Women and Humor: A Linguistic and Rhetorical Analysis of Joke Target

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by

Barbara Ann Karman
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Dissertation written by
Barbara A. Karman
B.A., Kent State University, 1996
M.A., Youngstown State University, 1998
M.A., Kent State University, 2005
Ph.D., Kent State University, 2013

Approved by

____________________________________, Chair, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Sara J. Newman, Professor of English

____________________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Margaret Shaw, Associate Professor of English

____________________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Pam Takayoshi, Associate Professor of English

____________________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Richard K. Washbourne, Associate Professor of Modern and Classical Languages

____________________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Kristin Mickelson, Associate Professor of Sociology

Accepted by

____________________________________, Chair, English Department
Robert W. Trogdon

____________________________________, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Raymond A. Craig
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Chapter I

Women and Humor: A Review of the Literature

Introduction

Feminism and humor remain topics of interest in contemporary culture and scholarship. In particular, the latter part of the nineteenth century in America has often been associated with the emergence of feminist humor (cf. Curry, 1983; Walker, 1988; Ross, 1989, Morris, 1992); however, to date, the particular ways in which nineteenth century women contributed to this development have received very little attention. This dissertation addresses these topics by looking at the historical development and use of humor by selected women writers in the nineteenth century. Authors like Marietta Holley, Fanny Fern and Harriet Beecher Stowe produced humorous fiction, parody and satire to advance discussion on the question of women’s suffrage and equality. Although they expressed divergent points of view on the subject of equal rights for women, some of the humorous writings authored by these writers represent an important linguistic and rhetorical research opportunity to analyze the use of humor amid the tensions of the fight for suffrage. What is feminist humor? This research answers this question, and provides perspective on the development of feminist humor by examining some of the joke targets used by several popular women writers in the nineteenth century. In so doing, I argue that Fanny Fern presents a consistent proto feminist humor in her writings while Marietta Holley’s early work is proto feminist humor, rather than feminist humor, as previously argued by other scholars. I also argue that Holley and Stowe created anti-feminist humor to control more radical elements of the early suffrage movement. Additionally, I contribute a methodology, The General
Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo and Raskin, 1994; Attardo, 1994) to analyze the joke targets used by these women writers. Finally, the dissertation recognizes the importance of humor as a form of rhetorical persuasion used by these women writers and argues for revived interest in Holley’s humorous fiction by nineteenth century American literature scholars, and American scholars of feminist rhetoric.

Before the analysis in subsequent chapters, this chapter offers a literature review on the relevant scholarship and a historical overview of the contexts involving women’s use of humor in the nineteenth century. To support the analysis, the chapter moves from background on women and rhetorical space, to materials on feminist humor, and then concludes by previewing what each chapter of the study covers.

**Women and the Role of Humor**

Within any society, the linguistic and rhetorical understanding of the humorous exchange is assigned a value. Arthur Asa Berger’s (1995) survey of the literature in *Blind Men and Elephants: Perspectives on Humor* discusses how rhetoricians and philosophers explain the humorous response. Berger summarizes Aristotle’s position on the role of humor in a society as simply a matter of natural oppositions effected by imitations. Aristotle believed that the humorous impulse is rooted in “an imitation of men worse than average” (p.38). Men who were deficient were considered inferior, and our laughter affirms our superiority. To Aristotle, humor was of lesser importance within society and should be considered an inferior form of expression.

The roots of this specific type of public joke target may rest in the concept of the *agon* in ancient Greece, and its beginnings may be traced to some of the forms of humor most often associated with women in classical Greek and roman culture. O’Higgins (2003) describes how
women used humor and joking speech in cultic ceremonies; they were also portrayed in Athenian Old Comedy as “mythical tales, fantastic or utopian tales, women characters portraying concepts or entities such as cities or islands, and mockery of historical women (relatives of Athenian politicians or notables)” (p.111). To O’Higgins, these comic portrayals are significant inasmuch as they represent women’s inclusion and participation in cultic ceremonies, in domestic joking and storytelling. Higgins further suggests that women (as well as men) were frequently idealized as joke targets in Old Comedy, stating that “The notion that “women” represented abstraction—the literally nebulous . . . world of ideas, words, and theories—manifested itself clearly in the feminine intellectual chorus of Aristophanes’ Clouds” (p.123).

O’Higgins describes personification as similar to the ideal represented in the Platonic form when she suggests that it was “easier to conceptualize a universal or transcendent quality or practice under a feminine than a masculine one” (p.123). The link between personification and the female status that O’Higgins proposes reflects the status of women in ancient society; yet the distinctions between public and private sphere for women were, in many respects, similarly constrained. Although separated by millennia, the authors’ works analyzed in this dissertation also function in part to subvert constraints, in the latter case, those of the nineteenth century domestic sphere, to opine and entertain. Many of these works were widely read and disseminated: their views were expressed within the pages of monthly serials and gathered into book form and marketed nationwide (Epps, 2006).

As I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, the marketing of this type of cutting commentary in the nineteenth century is not unique, but represents a much later revision of low comedy as the ancients understood its delivery; classical concepts of aggression and superiority as well as the use of insults and invective by Greek and Roman comedic poets provide some
frame of reference to consider, for example, the pointed ridicule in Stowe’s novel, *My Wife and I* or Fanny Fern’s cautionary tale “Aunt Hetty on Matrimony.” Aristophane’s play *The Clouds* and its defamatory portrayal of Socrates offers many more parallels for understanding the power of the use of parody as a humorous response, a position that counters the assertion that authors like Stowe were genial and intent on pursuing common ground. For Aristophanes, the satirization of Socrates and his Sophist beliefs played a significant role in leveling or reducing his importance in Athenian life and culture. This is important because the play provides us with a similar example of the power of public ridicule. In the conclusion of the *Clouds* Strepsiades torches Socrates’ quarters and taunts Socrates with insults that accuse him of blasphemy, foolishness and corruption. Socrates, according to Strepsiades, was “striven to unseat heaven” (p.199). As Socrates is pursued by the angry Strepsiades, the Chorus concludes that they “did a fairly decent job today” (p. 199). Aristophanes’ move was political; the success of the play signaled the destruction of new ideas—new ideas that were a dramatic break with tradition.

According to Berger (1995), Hobbes suggested a similar understanding of humor in the seventeenth century.¹ To Hobbes, humor is an aggressive impulse, a kind of “sudden vain glory” in which the humorous response is evoked by the “‘apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves’” (p.38). Berger also points out that his authorial concern is with “techniques that can be used to persuade people to laugh” (p.53). To Berger, an understanding of the rhetoric of laughter, then, is an understanding of the techniques used to generate laughter. This understanding of how humor is viewed in the twentieth century is useful inasmuch as it affirms what scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth suggested:

¹ The jump to the seventeenth century is not meant to suggest that no humor occurs in the millennia between *The Clouds* and Hobbes, but only to review salient issues within the scope of this study.
that to understand the humorous exchange, the rhetorical techniques used to generate humor must be studied.

Eighteenth century Scottish rhetorician, George Campbell, categorized the study of humorous eloquence into the following categories: wit, humor and ridicule. To Campbell, the defining characteristics of wit were intended to,

excite in the mind an agreeable surprise, and that arising, not from anything marvelous[ sic] in the subject, but solely from the imagery she employs, or the strange assemblage of related ideas presented to the mind. This end is then effected in one or another of three ways: first in debasing things pompous or seemingly grave…secondly in aggrandizing things little or frivolous: thirdly, in setting ordinary objects, by means not only remote, but apparently contrary, in a particular and uncommon point of view. (Corbett and Golden, 1968, pp.150-151)

Recalling ancient notions, Campbell suggests that wit is accomplished by a surprising play on oppositions. Wit, to Campbell is made up of “suddeness, surprise, and contrariety [sic]” (Corbett and Golden, 1968, p.152). Campbell claimed that wit was pleasing to the participants because of this element of surprise, while humor was “the pathetic, in this inferior sphere of eloquence” (Corbett and Golden, 1968, p.157). Clearly, humor relies on an appeal to emotion, whether the appeal to emotion is less logical, or moral. As all of the pre-twentieth century scholarship agrees, humor occupied an inferior role in the study of rhetorical eloquence. Like wit, humor draws upon the sudden or contrary opposition; that is, its response is based upon the visceral rather than the sublime, a play on words or ideas rather than moral reason, or eloquence. We laugh, then, because the representation is the opposite of what we expect, and the opposition is an aggressive debasement of expectations. To Campbell, any explanation or understanding of the hierarchical
arrangement of humorous discourse relegates the role of humor to a conversational practice. Humor could excite or please, provoke, perhaps, but its value, and thus its understanding as a discourse practice, was considered secondary to a well-reasoned moral argument.

Ridicule is described by Campbell as when “The intention of raising a laugh is either merely to divert by the graceful titillation which it excites, or to influence the opinions and purposes of the hearers” (Corbett and Golden, 1968, p.161). Ridicule, then, depends on an audience’s ability to be persuaded to excitation, or to be influenced to change their belief or opinion. Ridicule, Campbell suggests, is used to restrain or correct wrong conduct through debasement. To Campbell, wit, humor, and ridicule are conversational categories, their “appropriateness and usage” measured against the company or circumstance. Walzer (2003) explicates Campbell’s categorizations using the following graph:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Table 3.3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conversational Types</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wit</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faculty Corresponds to Effect</strong></td>
<td>Imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sublimity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Surprise, excites the mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Debase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Means</strong></td>
<td>Resemblance and Indignity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Walzer’s categorization illustrates how Campbell views the effects of persuasion within the humorous exchange; it is also useful in explicating how these same rhetorical concepts might
impact our understanding of rhetorical space in nineteenth century America. According to Walzer, Campbell clearly links the usefulness of “the concealed art” with the means of the humorous exchange, citing the need to veil the intent of the speaker as a “means” to persuade the audience. To Campbell, humor depended on the passions to excite an emotional response; that is, the humorous response works in a way that is similar to sympathy. Campbell believed that laughter in the humorous exchange signaled acceptance or acknowledgment that the perlocutionary goal of the linguistic exchange was met. The speaker intends to induce laughter, and persuade through debasement, or contempt. The listener acknowledges, agrees with, or is moved by the humorous act to respond positively.

Based on this understanding, humor functions rhetorically as a persuasive technique involving aggressive social exchange. As Campbell suggests, humor is an aggressive conversational practice that depends on acknowledging the social interaction to achieve its persuasive effect on the participant. In broader terms, humor depends on a transaction between participants to achieve its effect, laughter.

**Humor and Gendered Rhetorical Space in Nineteenth Century America**

To understand how humor functions as a form of persuasive discourse within nineteenth century society, I next discuss the environment in which Fern, Holley and Stowe wrote. To that end, I pick up with Campbell and Hugh Blair, rhetoricians with whom the women humorists I discuss would have been familiar from classroom study. Their views on style also help us understand the impact of the gendered speaking space on these women writers. Nineteenth century North American rhetoric depended on the theories of Campbell and Blair. According to
Johnson (2002), for example, “As the texts primarily responsible for popularizing the ‘New Rhetoric,’ Campbell’s *Philosophy of Rhetoric* and Blair’s *Lectures*. . .established the epistemological point of view as a normative foundation for rhetorical theory” (p.46). Thus, Campbell and Blair are crucial to this examination of women’s use of humor in the nineteenth century. More specifically, Campbell’s perspective on ridicule presupposes a concealment of true interpretation is the starting point for explaining the role of humor in a gendered space, while Hugh Blair’s ideas on situation and interaction add dimension and scope to how women authors transformed these boundaries.

Blair understands style, specifically the use of tropes, as the effect of imagination on the use of language; in so doing, he implicitly characterizes the notion of space as material.

