women, and only 2% of directors are women. However, few women seem likely to protest against the existing practice: 67 % of women scientists who were interviewed (mostly at Academy institutes in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Novosibirsk) believe, that *management*, including in the academic sphere, will remain men's prerogative.

30 Why don't women scholars object to the inequitable relationship, but instead take it for granted? Despite the low salaries, the women interviewed (from laboratory assistants to institute directors) emphasized that they are satisfied by their work (about 90 % of respondents). This high rate of satisfaction implies that women are interested in pursuing their scholarly work, rather than better salaries, higher positions, or even recognition for their academic achievements. As a professor of musicology said, "An attractive, honored profession is worth much in itself."

31 The texts of the interviews reflect the existence of a very complicated array of relationships between the men and women of scientific (academic) work projects that extend beyond institutional modes of interaction. Official posts and ranks are not of great importance. But an analysis revealed, surprisingly, the significance of behavioral patterns, consistent speech constructions, discursive practices, and the rituals of the workday such as joint tea-drinking.

32 While recounting their everyday lives as scholars, Russian women underline the fact that the heads of their scientific units replicate *familial relationships* in their sectors (departments, chairs etc.), preserving multi-generational structures and a complicated hierarchy under the leadership of an all-knowing head of family. The posts of department heads in postgraduate and doctoral programs in our scientific and research institutes are almost without exception held by women acting as careful *institute mummies*. Just as in the traditional Russian patriarchal family and in the Soviet-era governmental structures, paternalistic relationships pervaded all institutions and the society itself, and *academic families* differ. No matter who the head of a sector is, either a woman or a man, the unit's relationships take a typically patriarchal hierarchical form. The department head never performs the set-up for tea-drinking rituals or washes the cups of colleagues at the end of a working day. Forms of relationships are governed by strict hierarchization: those people holding higher post are addressed with the polite form of "you" (except for members of the same research group, persons of the same age, and those people who are accustomed to socializing informally during research expeditions).

33 The most important component of a scientist's everyday life is still preparation for participation and participation in meetings of academic congresses and other types of academic conventions. Respondents still recall vividly the severe reduction of such meetings that took place 10-15 years ago due to lack of financing. According to their accounts, in that period women scientists, in an attempt to establish networks based in traditional family ties, began to hold meetings "for insiders." Through their "secret," "quiet" leadership, women

scientists tried to retain women in post-Soviet science, and their efforts may be seen as the real story of the period, although they could not be recognized, unlike the open, and theoretically legitimate and legal governance of men.

34 On the other hand, the struggle over the past twenty years to obtain grants has been the second important component of everyday life for academics, for both men and women. In accordance with official procedure, project principal investigators must file all applications and prepare all reports. But often higher-ranking academics are named as the principle investigators of projects in order to facilitate the acceptance of the grant applications, women scientists, who generally have lower status, are relegated to "project manager" positions and routine work. Thus, this aspect of everyday life in scientific communities is marked by gender differences. The following joke illustrates the reality: "Our women are able to perform any work, even the most difficult, but only under the leadership of men."

35 Few of the male scientists started their careers as secretaries in a scientific area where they had to retype other scholars' articles or answer the telephone. But for most women respondents, this was a typical rung on their career ladder. After a variable period of time, they proceeded to the second stage – that of writing the doctoral dissertation. Most women scholars described the third stage, preparation for the doctoral defense, as the most difficult. They faced great difficulties when they took the posts of professor, leading scientific officer and especially principal scientific officer. Most respondents who decided to write the second dissertation did so in secret, and defended it at an academic institution far away from the ones where they worked. Only a few had the courage to undertake the unequal struggle with administration for promotion, with its concomitant stress and moral and psychological pressure. All the institutes under the Russian Academy of Sciences constrain women's professional advancement, while promoting male colleagues who are inactive and contribute little of scholarly value, but represent no challenge to authority.

36 When asked the direct question "At what stages of your scientific career did you experience sex discrimination?" most women respondents pointed to the period before defense of the second dissertation and afterwards, when the administration tried to ignore the defense and made no change in salary or position in light of it. Nearly half of the women interviewed emphasized that their contributions to scholarship were inappropriately devalued, and that their rights to their intellectual property were impaired in the course of publication of their work. A doctor said: "A chapter of a monograph was based on my manuscripts; however I was not included in the list of authors – since I was only an assistant to the Chair at that

time, and then a Candidate of Medical Science. And I walked out, and went to another scientific and research institute...”

37 We encountered numerous examples of this type in our interviews. In writing my reports on this project, I wanted to include the most typical examples of social practices at the highest levels of academic hierarchies that devalued women. Women who hold doctoral degrees suffer practically the same indignities and discrimination as women who are junior research assistants and senior researchers. But I did not intend to dwell upon the topic of latent gender discrimination as recorded in the folklore of the academic profession and in women’s biographic stories; most of the respondents did not want to focus on these forms of discrimination, and they preferred to explain their situations as unrelated to gender:

I would not term it gender discrimination; it is most likely just a matter of personal social capabilities, what might be called social competence, and the ability to build relations with the right people. It is a problem of a talent to survival in an academic world, rather than gender imbalance. Talented people always face difficulties, and in this situation it is talent that suffers such restrictions (and not being a woman). Forget your gender ...

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