Every object which makes any impression on the human mind is constantly accompanied with certain circumstances and relations, that strike us at the same time.

It never presents itself to our view *isolé*, as the French express it; that is, independent on, and separated from, every other thing; but always occurs as somehow related to other objects; going before them, or following them; their effect or their cause; resembling them or opposed to them; distinguished by certain qualities, or surrounded with certain circumstances. (Corbett and Golden, 1968, p.77)

To Blair, ideas or concepts must be considered in terms of the place and circumstance in which they are expressed, and, accordingly, meaning involves interrelated understanding. Blair describes this type of understanding as occurring when acknowledging that “every idea or object carries in its train some other ideas, which may be considered its accessories” (Corbett and Golden, 1968, p.77). While Blair is referring explicitly to the role of the imagination in the formation of tropes and figurative language, his explanation of the
interrelatedness of meaning can be extended to considering how a discourse space is conceived and formed, and understood.

In contemporary terms Mountford (2001) describes rhetorical space as “the geography of a communicative event, and like all landscapes, may include both the cultural and material arrangement, whether intended or fortuitous, of space” (p. 42). This definition allows current understanding of a rhetorical event to include its terrain, its cultural and material objects, and its system of interrelationships, or its place within the world. It is an examination of the interrelationships between systems, rather than a single close reading of one of the artifacts associated with the event. Rhetorical space, as Blair, and as Mountford (2001) later suggest, focuses on the event in terms of interaction and interpretation. Blair’s notion of tropes and his assertion that linguistic imagination must be analyzed in situ provides a way of understanding the complexities of a discourse space that is defined by gender and time, and then of analyzing how the humorous exchange may be used to transgress the boundaries of this defined space that understanding and analysis can take place without isolating the event from the circumstances surrounding it.

I next address how rhetorical spaces were read as gendered and ascribed spaces in nineteenth century America. Johnson (2002) describes the way gender defined difference in rhetorical practice in nineteenth century American conduct manuals and parlor rhetorics.

Women were encouraged to involve themselves in acquiring rhetorical skills for the kinds of performances that ranked lowest on a scale of rhetorics of power. Instead of being given rhetorical instruction that would enhance their access to rhetorical power in any real sense, women are encouraged by the speaker
tradition to affirm their roles as guardians to domestic morality by perfecting the rhetorical skills of enacting tender, humorous, or domestic sentiments. (p.45)

Johnson (2002) affirms that women were rhetorically confined to an appropriate speaking space, the domestic sphere, while males were encouraged to use rhetorical skill and training to “plan to change minds and affect moral responses” (p.43). Men spoke on matters of power, while women spoke on issues related to hearth and home. While seemingly inviolate boundaries, I suggest that for nineteenth century North American women, the use of humor, in particular, irony, allows them to transgress the boundaries of such ascribed discourse spaces. This use allows the author to mask the true nature of the response from a platform deemed emotional, and therefore considered safe according to the socio-cultural milieu of nineteenth century American rhetorical practices.

Women in nineteenth century America understood implicitly that good women do not venture into territories beyond accepted speech codes—and only bad women violated these established boundaries. Public life was reserved for males; females were trained to reign over the domestic sphere. This clear division of speaking space is significant because the breaking of these boundaries branded the women as outsiders within the public discourse space, even when the intent of the message was to preserve the status quo.

Johnson (2002) discusses the emergence of these gendered discourse spaces while tracing the development of conduct manuals and women’s rhetoric as training for the emerging middle class in the nineteenth century.

Ministers learned to preach, lawyers learned to argue, politicians learned how to persuade the masses, and white middle class young men acquired the rhetorical habits of speech and writing that marked their status as those who would surely
make everything happen, and women learned little to nothing about any of it.  

(p.3)

Johnson defines rhetorical space as a space of contested power. To Johnson “public rhetorical space” acknowledges that some rhetorical situations are capable of “shaping public opinion, whether locally and globally” (p.172). Rhetorical discourse space, as Johnson sees it, may be understood as a space that fluctuates between the public and the private; it may be further defined by the awareness that a person’s rhetorical space is intimately connected to a network of socially accepted speech and interaction codes. These codes are cultural, personal, and highly gendered ways of speaking and interaction. Our knowledge of rhetorical space is also complicated by the constraints of education, gender, access, class and race. To Johnson, then, rhetorical space is an understanding based on “which rhetorical situations carry power and which do not” (p.172). As Johnson suggests, certainly women in nineteenth century America understood accepted speech codes. I argue that for these early women humorists the ability to contest, or subvert the gendered rhetorical space of nineteenth century America was less important than securing their family living situation. All three authors share these same tensions and conflicts in their everyday living circumstances. Kelley (2002) discusses the impact of these types of conflicts on women writers in the nineteenth century.

Being private domestic females, the literary domestics did not find it easy to grapple with unexpected public notice, and resisted a public status that had never before befallen American women. […] Perhaps none of the writers bared her conflict more than Sara Parton did. Parton always wrote under the pseudonym “Fanny Fern.” Her daughter, Ellen referred in a letter to her mother’s “life-long dread of publicity—which we all share.” (p.136)
Analysis of these women’s humor use offers insights into a common nineteenth century shared social practice involving the importance of adhering to the tenets of the cult of domesticity. The women who used humor, in particular, did so at great expense socially; most made some concessions regarding their public and private personas. Sara Parton, for example, became Fanny Fern, the author. Marietta Holley became Josiah Allen’s Wife. A blunt edict on the negative consequences of marriage shields the author from potential censure by the public. For women confined to a rhetorical speaking space, these concessions, and others were sometimes necessary.

Devices like dialect use, the use of ridicule, and the masking of identity take on new significance when considered within the social practice of women occupying a domestic space. The use of the vernacular, for example, diverts attention from the seriousness of the message conveyed in the text: women should be considered equal participants in civil society, accorded the right to own property and the right to vote. Fern’s humor was widely read and considered general audience material, sold by subscription and featured in magazines. Parton’s popularity was so tremendous that Bonner, publisher of the New York Ledger, purchased a private rail car and named it Fanny Fern. Kelley (2002) discusses the popularity of Parton in nineteenth century American culture, noting that mass industrialization enabled an author like Parton to achieve national notoriety and economic security.

Robert Bonner gave Parton’s literary bandwagon his own vigorous push in 1855. In 1873 the freight conductor spotted the parlor car Fanny Fern. However, neither Parton’s career nor the Fanny Fern would have rolled had the nation and the economy not experienced massive growth and expansions since 1820. Those

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2 Fern died in 1872. (Kelley, 2002, p.6).
changes made possible and provided the structure for the creation of a national publishing industry. (p. 6-7)

With the advent of industrialization and increasing literacy, the result, according to Kelly, is that “literary economics paralleled the economic development of the nation” (p.7). This new national publishing industry demanded a steady diet of varied materials for publication, and subscriptions sales.

Much as Fern paved the way for humorous exposition and light-hearted jabs at gender parity, Marietta Holley enjoyed a similar following and widespread popularity; however, Holley’s character, Samantha Allen, offered readers a more forceful opinion regarding “the woman question.” Jane Curry suggests that there are limitations on the types of humorous stereotypes used by nineteenth century women writers. Curry (1983) states that “women as subjects of nineteenth century American humor seem to suffer from sex-linked frailties not shared by their male counterparts” (p. xv). Curry equates these differences to either a rejection of stereotypical behaviors—or a reinforcement of socially ascribed roles. To Curry, Holley transcends these boundaries and stock portrayals of aggressive unattractive qualities and evokes “a freshness that reminds us that the “woman question” goes beyond social mores and politics to the most basic assumptions of our culture” (p. 2). Similar to much of the positive criticism regarding Holley’s status as an early practitioner of feminist humor, Curry’s perspective reflects the accepted stance that Holley is a writer interested in “the woman question.” I argue that Holley’s satires deserve renewed critical attention and reconsideration because Holley also penned anti-feminist humor to reject radical suffrage ideas and Victoria Woodhull. Holley demonstrates the power of using ridicule and satire to level an opponent that represented a threat to traditional mores and culture;
more importantly, Holley does this using her character, Samantha Allen, as a model of virtuous domesticity.

Because they had limited opportunity, nineteenth century women humor writers subverted the rhetorical space in which they were confined through their writing. Contemporary linguistic research involving gender and humor suggests that for most scholars the use of feminist humor is a response to oppression (cf. Crawford, 2001; Bing, 2004; Kottkoff, 2005). Crawford’s (2003) findings also support the view of feminist humor affirmed by Lampert and Tripp’s research on gender and humorous joke targets.

Lampert and Tripp (1998) reviewed over 40 studies conducted between 1970 and 1996 seeking evidence for a decline in the acceptance of anti-female humor and a rise of pro–feminist or resistant humor. They concluded that there are trends toward diminished acceptance of anti-female humor and an increased acceptance of humor that challenges traditional views of gender by targeting men. They concluded that these trends are most pronounced among people who espouse pro-feminist or liberal attitudes. (pp. 1424-1425)

Crawford asserts that the development of feminist humor affirmed “the importance of social context in understanding humor” (p. 1425). To Crawford, feminist humor represents how a group “evolved a distinctive form of humor that can be a powerful tool of political activism” (p. 1425). More specifically, Crawford’s research on feminist humor characterizes women’s humor as a platform to articulate conformity and/or resistance, and notes the need for research to be conducted “on the co-construction of feminist identity through language in pro-feminist communities of practice” (p. 1427).
Morris (1992) claims that “a distinctive women’s humor emerged in the 1830s” and that the subsequent birth of the suffrage movement at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention marked a time of extended social upheaval” (p. 7). This cultural and ideological shift, in turn, seems to have provided fertile territories for the development and use of feminist humor in the following seventy-year struggle for suffrage; but, to date, while literary collections and investigations into the literary and cultural use of women’s humor exist (cf. Walker and Dreiser, 1988; Walker 1988; Barreca, 1991), little or no research focuses on the historical use of humor by women from a linguistic and rhetorical perspective. To fully explicate the relationship between the humor of Fern, Holley and Stowe, I next situate them in their historical contexts.

Nineteenth century suffrage advocate Victoria Woodhull and her ideas on “free love” and women’s suffrage were the targets of satiric lampooning during what was known as the Beecher-Tilton scandal. Understanding how lampooning works is cultural and the analysis requires building a bridge between the situation and the joke target. The situation that Harriet Beecher Stowe was embroiled in was personal; Stowe’s brother, a prominent minister, had been named as an adulterer by Woodhull in her weekly newspaper. The publication had numerous subscribers, and Henry Ward Beecher’s private love affair became national news at the time when Victoria Woodhull publicized the details of the affair in her newspaper. The publication of the affair and the consequences of public scrutiny on personal failings, in turn, contrasted with the enmity and division between the Beecher sisters, Harriet and Isabella, over the issue of women’s suffrage as well as the influence of Victoria Woodhull and her attitudes toward marriage, divorce and equal rights. The discord between family members provides historical context for the ridicule of Woodhull when viewed in concert with the power of Stowe’s pen in the popular press. The threat that suffrage and equality represented to the cult of domesticity cannot be discounted, particularly
when Stowe, Holley, Fern and other popular writers weighed in on “the women question” in serialized magazines that were mass-distributed. To these writers, philosophies like “free love” represented a threat to the moral order that the domestic sphere maintained.

In her history of American parlor rhetoric and conduct training manuals, Johnson (2002) emphasizes that this type of research privileges a complex interplay of cultural and social factors.

I agree that writing feminist histories of rhetoric confronts us with a matrix of interrelationships between gender and power, and I would go further to argue that contextualizing every silence in the historical record is a cultural narrative about the conditions that constrained or erased women’s rhetorical achievements. (p. II)

This research addresses gaps in feminist rhetorical history by focusing on how women used humor as an ideological tool to support or refute the emerging suffrage movement. The nineteenth century suffrage movement and selected works of Fern, Stowe, or Holley relate to feminist rhetoric and provide a passionate backdrop for strong voices to emerge in the fight for women’s rights in the United States.

In addition, this research supports Crawford’s contemporary understanding of the importance of social and cultural context in examining feminist humor and, at the same time, augments the linguistic analysis discussed in Attardo (2001). Attardo (2001) provides an example of the link between the situation and target in a discussion of inferential processing and para-jokes when he addressed how the situation and target interact to create the script opposition and suggested that further research on the KR Situation and KR Target is needed (p.74; see Chapter 2, pp. on KR). To date, however, little research on joke targets has been published (see Archakis and Tsakona, 2005; Attardo, 2001; Zhao, 1987; Davies, 1990). In general, most researchers accept that the target is the butt of a joke or the subject of ridicule in a humorous narrative (see
Attardo, 2001). In the use of the ideological abstraction as a joke target, a shift must take place in the understanding of what is an appropriate “butt” of the joke for the humor to occur. To distinguish this shift from a specific singular target, such as an ethnic stereotype, the joke teller and the audience must accept the generalized understanding of the abstraction, idea or collective group that is targeted in the joke text. This use of joke target is specific, directed toward a particular audience, and ridicules by deconstructing a cultural norm.

Generalizations based on these groupings are then advanced to explain the development of feminist humor in terms of the use of the target. The framework for this analysis bridges theoretical work in linguistics and stylistics to provide an audience-based consideration of joke target.

Previous research on nineteenth century women writers has focused on the impact of the cult of domesticity, the sentimentalist tradition of nineteenth century associated with American women authors, or the impulse to proselytize for social reform. While these are foundational social and cultural movements that shaped the discourse of women writers of the nineteenth century, it is worth noting that there is a gap in the history of feminist rhetorical studies related to women and the use of humor as a cultural site of study. A similar gap exists in the field of socio linguistic literature on studies specific to historiographic studies of discourse in humor and gender. Because linguistic studies related to gender and humor are more closely tied to contemporary synchronic studies of language use, the lack of any textual studies of language use related to gender and the history of feminist humor is significant but not surprising. The concentration on the contemporary study of gender mirrors the Western cultural move in dialect studies inasmuch as early research focused on male language use.
Feminist Humor: What is it?

Next, I clarify the definition and use of the term “feminist humor” in relation to nineteenth century women authors working in this genre. Cott (1987) suggests that historians generally agree that the use of the term feminism emerged after 1900 and was presaged by the term “women’s movement” (p. 3-4). Ferguson (2004) places the use of the term feminism more closely at the end of the nineteenth century.

As a figure, feminism has multiple, changing, and disputed referents. The name in the dominant modern sense given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* —“advocacy of the rights of women (based on the theory of equality of the sexes)” — came rather belatedly into English: 1894–95, according to the *OED*’s entries for the substantive and adjectival forms of the word. (p. 7) This distinction is significant because the term feminist humor is readily used by modern scholars in relation to the genre. This dissertation proposes that examining the selection of the joke targets employed by women writers in the nineteenth century should add to a growing corpus of materials on the historic development of feminist humor. The term proto feminist humor and feminist humor will be situated historically and further clarified by an exploration of selected humorous texts authored by Fern, Holley and Stowe.

The study of humor in a situated context is significant; the study of women using humor to transform their wider discourse community is doubly so. Crawford (2004) defines the use of humor by women as a community practice and separates the aims of humor according to gender.

Influenced by the two-culture model of gender and communication (Maltz and Borker, 1982; see also Crawford, 1995), some theorists have proposed that the humor of women functions to create solidarity and build intimacy, while the
humor of men functions as a form of status competition. When women give accounts of their own humor preferences and practices, they report that they like to tell and hear anecdotes about mundane happenings (Crawford and Gressley, 1991). Often, these accounts construct the teller as helpless or overwhelmed by events (Coates, 1996). However, their function seems to be not self-deprecation, but the construction of a community of shared understandings about life’s absurdities. (p. 1421)

This definition of gender and humor use is significant because it emphasizes the differences in humor preference. Males seek status in the use of humor, while seeking solidarity forms the central activity for female use of humor in contemporary terms. These specific social practices differ sharply from the use of humor as a tool to effect social change. Crawford (2004) emphasizes that the humorous exchange for females is a community building exercise in understanding. In contrast, note how Bing (2004) fashions a definition of feminist humor based on contemporary understandings of humor that also focuses on the shared community of female users.

I define feminist joke as a joke created by a feminist that assumes the shared values of most feminists; similarly, I define lesbian joke as a joke created by a lesbian that assumes the shared values of most lesbians. These definitions exclude jokes that would belittle or be hostile to feminists and lesbians, or to women in general. (p. 22)

The definition places tenuous boundaries on the concept of feminist humor; the boundaries, such as they are, begin with the premise that the joke must be forged by a feminist for a feminist. In addition, the definition demands loyalty from the participants inasmuch as “shared values”
implies inclusion in a discourse community and excludes outsiders. This definition is an appropriate beginning for examining the use of this type of humor; however, the definition lacks any sense of a historical or cultural point of reference. Feminist humor, according to this definition, exists only for feminists with the same values.

While contemporary work in feminist humor offers some guidelines for defining the genre, earlier work in feminist humor from a cultural perspective provides some historical context by claiming that Holley was an early practitioner of feminist humor (See Walker, 1988; Kaufman, 1980; Ross, 1989). Ross (1989) discusses the key differences between feminist and female humor. “Feminist humor differs from female humor in that feminist humor is the humor of ‘non-acceptance’ that challenges the patriarchal status quo.” This difference, according to Ross, positions the term female humor in a much more narrow scope by claiming that, in fact, this “humor accepts women’s position in society, even though it ridicules it” (p. 21). Ross later characterizes Walker’s resistance to the narrowness of the definition noting that “any humor centering on the domestic situation of American women is (perhaps unknowingly) trying to break the frame and consequently should be considered subversive feminist humor, not female humor” (p. 22).

Walker (1988) further discusses “subversive feminist humor” in relation to the familiar concepts of overt/covert behavior, claiming that the relationship between feminist and female types of humor is more similar to early coalitions of feminists working together despite differences.

Just as these two groups of feminists have co-existed, so the two types of humor that may be considered feminist have co-existed in American culture for well over a century. One operating subversively within the cultural system of
subjugation, acknowledges women’s subordination while protesting it in subtle and not so subtle ways, thus calling attention to the “the actual position of women in American culture; the other explores the fundamental absurdity of the system and calls for different ways of conceptualizing gender definition. (p. 147)

Walker captures the importance of considering both types of humor as valid expressions of feminist humor, offering support for the idea that the practitioners of feminist humor adopted specific strategies; moreover, these strategies are based on the discursive practices of a particular community of users. Walker’s position is certainly similar to later theoretical constructs regarding the development of a feminist humor; however, the definitions and explanations as offered do not clarify or provide more historical context on the related use of humor as social commentary by women. Accordingly, this dissertation considers examples of humor by nineteenth century women writers to clarify the usage and early development of feminist humor.

Bing (2004) discusses how feminist humor is understood as divisive or inclusive. Humor does not have to be divisive to be influential; inclusive humor can effectively deliver a message without the drawbacks of much divisive humor. Inclusive humor can target inequitable systems without attacking putative mean-spirited oppressors. Whereas divisive humor often attacks people, inclusive humor makes fun of absurd attitudes, ideas, beliefs and systems that keep females at a disadvantage. (p. 28)

Bing’s observation proves significant to the development of feminist humor because it clearly states that the ability to make fun of an ideology is indicative of an inclusive form of humor, rather than a divisive humor. To Bing, a feminist joke can be either inclusive or divisive, and
more importantly, the type of joke target selected can offer critical social commentary and eschew using insults or polarization.

Women within the discourse community using the term “feminist humor” transformed the definition, mirroring the movement’s accommodations to the shifting landscape of the emerging twentieth century. As discussed earlier, the term “feminist humor” is a contemporary definition adapted to humor generated by women in the nineteenth century. This use is bounded by the situated space of the failed first attempts of the suffrage movement at forming a political agenda. To Schiappa (2003) the key to understanding the formation of a definition is in a clear understanding of the role and importance of the two functions.

Dictionary definitions report institutional facts of usage with which we ought to comply if we are to use words correctly. If one does not agree to participate in a particular language institution by choosing to adopt a nonstandard usage such as regional dialects, speaking a language other than English or simply renouncing dictionaries as obsolete, then the normative force of an English dictionary is rendered ineffective. One is not obliged to follow the rules of an institution from which one has walked away.” (p. 50)

In this passage Schiappa suggests that the acceptance of the standard implies a kind of contract; that is, there is a power conferred in the use of the non-standard, a rejection of the majority perspective. The significance of the real is important; in this case, the real is the non standard or regional variation of language used within this body of literature. The use of the vernacular or regional variation of language in the text is a form of resistance to the constraints of the domestic space. This usage is not new; in fact, this particular use of humor by women has been noted in relation to nineteenth century women’s literature. Wright (2001) suggests that many of Fanny
Fern’s witticisms and sage observations are a form of ironic signifying. Wright notes that “Irony is not necessarily a marker of successful worldliness and maturity, but can be a marker of people who know that their words cannot be accepted by those in power” (pp. 91-92). In Wright’s article, she notes how the normative function of irony speaks to the nature of dual opposition in the theory of Signification. The term Signification as Wright suggests indicates a type of verbal posturing. Relying on Gates’ theory of Signification, Wright claims that “It is a game—play, but play with power (p. 97). Wright suggests that the role of Signification is natural to the early attempts to craft a humorous form of discourse aimed at raising awareness of the disenfranchisement and plight of nearly half of the population in the nineteenth century. These early attempts to use humor to advance a social platform for women’s equal rights hinged on Fern’s ability to use irony successfully. Fern’s work, she suggests, is ironic and subversive; her audience’s reaction frees her characters to critique social policy from a non-threatening stance. According to Wright (2001), “Signification can help us better understand how irony can work as a rhetorical strategy that allows an audience to articulate unacceptable views to an audience's acceptance (p. 96). Wright discusses the power of using language to disguise one’s true motives. This masking of intent as well as the ease with which she is able to link the use of Signifying as a rhetorical trope of the oppressed through the subversion of patriarchy is important because the use of a tactic like Signifying allowed Sara Parton (Fanny Fern) to create humor that was relevant to women’s experience regarding property and personal rights in nineteenth century America.

Marietta Holley exhibits a similar style and comedic approach to the issue of women’s suffrage. Curry (1983) discusses how Holley’s characterizations differed from the majority of nineteenth century popular discourse. “When it comes to explicit reference to the “woman question,” suffrage, or women’s rights, there is near unanimity among writers. With the exception
of Marietta Holley, nineteenth century humorists are against changes, modifications or reversals of the traditionally defined roles assigned men and women in our culture” (pp. xii-xiii).

Fern’s “Aunt Hetty” counseled women to enter into matrimony cautiously, if at all. This tact does not reinforce the dominant paradigm of domesticity but offers an alternative reality for the young marriage-minded women to consider: a reality that does not include life spent bounded by the limits of a gender based role. The married life she portrayed was not blissful or fulfilling, but was a drudgery of endless chores, needy children and numbing isolation. Aunt Hetty provides a framework for an early example of feminist humor.

Camfield (1998) argues that a theory of humorous practices by nineteenth century women writers is rooted in genial relations, creativity, and the pursuit of common ground. This theory is applicable but perhaps far too willing to over-generalize the work of female humorists of the time period because it fails to account for some very specific uses of humor by popular women writers. Acknowledging how writers like Marietta Holley and Harriet Beecher Stowe reaffirm the cult of domesticity in works like Old Town Folks and the Samantha Allan series of books, Camfield, in fact, offers praise of Holley for her willingness to “to refuse to fit into a narrow scheme of power politics;” yet Camfield also neglects to adequately assess the power of works like Stowe’s My Wife and I as a part of the developing suffrage movement. Simply put, I argue that Stowe used popular discourse to ridicule an emerging, largely affirmative discourse on the woman’s question.

Marietta Holley also weighed in on the immorality of “Victory Woodhull” and the Free Love movement in her episodic novel, My Opinions and Betsy Bobbet’s. Essays such as “Interview with Theodore and Victory,” and texts such as My Wife and I represent the use of humorous discourse to attack the opposition in an aggressive and quite public forum. Stowe and Holley’s texts exemplify the effective use of aggressive ridicule as resistance, and should be
characterized as examples of anti-feminist humor. Crawford (2003) discusses the importance of situation and context, and in addition reviews a variety of studies that focus on understanding how gender is constructed, suggesting that one of the “important functions of women’s humor implicit in some of the examples given earlier is resistance to dominant constructions of femininity (Crawford, 1995)” (p. 1424). The resistance, as Crawford described it, created a sense of cohesion and collaboration among group members and encouraged “the first steps toward political and social change” (p. 1424). Stowe’s text uses the dominant discourse of the cult of domesticity to resist and ridicule the Free Love movement and Victoria Woodhull, and, in turn, resists the message of the suffrage movement.

Camfield (1998) asserts that theories of aggression or superiority dominate the discourse of humor and fail to acknowledge “the playful and the creative” (p. 6). His analysis of nineteenth century male and female writers focuses on what he characterizes as shared relationships and understandings.

What does need commentary is not the way men and women often hold one another responsible for the failures of ideal visions of love, but the way in which male and female humorists often share the same point of view. Comedians attack marriage precisely because they see spouses as a fundamental limitation of individuality. As much as women’s humor attacks husbands as sources of power (as indeed they were politically), so men’s humor attacks wives as the authoritative centers of families (as indeed ideologically they were). Law versus custom, individuals versus groups, men versus women, children versus parents—competition runs wild in the haven from competition. (p. 21)
Camfield (1998) suggests that there is an equitable give and take of the humor and gender relationships in humorous discourse published in the nineteenth century, yet Camfield’s narrow lens of genial give and take presents an equally narrow perspective on humor and gender. Further textual assessment of the impact of these texts is warranted; the social aggression of the ridicule in many of these pieces offer a sharp contrast to the genial relations Camfield suggests. In this case, the weight of the socio-cultural evidence belies Camfield’s claim of geniality and the pursuit of common ground in humor.

Holley also weighed in on the Free Love movement and “Victory Woodhull” and her role in the Free Love Movement; it is interesting to note that Camfield seems more willing to view the concept of superiority and humor within Holley’s works; however, Camfield, in his assessment of Holley’s humor also acknowledges that to Holley, “megunness” or moderation is of far more significance. Camfield even suggests that Holley clearly “defines the limits beyond which she is willing to challenge domestic ideology” (p. 25). This attitude is certainly more closely aligned with his original conception of seeking a common ground; yet, even Camfield acknowledges that Holley, by the publication of her third book clearly expresses a recurring narrative thread in her texts that espouses the moral superiority of women when he states that as “Samantha becomes more clearly the mouthpiece for her creator, Josiah loses stature, becoming both meaner and sillier” (p. 119). Clearly, Camfield acknowledges the role of aggression and superiority in the humorous response, yet his discussion seems more focused on aligning women’s use of humor with the cult of domesticity through the use of terms like geniality and common ground.

Curry (1983) illustrates Holley’s successful use of the flawed male and the morally superior female stereotypes in her discussion on the differences between male and female characters in nineteenth century women’s humor. Curry states that “Male characters are shown to
have their shortcomings and are variously vain, foolish, short sighted, pompous, etc., but these foibles do not seem genetically tied to their maleness” (p. xv).

To Stowe, Woodhull posed a significant threat to Stowe’s personal life and the spiritual duties of women to occupy a primary role of domesticity. At the time, Woodhull commanded a powerful platform as a popular lecturer and passionate advocate of women’s rights. Stowe’s use of humor to derail Victoria Woodhull advances the discussion on the development of feminist humor in the nineteenth century through her aggressive use of ridicule. Like Socrates, Woodhull’s position as a public individual was subject to ridicule. Open to parody and ridicule, she became an object of derision “The Woodhull.”

Stowe’s humorous novel provides an example of ridicule used within the community of practice to counter a social movement that Stowe perceived as a threat to her family and the wider community, including the members of the suffrage movement. This is a significant variation within the common discursive community at that time, perhaps more reflective of an anti-feminist form of humor.

Conclusions

To advance discussion on the emergence of feminist humor and the use of proto feminist humor, this dissertation recovers a body of literature created to convey a particular point of view to a mass audience in the nineteenth century and uses contemporary linguistic research on gender and humor to analyze specific joke targets and accompanying jab lines (Attardo and Raskin 1991; Attardo 1994; Attardo, 2001). To achieve these aims, the dissertation covers these matters in the following chapters. Chapter I reviews literature associated with gender and humor; introduces the
terms feminist humor and proto feminist humor; and, finally, provides relevant background information on the authors included in the study. Chapter II outlines the method used in the study, The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) (Attardo and Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 1994) and models an example of a short essay analyzed according to the method. Chapter III profiles the author Fanny Fern, focusing on the author’s social circumstances, education and use of irony. After analysis of the Fern corpus according to joke targets, the chapter concludes by addressing the use of proto feminist humor. Chapter IV profiles Marietta Holley and the use of satire and parody in the service of anti-feminist humor, followed by the author Harriet Beecher Stowe’s use of parody and ridicule in anti-feminist humor. Because the analysis Holley and Stowe example texts are from long form, episodic novels these authors are grouped accordingly. Significant to the use of the GTVH in long form narrative analysis is the addition of semantic frames (Chlopicki, 1987; 2000) to accommodate longer narratives. Their work helps further characterize the conditions for the use of proto feminist humor.

My dissertation contributes to research in the fields of rhetoric and linguistics on three levels: first research into the joke targets used by women writers in the nineteenth century may provide a historical framework for some of the issues in linguistics that Crawford (2004) suggests as significant to understanding how humor connects a community of users. Next, my research should help to clarify and aid in understanding what social ideas or institutions were targeted by nineteenth century women humorists; and, finally, the humor in these particular texts provides a glimpse into the content and context necessary for a sociolinguistic and rhetorical understanding of the selection and use of an ideology as a joke target. The research and data collocated in this dissertation should contribute to an expanded understanding of how women used humor as a rhetorical tool in the nineteenth century.
Chapter II
Methodology

Introduction

As Chapter I indicates, humor has always had a social purpose to persuade audiences to overturn the status quo; to that end, nineteenth century women reformers used humor to advocate for change. These circumstances present an opportunity to question when feminist humor developed and to analyze how woman writers used popular humorous texts to advance the aims of the suffrage movement. To address these questions and concerns, this chapter explains and then models the method applied in the study.

As discussed below, the study applies a discourse-based analysis of texts using the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) (Attardo and Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 1994, 2001) to explicate, group, and identify joke targets as they appear in selected nineteenth century women’s humorous discourse. The use of the GTVH as the methodology for the narratives analyzed in the corpus is supplemented by the addition of semantic frames to explicate the structure of the text and characters (Chlopicki, 1987, 2000). This move accommodates the complexity of scripts that present in Holley’s longer works and in the Stowe literary text, My Wife and I.

To present the method, I first describe the data set, following it by a short explication of the development and operation of the GTVH. The chapter concludes with an example analyzed according to the methodology established in the chapter.
Data Set

I limited the corpus of materials to these selected works authored by a small group of nineteenth century women writers because these authors, Sara Willis Parton, Marietta Holley and Harriet Beecher Stowe, represent extremely successful, syndicated writers with large audiences. These authors are then further limited to early works (pre-1880) addressing the issue of suffrage and women’s rights within a comedic essay or novel. Given my aim to examine how this humor addressed the suffrage movement, and the well-documented popularity and syndicated success of all three writers, the corpus is thus limited to selected works in which the authors allude to or reference women’s rights. For example, Stowe parodied the more radical practitioners and supporters of equality for women. Similarly, yet to achieve different ends, Fern and Holley relied on the audience recognizing societal injustices in the treatment of women. These injustices were meted out daily, woven into a social fabric that failed to acknowledge that women deserved the right to vote in a free society. Although a portion of the corpus focuses on book length narratives, the greater portion of the texts used in the analysis are culled from collections of newspaper and magazine articles as well as serialized stories commonly encountered in literate nineteenth century America. Thus, the corpus of materials selected for this dissertation offers a sampling of how three successful serialized women writers, Stowe, Holley and Fern, used humor and comedy to address the concerns of women, specifically and the right to vote in nineteenth century America.
Linguistic Theories of Humor

Before discussing the use of the GTVH as my method, I discuss its emergence from the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH). This semantic-based theory of humor was developed by Victor Raskin in 1979 and expanded to book length form in 1985. This humor theory examines the competence of the speaker and the hearer in an idealized context, uses quantifiable means to analyze the humorous exchange, and extends this examination to include the semantic scripts occurring in the exchange between speaker and hearer. The scripts may be compatible or not and may be subjectively biased or unrestricted.

Raskin (1985) defines a script as “a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it. The script is a cognitive structure internalized by the native speaker and it represents the native speaker’s knowledge of a small part of the world” (p. 81). Raskin suggests that semantic scripts depend on the meaning exchange between participants, engaged in either unwitting or deliberate cooperation. Significantly, according to Raskin, semantic scripts are comprised of a series of interconnected relations between words. Moreover, each participant in the humorous exchange brings a distinct semantic script to the exchange (p. 81). Composed of two parts, Raskin’s theory contains the “Main Hypothesis” and a set of combinatorial rules. To Raskin (1985), the foundation of his theory, the “Main Hypothesis” is expressed as follows:

A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the conditions are satisfied:

(i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts.
Raskin’s theory emphasizes two areas: the compatibility and overlap between scripts, and the oppositional nature of the exchange, a characterization which is consistent with the definitions of humor in Chapter I. When the above conditions are met, the exchange provides “the necessary and sufficient conditions to be funny” (p. 99). As such, scripts are understood as the world knowledge of the participants; further clarification states that “the use of the term “script” is a neutral choice equivalent to “frame” (Attardo, 2001, p. 54). According to common understanding, a script is what the participant knows or understands about a word or concept, and how this knowledge can be overturned, overlap, or vary related to the world knowledge of the participants.

In addition, Raskin clarifies the relationships and connections between cooperation and spoken interactions between speakers and hearers by incorporating the theories of Herbert Paul Grice. Raskin uses discussion of Gricean conversational maxims to expand on the importance of non bona-fide communication in the joke structure. Grice’s Cooperative Principle is based on four maxims: quantity (relay only the information needed); quality (adhere to the truth); relation (speech acts should relate to the conversation); and manner (be as brief as possible). According to Grice (1989), when the above conditions are met, then bona-fide communication will take place (pp. 26-27).

Grice’s stance on bona-fide and non bona fide communication assists in explicating humor inasmuch as any humorous exchange depends on a conscious or unwitting violation of one or more of the maxims in Grice’s Cooperative Principle. That is, the humorous exchange relies on a negotiation between hearer and speaker, a set of mutually understood conventions that result in
the *non bona-fide* communication required of joke-telling (Raskin, 1985, p. 103). However, humor analysis emphasizes the cooperative nature of the exchange in the humor analysis. While cooperation between the hearer and speaker is important to the success of the humorous venture, the SSTH, as Raskin’s Main Hypothesis stipulates, also depends on the combinatorial rules: script overlap, oppositionality, and the script switch trigger.

Script overlap occurs when the text in the humorous exchange evokes more than one interpretation; these interpretations are not necessarily congruous but are at least partially compatible. The standard script is then overturned by a perceived violation of one or more of the maxims for *non bona-fide* communication; the violation causes the original script to be reevaluated or reinterpreted according to this new information. Similarly, the role of oppositions in the SSTH assists in resolving any incongruities in the script overlap. Raskin (1985) notes that script oppositions are concerned with “basic quintessential categories of human existence” (p. 114). In the SSTH, Raskin divides script oppositions into categories of real and unreal situations, and separates these divisions into dichotomies of actual/non-actual situation, normal/abnormal state, and possible plausible/partially implausible, and much less plausible situation (p. 111).

The semantic script-switch trigger refers to the unconscious mental processing that takes place when processing a joke. While hearing the joke text, the semantic script-switch trigger causes something within the utterance to switch the hearer’s attention from one script to another. As Raskin (1985) discusses, something switches “one script evoked by the text of the joke to the opposed script” (p.114). Raskin describes the semantic switch-trigger as containing either ambiguity or contradiction. The hearer’s assessment of the text (joke) changes with the introduction of the trigger; Raskin notes that the role of the trigger is to “render this different
interpretation more plausible” (p. 115). As Raskin sees it, the function of the script-switch trigger is to make the incredible credible, a notion which recalls Aristotle’s understanding of comedy. However, it is important to realize that the trigger is only as successful as the unstated agreement between hearer and the joke-teller is successful at violating normal conversation communicative practices and entering into non bona-fide communication. The following analysis models the use of the SSTH (Raskin, 1985).

“Is the doctor at home?” the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. “No,” the doctor’s young and pretty wife whispered in reply, “Come right in” (p. 100).

In the first sentence, it is easy to see that the script, “doctor,” is corroborated by the language, doctor, patient, and bronchial; however, in the second sentence, the doctor script is subverted by the inclusion of extra information (young and pretty wife) and by the fact the wife whispers her reply. Recalling Grice’s Cooperative Principle, the maxim of quantity is violated twice in this short interchange: unnecessary information is given, and the woman’s response does not provide enough information. The hearer is forced to reevaluate the information acquired in the previous script (doctor) (p. 100). The hearer must then incorporate a different script (lover) based on the information. Thus the script overlap in this joke contrasts the doctor (real) vs. the lover (imaginary). Raskin also discusses the fact that this joke is “a typical example of two script overlaps on a joke” (p. 104). To Raskin, the primary function of the theory was to account for the mechanisms in the joke-bearing text. The SSTH was not intended to analyze longer narrative texts. As discussed above, the SSTH was created to account for joke texts; the GTVH, a revision of the SSTH, was developed to analyze any humorous text.
The General Theory of Verbal Humor

Raskin’s SSTH led to a revised theoretical stance, the GTVH by Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin (1991; 1994; see also Attardo, 2001). Attardo (2001) examines the differences between the two theories, stating that the,

[r]evision of the SSTH consisted mostly of broadening its scope. Whereas the SSTH was a “semantic theory of humor, the GTVH is a linguistic theory “at large”-- that is, it includes other areas of linguistics as well, including most notably textual linguistics, the theory of narrativity, and pragmatics. (p.22)

Attardo (1994) accomplished this revision of the SSTH by adding five Knowledge Resources (KRs) to Raskin’s original idea of script opposition. The KRs, as developed by Attardo and Raskin, are understood as the linguistic elements needed in the generation of a joke text. The KRS include Script Opposition (SO), Logical Mechanism (LM), Target (TA), Narrative Strategy (NS), Language (LA) and Situation (SI). The KRs provide a thorough analytical framework for examining of any humorous text; and, as Attardo notes, the GTVH also develops the idea of “joke similarity.”

The KR Attardo considers first is the LA used in the humorous text, pointing out that this resource “contains all the information necessary for the verbalization of a text” (p. 223). This information includes wording and position of the punch line, which can be critical to the effectiveness of the humorous exchange. The NS is the KR that encompasses the structural organization of the joke text; Attardo lists several examples of NS, including simple narrative, question and answer, riddle, and conversational aside, and also admits countless NS are not
addressed in his text (p. 223).

TA is the optional KR that contains “the butt of the joke” and is based on “(humorous) stereotypes” (p. 224). Attardo also notes that nonaggressive jokes will not have an expressed target. According to the GTVH (Attardo and Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 1994) it is commonly understood that the joke target is the butt of the joke. The target can be expressed in a singular sense and reflect, or name, individuals with humorous stereotypes attached to each, such as a man or a woman, or an everyman or everywoman stereotype. These scripts are a collection of stereotypes such as those involving American tourists, light bulb jokes, or dumb blondes. Such joke targets are ideological joke targets and may be defined as joke targets that name groups or ideas in a more abstract or collective sense. The ideological joke target represents groups or institutions that do not have a clear constituency but may nevertheless be made the subject of ridicule (Karman, 1998). Particular ideological joke targets may be characterized as social ideas such as marriage or romantic love, or institutions, such as the government or big business. In my original understanding of the ideological joke target, I suggested that when analyzed, the ideological joke target functions as a social corrective (Karman, 1998). This initial research involved data collection and analysis of the joke targets used in 16 episodes of a contemporary television show, The Simpsons. The analysis showed clear categories of jokes targeting concepts like romantic love and consumerism as well as singular joke targets featuring characters in the situation comedy. The use of an abstraction as a joke target in a contemporary television narrative opens up avenues to pursue further research into the function and selection of the ideological joke target.

According to Attardo (1994), the SI in the humorous text accounts for the circumstances within the joke. Attardo describes the situation of a humorous narrative or joke as the “props of
the joke: the objects, participants, instruments, activities, etc.” (p. 225). The LM addresses how the various elements in the humorous exchange are conjoined. Attardo explains that the logical mechanism can “range from straightforward juxtapositions . . . to more complex errors in reasoning, such as false analogies, etc. (see Attardo, 1994, p. 225). In the LM, this expressed logic of the “joke-world” is a logic bounded by the humorous exchange, and unconcerned with the limitations of “real-life” (p. 226).

The final KR in the GTVH that must be considered is the SO. As in Raskin’s Semantic Script Theory, the SO accounts for the real/unreal dichotomy and is, according to Attardo, “the most abstract of all . . . KRs, which accounts for the fact that the SSTH could collapse all six KRs onto this one, while basically ignoring all other five, with some exceptions such as TA and LA,” (p. 226). Attardo stresses that any humorous exchange (and text) will contain a script opposition.

Attardo (1994) views the GTVH as a “mechanism capable of generating an infinite number of jokes” (p. 226). The knowledge resources, according to Attardo, may be combined in limitless configurations and should not be considered as binary values; also he notes that the LM and SO appear “limited in number” (p. 227). While the value of the KRs as resources in determining the structural identity of a text seems clear, it is equally clear that their role in the analyzing of longer humorous texts should be more closely examined; to that end, study of the joke target should prove useful.


The basic principle on which the hierarchy is based is that of a KR is likely to determine or be determined by another KR. “Determination” is to be intended as
limiting or reducing the options available for the instantiation/actualization of the parameter. . . . Thus since the choice of SO determines a choice in the TA, whereas the opposite is not the case, we will say that the SO is independent from the TA and the TA depends on the SO. Accordingly the SO will be higher in the hierarchy and the TA lower. (p.127)

Early research conducted by Ruch, Attardo and Raskin (1993) focused on the role of hierarchical positioning of the KR\text{s} and concluded that “the GTVH’s predictions were borne out by the data for all KR\text{s}, except the LM” (p. 409). This research indicated that the LM “did not show up where the theory predicted it should have, but only in relation to the KR next to it (SI)” (p. 409). Later research by Attardo (1997) examined some problems within the KR\text{s}, specifically the LM and created an interesting resolution. Attardo (1997) argued that the LM should be understood as the resolution of the incongruity presented in the SO. He also moved the LM into an optional KR status because not all humorous texts offer a resolution similarly, not all humor contains an explicit joke target.

The shift to analyzing longer narratives is explicated fully by Attardo in a variety of exemplar texts (Attardo, 1997; 2001; 2002; 2008). According to Attardo (2008), the GTVH is most useful for isolating and locating specific examples of humor in the text.

In other words, the application of the GTVH to long humorous texts, consists, among other aspects of the analysis, of locating all the instances of humour using the approach of the SSTH, analyzing them according to the six parameters, and then plotting the relationships among the various jab lines in relation to the parameters. Thus, for example, we can identify all the jab lines having the protagonist as their target and a given script opposition. (p. 255)
This passage introduces a significant methodological development, the notion of the “jab line.” Briefly defined, a jab line may be understood as a humorous instance; the term and related discussion are fully defined later in the chapter.

Various authors have criticized using the GTVH to analyze humor within larger narratives. Although some of these objections are discussed in the next section, let me note for now that most of the arguments suggest that script-based theories are inadequate to literature analysis because of the linear nature of the analysis. Both theories, the GTVH and the SSTH, have also been criticized because they do not adequately address the collaborative nature and conditions of a humorous exchange as I discuss below.

**Critical assessment of the SSTH and the GTVH**

Veale (2004) suggests that the collaborative nature of the humorous exchange indicates that “Raskin and Attardo have championed a version of the collaborative view, providing a cooperative principle for joke telling that is a homologue rather than an extension of the better known Gricean principle” (p. 424). To distinguish between his ideas on collaboration and incongruity in joke-telling, Veale claims that a difference exists between the idea of the speaker and hearer engaged as “willing conspirators who collectively shape the trajectory of the narrative, perhaps to throw a deserving third party, a character in the narrative over a cliff” (p. 425). The distinction between these concepts is slight; willing conspirators must collaborate and cooperate in order to be considered conspirators. Because of its minimal effect, Veale’s approach does not offer additional insight to the GTVH or the SSTH.

Rather than focus on cooperation and collaboration in the humorous exchange, Brône and
Feyaerts (2004) explore the connections between semantics and cognition by explaining the links between cognitive linguistics and the SSTH and GTVH.

Raskin’s Semantic Script Theory and its more developed version, the General Theory of Humor (Attardo and Raskin 1991; Attardo, 1994; 1997) are cognitive linguistic in the sense that they explore the interface between language and cognition in highly creative language use. Witness of this cognitive rather than structural-typological approach is the fact that concepts such as scripts and frames, incongruity and resolution, which are grounded in cognitive psychological models of humor, are the central pillars of these theories. (p. 362)

This quotation assesses the GTVH’s major contributions to humor theory, cognitive linguistics, and psychology. Brône and Feyaerts offer the cognitive linguistic concept of cognitive construal, and, additionally, argue against a taxonomy of logical mechanisms in favor of a combinatory approach that collapses all incongruities and resolutions into an “analysis of patterns in the marked set up in terms of normal cognitive operations would render the theoretical hypothesis of logical mechanisms redundant” (p. 364).

Close examination of this perspective reveals inconsistencies in the authors’ shared understanding of the function of the LM; for example, the authors claim that the concept of “this approach is not necessarily incompatible with the notions of script opposition, script overlap and script switch trigger in the SSTH/GTVH” (pp. 363-364). In addition, Brône and Feyaerts fail to recognize is that there is nothing wrong, abnormal, or special about the mechanisms charted in the GTVH. That the GTVH is compatible with a cognitive linguistic perspective is not questioned. In short, the GTVH is compatible with cognitive and non-cognitive approaches to the analysis of humorous texts.
An earlier perspective on analyzing longer humorous narratives references targeted and meta humor; this discussion occurred within a broad discussion considering how to expand or extend the GTVH to analyze longer humorous texts. Chlopicki (1997) acknowledges that “the concepts presented in this article (jab lines, strand, macro scripts, meta scripts, character frames) deal with some of these humor types (e.g. targeted humor or meta humor)” (p. 344). Later, Chlopicki clarifies the concept of value judgments as central to analyzing longer humorous narratives.

I would like to mention another area, crucial in my view for the analysis of targeted humor and satirical edge categories, which is left largely unexplored. . . . This could be called value judgments. An element of value judgments is already present in the 1985 version of the script theory in the form of the good/bad dichotomy; in the 1991 version in (Attardo and Raskin, 1991) its status was upgraded to a distinct level of analysis. (as cited in Chlopicki, 1997, p. 344)

Chlopicki weds the script theory approach to other concepts to form an analytical tool kit for longer humorous narratives. Character frames clarify and enhance analysis of targeted and meta humor, while script oppositions are likened to value judgments. Later work affirms this perspective. In an article on analyzing humorous narratives, Chlopicki (2000) clarifies the significance of character frames in analyzing humorous narratives because:

Firstly, the analysis focuses on written fictional humorous texts and on their reception by potential readers; secondly, even though it is assumed here that there are four basic kinds of text-specific frames (of people, places, events and objects), it is character frames that are in focus, as it is them that are responsible to the largest extent for the funniness of humorous lines (there is considerable
interdisciplinary literature on the issue of character in texts; e.g Chatman, 1990; Morrow, 1985; Zacharasiewicz, 1993 and references there). (p. 515)

Chlopicki (2000) models a character frame. Significantly, Chlopicki admits that character frames “supplement the script theory with character frames and (principally, of places, objects and events) for the sake of the analysis of the jokes AND short stories and in order to account for the non binary nature of humor” (p. 514). Chlopicki points out that the GTVH was an expansion generated to account for non binary approaches to humor and longer humorous narratives, and raises a valid point about the importance of character, place, or thing in the reception of humor. In particular, Chlopicki’s ideas on semantic character frames offers insight on how early forms of feminist humor were distributed and received in nineteenth century and early twentieth century culture. Chlopicki (2000) depicts a character frame as a series of prompts for readers to assess the characters in a longer humorous text. The Fictional Character frame opens with a reader’s assessment of whether a character is Good or Bad. According to Chlopicki, the Fictional Character Frame factors in a variety of character traits: physical, mental, associated locales, needs, concerns relations with other characters and an event arc of significant life events in the fictional character under scrutiny (p. 515). These concerns, according to Chlopicki, reflect the essence of humor. While I concur that character is important in analyzing complex literary narratives, my methodological concerns focus on a cataloguing joke targets used in popular fiction to advance opinions related to suffrage (either pro or negative). In the analysis, I consider character useful if such considerations provide information related to the joke target. Many of the shorter popular essays catalogued in this dissertation rely on clear stereotypes to convey humor; they are constructed in the same manner as a longer joke text, and are treated as such using the GTVH.
Triezenberg (2004) questions whether a linguistic theory like the GTVH can account for literary humor. Her hesitations regarding the GTVH are confined to her understanding that a linguistic theory is insufficient to explain literary devices used by authors to enhance the humorous experience. Triezenberg defines humor enhancers as stylistic conventions such as alliteration, familiarity and stereotypes (p. 412). To Triezenberg, these literary applications provide a flavor to material that the GTVH cannot assess.

But Attardo (2001) gives the impression that one can create a joke simply by inserting fillers into each of the six KRs. This is obviously not true; life and literature are not so simple. Even with a given set of fillers for the KR, the joke must still be crafted, and can be so crafted either well or badly, which will heavily influence the experience of humor by a non-ideal audience. . . . I am simply not sure that this is necessarily the best way to go about it: let the literary studies of humor develop its own theory and methodology for dealing with these phenomena. The proposed humor enhancers should be a component of such a theory. (p. 418)

Triezenberg raises a valuable point regarding the KRs; that is, all jokes are crafted, either cunningly or inexpertly. A piece of humor succeeds because it is well-crafted. In addition, her discussion of humor enhancers focuses on what many scholars commonly acknowledge are stylistic conventions used in literature.

Murphin and Ray (2003) define stylistics as “[a] critical method that analyzes literary works on the basis of style. Its practitioners focus on analyzing a writer’s stylistic choices with regard to diction, syntax, phonology, figurative language, vocabulary and even spatial and graphic characteristics,” (p. 465). These categories conform to the conventions that Triezenberg
refer to as “humor enhancers.” This confirmation is significant because Murfin and Ray suggest that “many stylisticians thus perform quantitative analyses of literary works calculating the frequency with which various stylistic and grammatical elements appear” (p. 466). Triezenberg’s argument exhibits a common objection to the use of stylistic analyses; that is, analyzing stylistic conventions is flawed because stylistic conventions cannot be considered separately from the text under consideration. This argument is disingenuous because it does not discuss the open-ended LA KR in the GTVH, the knowledge resource that contains all of the detail about the text. In addition, the assessment fails to acknowledge the long history of stylistic analysis and trades on an assumption that a stylistics approach separates content from structure, thereby diminishing the ability to form generalizations or otherwise interpret the text. Although Triezenberg points out the strength of the combinatory potential of the GTVH, she fails to offer a clear alternative to otherwise supplement the GTVH other than the assertion that “humor enhancers” must be considered a part of the analysis. The notion, then, is that humor (and by default) any work of literature resists interpretation because of the interconnectedness of textual elements. This criticism seems naïve, a less than objective analyses of the value of script-based models of humor.

Ermida (2008) offers a similar criticism regarding the limitations of script based theories for analyzing longer literary narratives. Ermida also develops a model for classifying humorous narratives by accounting for four principles, opposition, hierarchy, recurrence, and informativeness (p. 172). To Ermida, script-based theoretical approaches such as the SSTH/GTVH are limited by the linear nature of the analysis. Instead, Ermida (2008) advocates for a multi-disciplinary approach that expands on the script-based analysis as discussed. Additionally, Ermida’s perspective on the linear nature of script-based theories is limited to
literary fiction. As such, the complex tales Ermida analyzes demonstrate how the GTVH can be applied to more traditional forms of literary analyses. Ermida’s criticism of the GTVH again presents a narrow perspective when she objects to a linear line analysis. “I disagree that the complexity of the comic text can be tackled by ‘reducing’ it to a simple succession of humorous moments” (p. 109). This perspective, as expressed, assumes that a linear line analysis is less effective.

Like Triezenberg, Ermida (2008) contends that texts must be understood in their entirety. Neither approaches accounts for the stylistic analysis of literary texts. Accordingly, the reservations regarding the usefulness of script-based analysis are overstated as well as disconnected from the long association script-based analysis shares with cognitive linguistic theories, incongruity theories, and psychology.

Further, this dissertation’s analysis of humorous narratives address a type of fiction more suitably understood as humor stereotypes. Epps (2006) describes the use of humor stereotypes in nineteenth century fiction and, significantly, their relation to canonical or literary fiction.

In the case of the canon, the stereotype functions, as John Guillory would presumably note, as an anti-literary writing strategy that brings the literary into being in a system that manages access to cultural capital. In the case of popular political writing, the stereotype functions as an efficient but imperfect means of mobilizing affect quickly. (p. 100)

Humor stereotypes are important to the developing of an appropriate methodology to analyze the joke targets because stereotypes were the primary means of conveying meaning in popular nineteenth century comic narratives. In the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, women writers used stereotypes successfully amid a unique set of cultural constraints and circumstances
associated with the fight for women’s suffrage. Structurally, many of these narratives are short, as in the model presented below. The short comic essays were popular literary fiction; all three authors wrote works that were serialized in newspapers and magazines first, then gathered and distributed as full length novels, and/or essay collections. All of the texts in this dissertation follow this publication pattern of serial distribution before collection into a longer narrative.

Although Ermida (2008) acknowledges that the GTVH facilitates the analysis of longer comic narratives, she tempers this acknowledgement by her insistence that the GTVH “corpus of analysis comprises joke texts only” (p. 111). Clearly she does not account for the variety and adaptability of the theory, particularly when the case studies proffered in Attardo’s (2001) text extend across genres and include analyzed examples of nineteenth century literary fiction, and contemporary comic episodic television shows. Ermida also suggests that episodes of humor within non-humorous texts should not be subjected to linear script-based analysis.

The distinction between serious plots and humorous plots deserves criticism, insofar as the so-called serious plots should automatically be excluded from the very category of “humorous texts” Otherwise, any text would be open for analysis—including tragedies, which may have comical elements. (p. 109)

Imposing artificial boundaries between the serious and humorous serve no purpose other than to indicate that Ermida’s artificial constraint against the analyzing humor instances in a largely serious text borders on excessive purism. Analyzing the comic instances within an otherwise serious text is neither unusual nor unique but part of a larger practice of discourse analysis.

Additionally, Ermida (2008) labels the GTVH from the outset as a “linear model” when she states,
Attardo’s contribution to the comprehension of comic narratives goes astray by favoring an exclusively sequential criterion of analysis. His linear model falls short of capturing the hierarchical complexity of the textual meaning and the significance of the text’s vertical organization.” (p. 110)

Of note, Ermida (2008) uses the term sequential to refer the hierarchy of the KRs (per discussion earlier in the chapter). This reference is unrelated to the issue of textual linearity of the text, which the GTVH assumes. Ermida (2008) concludes with a statement of her method.

Although a linear approach along Attardo’s lines helps to uncover some specificities of the humorous narratives—such as parallelism and recurrence—see Chapter 6), it is essential that the supra-sequential approach be applied, so as not to reduce the text to a succession of autonomous joke-like structures. (p. 111)

Here, Ermida ignores the facts that the GTVH analyzes humor that is present in a text and is open-ended in the retrieval of said information. Ermida likewise completely ignores the numerous and wide-ranging analyses of what traditional literary analysis calls “themes” or “motifs” in the various case-studies exemplifying the GTVH (Attardo, 2001, pp. 127-207). For example, Attardo notes that in analyzing Wilde’s “Lord Arthur Saville’s Crime” the strand of jab lines in a humorous text including the LMs “faulty reasoning” and “reasoning from false premises” shows 97 instances throughout the text and that the vast majority, 59 out of 97, has Lord Saville as its target. Attardo concludes that “we can safely say that there is a central strand in [Lord Arthur Saville’s Crime] which associates faulty reasoning or some sort and Lord Arthur Saville” (p. 206). Whatever one may think of the GTVH, here it is not addressing the linear distribution of the jab lines and is on the contrary addressing the text as a whole.
Ermida’s is a mistaken interpretation of the GTVH that narrowly interprets the ability of the KRPs to analyze longer narratives. The characterization of script-based theories as somehow capable of stripping a text of its context is a claim that is not supported by any previous analysis of the GTVH. Additionally, Attardo (2001) does not state that a sequence of joke structures is viewed as autonomous; instead, the GTVH relies on the interconnectedness of interpretative phenomena like series of strands (closely related jab lines, joke similarity, and the open ended KRPs) to form an interpretative frame.

Although analysis of longer humorous texts remains a relatively unexplored field (Chlopicki 1987; Attardo, 1994, 2001, 2002, 2008; Ermida, 2008), the revision that moves from semantic-based (SSTH) to linguistic-based (GTVH) analysis of humor is significant because, for the purposes of this dissertation, the GTVH provides the primary method for discerning the joke targets used in comic narratives authored by nineteenth century women writers.

My dissertation thus uses this methodology to identify and analyze the joke targets used in humorous fiction and essays written by women writers interested in women’s rights in the nineteenth century. More specifically, the General Theory of Verbal Humor has three major strengths: 1) The LA component gives this humor theory flexibility in analysis of longer texts; 2) establishes similarity or relationships between jokes; and 3) accounts for the semantic as well as linguistic and non-linguistic features of a text (pp. 228-229). The advantages of the GTVH seem clear; particularly relevant to this discussion is the role of the KR, NS in establishing relationships between humorous texts. Attardo (1994) points out that the NS “parameter deals precisely with the narrative differences between texts, borrowing methodologies from narratology, folklore studies, and literary criticism” (p. 229). The NS accounts for any differences between texts and resolves any specific requirements such as punch line position in a joke text.
The advantages of using the GTVH in this analysis are numerous. First, as a method, the GTVH maps the text according to strands of meaning of the various lines that comprise a humorous text. These lines occur in all humorous texts. Second, the process of text mapping according to the position of the lines accounts for the interrelationships that might occur on semantic, social or other grounds, while revealing any recurrent patterns of line formations. The abilities to establish similarity or relationships between lines and account for the semantic as well as linguistic and non-linguistic features of a text offer a significant methodological advantage. In this dissertation, the GTVH identifies the use of abstraction and ideology in the target, as a line analysis charts regularities or patterns specifically related to the joke target.

Additionally, analyzing the joke target clarifies any relationships between the situation and the target. Attardo (2001) illustrates an example of the link between the situation and target in a discussion of inferential processing and para-jokes; more specifically, he addresses how the situation and target interact to create the script opposition and suggests that further research on the KR Situation and KR Target is needed (p.74). To date, and as indicated, however, little research on joke targets has been published (see Archakis and Tsakona, 2005; Attardo, 2001; Zhao, 1987; Davies, 1990). In general, most researchers accept that the target is the butt of a joke or the subject of ridicule in a humorous narrative (see Attardo, 2001).

When an ideological abstraction becomes a joke target, the hearer reconsiders what is an appropriate “butt” of the joke; that is, the joke teller and the audience must accept the generalized understanding of the abstraction, idea or collective group that is targeted in the joke text. This use of joke target is specific, directed toward a particular audience, and ridicules by deconstructing a cultural norm. Generalizations based on these groupings are then used to explain the development
of feminist humor in terms of the use of the target, in so doing, I bridge theoretical work in linguistics and stylistics while providing an audience-based consideration of joke target.

**Modeling the Example**

Next, I model this method by analyzing a humorous text; a short essay on matrimony by Fanny Fern titled “Aunt Hetty on Matrimony.” The essay was first serialized in a magazine, then included in a best-selling volume entitled *Fern Leaves from Fanny’s Portfolio* in 1854 (Kelly, 1984). This example is offered here as the text appears in its published entirety in the serialized humor of Fanny Fern. I selected this essay as a model because it addresses women’s rights. The author, Fanny Fern, aka Sara Parton, a young widow with children, was well-educated, literate and possessed a strong drive to provide financial support for her family, impoverished after the untimely death of her first husband (Kelley, 1984). Fern’s dissatisfaction with the effects of matrimony upon women and how married women were deprived of rights engendered a number of sardonic, pointed satires on matrimony and women’s rights from the perspective of the female. Thus, the model takes clear swipes at the institution of marriage. As the essay, “Aunt Hetty on Matrimony” asserts:

"Now girls," said Aunt Hetty, "put down your embroidery and worsted work; do something sensible, and stop building air-castles, and talking of lovers and honeymoons. It makes me sick; it is perfectly antimonial. Love is a farce; matrimony is a humbug; husbands are domestic Napoleons, Neroes, Alexanders, — sighing for other hearts to conquer, after they are sure of yours. The honey-moon is as short-lived as a lucifer-match; after that you may wear your wedding-dress at breakfast, and your night-cap to
meeting, and your husband wouldn't know it. You may pick up your own pocket handkerchief, help yourself to a chair, and split your gown across the back reaching over the table to get a piece of butter, while he is laying in his breakfast as if it was the last meal he should eat in this world. When he gets through he will aid your digestion--while you are sipping your first cup of coffee, by inquiring what you’ll have for dinner; whether the cold lamb was all ate yesterday; if the charcoal is all out, and what you gave for the last green tea you bought. Then he gets up from the table lights his cigar with the last evening’s paper that you have not had a chance to read; given two or three whiffs of smoke,-- which are sure to give you a headache for the afternoon,-- and just as his coattail is vanishing through the door, apologizes for not doing that errand for you yesterday,-- thinks it is doubtful if he can today ,--‘so pressed for business. Hear of him at eleven’oclock , taking an ice cream with some ladies at a confectioner’s, while you are at home new-lining his coat sleeves. Children by the ears all day; can’t get out to take the air; feel as crazy as a fly in a drum. Husband comes home at night; nods a “How d’ye do, Fan?” boxes Charley’s ears; stands little Fanny in the corner; sits down in the easiest chair in the warmest nook; puts his feet up by the fire while the baby’s little pug nose grows blue with the cold.; reads the newspaper all to himself; solaces his inner man with a cup of tea, and, just as you are laboring under the hallucination that he will ask you to take a mouthful of fresh air with you, he puts on his dressing gown and slippers and begins to reckon up the family expenses; after which he lies down on the sofa and you keep time with your needle, while he sleeps till nine o’clock. Next morning, ask him to leave you a ‘little money,’ he looks at you as if to be sure that you are in your right mind, draws a sigh long enough and strong enough to inflate a pair of bellows, and asks you
'what you want with it, and if a half-a-dollar won't do?' Gracious king! As if those little shoes, and stockings, and petticoats could be had for half-a-dollar! O, girls! set your affections on cats, poodles, parrots or lap-dogs; but let matrimony alone. It's the hardest way on earth of getting a living. You never know when your work is done. Think of carrying eight or nine children through the measles, chicken-pox, rash, mumps, and scarlet fever,—some of them twice over. It makes my head ache to think of it. O, you may scrimp and save, and twist and turn, and dig and delve, and economize and die; and your husband will marry again, and take what you have saved to dress his second wife with; and she'll take your portrait for a fire-board!

"But, what's the use of talking? I'll warrant every one of you'll try it the first chance you get; for, somehow, there's a sort of bewitchment about it. I wish one half the world were not fools, and the other half idiots." (p. 377-378)

As a whole, the essay depicts strict gender roles and paints a grim portrait of wedded bliss in vivid, uncompromising terms. Close reading of the text reflects domesticity; more importantly, the text plays on some of the common cultural stereotypes of the nineteenth century such as marriage, gender roles and cultural expectations. As this and subsequent examinations of ideological joke targets and related joke targets by nineteenth century women writers reveal as I mentioned in Chapter I, strong messages that criticize injustices in their society were an important part of the suffrage message.

After a short discussion of jab lines and punch lines, I present the model by breaking into units of analysis (100 words more or less) and analyzing according to the proposed GTVH
methodology discussed above (Attardo, 2001, 2002). The chapter concludes with a copy of the analyzed model in its entirety.

**Unit of Analysis**

Before applying the model let me address the choice of units. For the most part, Attardo (2001) suggests that the unit of analysis should be determined by breaking the text into chunks of approximately 100 words (pp.107, 200, 203). Subsequent references to the unit of analysis liken the unit to a “paragraph” and a “verse of a poem” (p. 155). According to Attardo (2001), the selection of 100 words is arbitrary but consistent (p. 200). Attardo offers additional advice on segmenting the text when he indicates that clear authorial signals should be considered when locating “narrative boundaries” (p. 81). Clearly, the GTVH expresses adaptability with respect to the unit of analysis, and, as such, demonstrates this flexibility in its ability to elicit semantic and pragmatic textual information. Attardo (2001; 2002) discusses the fact that the “availability of a medium-sized text analyzed in the detail of the previous chapter allows us a novel approach to humorous text, namely to investigate the distribution patterns of jab lines within the text itself” (p. 203). Because this dissertation’s primary concern is investigating the joke targets used by nineteenth century women writers in the, the patterns of humorous occurrences in the text elicit little concern.

Additionally, when analyzing humor from a prior century, it is important to consider how various cultural elements influence the depiction and selection of joke targets. Significant to analyzing these domestic pieces is that the humor overturns the conventions and canons of domesticity. Because the GTVH has been expanded to include humorous texts of any size,
analysis of “Aunt Hetty on Matrimony” should yield several types of lines to analyze in the text: jab lines (in their respective positions) and punch lines will be assessed as a part of the analysis, along with the KRs.

**Jab Lines and Punch Lines**

As stated earlier, this section defines jab lines and punch lines within humorous narratives. First, the jab line is the hyponym of a line within a humorous narrative; further characterization is briefly defined as lines that are instances of humor within the narratives. Attardo (2002) distinguishes between jab and punch lines in the humorous narrative as “semantically indistinguishable . . . but they differ at the narratological level” (p. 235). He further characterizes the difference between the lines stating “whereas punch lines are disruptive of the narrative they close, jab lines are not, and in fact, often contribute to the development of the text” (p. 235). Attardo (2001) defines the punch line as occurring at the end of the text, and the jab lines as “non-final punch lines” (p. 29). Attardo (2001) classified related jab lines that occur within a longer text as a strand. The strand consists of three or more interrelated lines in a text (p. 29). These boundaries between types of lines are important to establishing the joke target. The standard of identifying the lines of the text should offer additional insight on the joke target of the text; moreover, analyzing the KRs according to the GTVH pinpoints similar insights in the situation, script opposition and target as presented in the text.
Line Analysis

To accomplish the analysis, the lines containing jabs are italicized. Final position jab lines are italicized and bolded. The punch lines are noted in bold text. Based on these criteria, the lines within the phrases are explicated according to their respective categorizations as a jab or punch line. The lines are individually numbered to facilitate ease of analysis; for example, the first passage is titled Segment A; lines are then numbered as A1, A2, etc. The line analysis is then followed by a brief explication of the GTVH. The model is explicated fully for clarity in the sample.

A1: "Now girls," said Aunt Hetty, "put down your embroidery and worsted work; do something sensible, and stop building air-castles, and talking of lovers and honeymoons.

A2: It makes me sick; it is perfectly antimonial.

A3: Love is a farce; matrimony is a humbug;

A4: husbands are domestic Napoleons, Neroes, Alexanders, — sighing for other hearts to conquer, after they are sure of yours.

A5: The honeymoon is as short-lived as a lucifer-match;

A6: after that you may wear your wedding-dress at breakfast, and your night-cap to meeting, and your husband wouldn’t know it.

Segment A: Line Categorization

The first few phrases in the text emerge as a trio of closely aligned jab lines, A1-A3 followed by A4-6. Fern sets the scene for a debate on marriage and the domestic sphere through the familiar gathering of women at the time, the sewing circle. When Hetty declaims “--put down your embroidery and worsted work; do something sensible, and stop building air-castles, and
talking of lovers and honeymoons,” she is poking fun at the institution of marriage as nonsensible by claiming that lovers and honeymoons are not sensible enterprises. This sentiment is emphasized via Fern’s use of the terms “embroidery” and “worsted work.” These terms were understood in the nineteenth century as needlework used for decorative purposes only; Aunt Hetty is, in fact, comparing the institution of marriage to decorative, but useless needlework. The jab line is followed by another “--It makes me sick; it is perfectly antimonial.” This jab line features a play on the use of the prefix -anti and turns the phrase matrimony from a positive to negative by also linking matrimony to illness.

The final jab line in the trio “--Love is a farce; matrimony is a humbug” is a line that offers a final cynical assessment of matrimony and the concept of love. In this first segment A, the jab line is delivered by Aunt Hetty. The following jab strikes a sharp blow to the other half of the domestic contract, males, with the phrase “-- husbands are domestic Napoleons, Neroes, Alexanders, — sighing for other hearts to conquer, after they are sure of yours.” In the final jab line in this strand (see p. 27), Fern offers a stinging retort to some of the key concepts of the institution such as fidelity, love and trust. She accomplishes this in the text by evoking male symbols of tyranny, faithlessness, repression and oppression.

Whole text GTVH considerations

Overall, the joke SI in the text involves a sewing circle of young women chaperoned by Aunt Hetty. The LA used in the text is nineteenth century prose, suitable for a wide variety of literate nineteenth century readers. The NS in the first example text adopts an essay format that is, in fact, a meta narrative with an embedded text that illustrates the perils of marriage by means of
a vignette of the daily lives of a young married couple. The story within story convention persists throughout the text. Attardo describes a macronarrative in terms of main and embedded story lines.

a macronarrative is a framing narrative which may incorporate at least one narrative of level n-1. The macronarrative of level 0 is called the (main) story line. It is usually the level at which the text begins and ends. (p. 82)

Understanding the structure of macronarratives in a narrative structure is significant because the story presents a good example of an embedded meta narrative story line used to target matrimony, a significant nineteenth century social convention.

**GTVH KRs: Analysis**

Every line has a unique SO. In the first jab line, A1, the script opposition is the actual /non actual life circumstance of marriage as Aunt Hetty understands the institution and conveys this information to her audience. Subsequent lines are analyzed for SO as follows: Line A2 features wordplay using the word matrimony and connotes a real/ imaginary or implausible situation because the term anti-monial does not exist. This use is particularly ironic given that antimony is a toxic and brittle chemical element. In A3, the SO is an analogy that contrasts marriage as idealized vs. the real state of matrimony. Line A4 is a phrase that features a SO that focuses on opposites (husbands are not dictators/ husbands are dictators). Line A5 offers a real vs. unreal type of opposition inasmuch as marriage is not supposed to blaze and extinguish in a manner consistent with a quick igniting match. Line A6 features an SO based on normal and abnormal states. What is normal becomes abnormal for the married female; therefore, she can
wear a wedding gown to breakfast and a night cap to church and her husband will not “see” the abnormal state of affairs. Line A7 is an SO based on nineteenth century cultural understandings inasmuch as it was improper (or abnormal) for a woman to bend over to pick up a handkerchief if a there was a gentleman present to retrieve the dropped kerchief; in this instance, the SO becomes a play on normal/abnormal relations between the sexes.

The LMs addressed in the text are markedly similar; that is, Fern uses reversed convention, often entwining the institution and the other half of the social contract of matrimony. This KR conveys the ‘resolution’ phase of an incongruity/resolution perspective. According to Fern, clothing, customs, even child rearing practices accentuate the differences between the genders. In Aunt Hetty’s mind, males and females are at odds in the domestic arena.

In this first segment A, the joke targets are the institution of matrimony (in the jab lines) as are males, and matrimony are targeted.

B

B1. You may pick up your own pocket handkerchief;

B2. help yourself to a chair, and split your gown across the back reaching over the table to get a piece of butter,

B3. while he is laying in his breakfast as if it was the last meal he should eat in this world.

B4. When he gets through he will aid your digestion--while you are sipping your first cup of coffee, by inquiring what you’ll have for dinner; whether the cold lamb was all ate yesterday; if the charcoal is all out, and what you gave for the last green tea you bought.
Segment B: Line Categorization

Interrelated jab line groups form a strong strand in Segment B; note that the B3 sentence structure is non-standard, stringing together subordinate clauses designed to appear as a one-sided imaginary discussion of the realities of marriage from the wife’s point of view. The closely connected jab lines present a series of jokes targeting the husband’s lack of decorum or proper behavior. In this case, the interplay between the jab lines in segment B feeds into a jab line that concludes the exchange. During the exchange, Fern’s female character is silent, sipping a “first cup of coffee” as her husband voices a variety of expectations and tasks that the female is responsible for as a part of her daily routine.

The jab line in this strand in its entirety “--You may pick up your own pocket handkerchief, help yourself to a chair,” is a good example of this issue as the humor in the phrase is less obvious to many contemporary twenty first century readers; however, Holley’s readership would have been well-versed in the culture of domesticity and the duties each sex must perform to be considered worthy exemplars. Women of a certain class expected, at the least, particular types of male attention as a part of the fabric of nineteenth century life. Men picked up handkerchiefs; they held chairs. These small conventions were expected by many, if not most of the literate population of the nineteenth century.

GTVH KR Analysis

The SO in the second segment phrase (B1) presents the normal/abnormal state of domestic affairs. Reversing the normal state provides the basis for the humor. A normal domestic
scene in the nineteenth century cult of domesticity contains a devoted husband who notices the appropriateness of his wife’s clothing.

The SO for the next line (B2) follows a similar pattern inasmuch as the husband should notice the need for a chair and the need to observe table manners. A normal husband would be very concerned if his wife’s dress ripped. As Aunt Hetty counsels her charges from the outset of the text, the message is clear: the idealized reality depicted in the popular press is false. The normal state of affairs, according to Aunt Hetty is not the idealized picture portrayed in the popular press, but a husband oblivious to these concerns and absorbed in eating his meal while the wife experiences the husband’s physical and emotional neglect. In the SO that surfaces as a normal/abnormal state of affairs, Fern uses a reversal to turn the digestion of a meal from a normal to abnormal state for the wife as the husband reminds her of the numerous tasks she faces.

The SI in the first jab line of B is the fictionalized husband and wife at a meal: this is significant because the situation parodies a traditional domestic encounter. The SI continues as a conversation between husband and wife as they breakfast. Two first position jab lines precede a final position jab line. The first jab line contradicts normal etiquette “—You may pick up and help yourself” and the second jab line “—split your gown, etc.” poses another contradiction of normal/abnormal state of affairs. Women who are well-provided for do not have gowns in disrepair; these women should have attentive males to pick up handkerchiefs and provide assistance. These customs are conventions, represented as part of the everyday life in middle class literate nineteenth century society. To violate these conventions is a humorous reversal intended to amuse a literate audience. The phrase “—while he is laying in his breakfast, etc.” also contradicts normal/abnormal in non final jab line position inasmuch as the husband is shoveling in food as the wife experiences his neglect and then subsequently experiences further distress.
The TAs in segment B represent males as foolish or ignorant; that is, the author Fanny Fern intends that the TA be seen as males who are foolish and uncivilized louts after matrimony under the present system of rules. From Aunt Hetty’s window, that situation appears to be more often than not, commonplace.

The TA is the female, the you reference significant for the multiple appearances in a short phrase. Fern emphatically pokes fun at any female “you” willing to tolerate the bilious state of matrimony as Aunt Hetty portrays it.

The LM category for Segment B features repeated exaggeration, evident in the torn dress and the litany of tasks the married woman faces while the husband enjoys an afternoon out. Segment B also features faulty reasoning inasmuch as the exaggerated picture Aunt Hetty paints of matrimony is a miserable life for the female.

C.

C1. Then he gets up from the table, lights his cigar with the last evening’s paper that you have not had a chance to read;

C2. given two or three whiffs of smoke,-- which are sure to give you a headache for the afternoon.--and

C3. just as his coattail is vanishing through the door, apologizes for not doing that errand for you yesterday ,--thinks it is doubtful if he can today ,--’so pressed for business.

C4. Hear of him at eleven’oclock, taking an ice cream with some ladies at a confectioner’s, while you are at home new-lining his coat sleeves.

Segment C: Line Categorization

The third phrase group, Segment C features jab lines in first and second positions (C1, C2). In this case, both jab lines poke fun at the realities of domestic life and a wife so
insignificant that her husband lights a cigar with the morning paper before she has a chance to read it. The husband figure in Aunt Hetty’s narrative will give the wife a headache from cigar smoke revealing careless disregard for his spouse’s feelings or health. This portrayal also contradicts domestic relationships as portrayed in the popular press at the time.

This jab line begins the two related phrase groups and a punch line. The first jab line offers a portrait of a self-involved spouse “--Then he gets up from the table lights his cigar with the last evening’s paper that you have not had a chance to read; given two or three whiffs of smoke,-- which are sure to give you a headache for the afternoon.” The next jab line C3 affirms again the male as uninvolved with his family, and unconcerned with his wife’s needs; he demonstrates his near complete disengagement from the family dynamic by. These jabs at the male character are then quickly supplanted by the jab line (C4) that reaffirms the insignificance of the wife in the domestic hierarchy when Fern asserts, “--Hear of him at eleven’o clock, taking an ice cream with some ladies at a confectioner’s, while you are at home new-lining his coat sleeves.”

**GTVH KR Analysis**

The SO in this phrase (C1) features a play on normal and abnormal marital relations. In this case, normal must be considered a husband “representative” of the conventions portrayed about gentleman in the popular press. The husband in Aunt Hetty’s parable ignores his wife’s needs. Similar SI details continue as the dialogue between the fictional husband and wife and, in addition, provide more evidence regarding the disharmony in the matrimonial state. The phrase C3 offers a (SO) script opposition based on actual/non-actual events. The ironic turn targets the
female by painting a domestic scene of a male uninterested and unavailable to his spouse, contrary to the idealized dreams of lovers and honeymoons the sewing circle young women idolized in the opening of the text. This spouse is so removed from the domestic environment that he is unable to fulfill simple household duties, “just as his coattail is vanishing through the door, apologizes for not doing that errand for you yesterday, --thinks it is doubtful if he can today, -- ‘so pressed for business.’” Again, we see the woman targeted as the butt of the joke; in this phrase, the female is seen as foolish for considering matrimony.

The jab line (C4) SI shifts from the interaction or lack of between the husband and wife to the wife performing a domestic duty while the husband dallies in a social encounter outside the home. The SO in the jab line (C4) opposes the real life drudgery of matrimony for the female with the unreal. This jab line demonstrates the myth of domestic bliss and a faithful, attentive spouse within the state of matrimony. The target in this phrase is the “you” that is “new-lining” the coat sleeves while the husband enjoys an outing with other women.

The LMs at work in (C 1-4) use a combination of exaggeration and faulty reasoning to strike at the male character’s ethical behavior.

D.

D1. Children by the ears all day; can’t get out to take the air;
D2. feel as crazy as a fly in a drum.
D3. Husband comes home at night; nods a “How d’ye do, Fan?” boxes Charley’s ears; stands little Fanny in the corner; sits down in the easiest chair in the warmest nook; puts his feet up by the fire while the baby’s little pug nose grows blue with the cold; reads the newspaper all to himself;
D4. solaces his inner man with a cup of tea, and
just as you are laboring under the hallucination that he will ask you to take a mouthful of fresh air with you, he puts on his dressing gown and slippers and begins to reckon up the family expenses; after which he lies down on the sofa and you keep time with your needle, while he sleeps till nine o’clock. (p.377)

Segment D: Line Categorization

Segment D is an interrelated phrase group. The first jab line (D1) is significant because in it Fern avoids pronoun reference to reaffirm the wife’s invisibility in her narrative. The phrases (D1-2) “Children by the ears all day; can’t get out to take the air; feel as crazy as a fly in a drum,” emphasize how the female is trapped by the state of matrimony while the male is not equally constrained by the institution. Overall, it is of note that segment D is a quick flurry of jab lines. Specifically, in Aunt Hetty’s narrative, all of the jab lines target the male. The final jab line is a double edge sentence (D5) that counters the multiple jab lines targeting the male by aiming at the female. The female “laboring under the hallucination” is the joke target. Fern shifts the humorous joke target from male to female to institution within the short narrative to target males, females and the ills of institutions in her humorous narrative on marriage.

GTVH KR Analysis

The SI continues the domestic saga Fern introduced as a parable to describe the woes of matrimony. The SO is a real/unreal situation. The fictionalized wife is not holding children by their ears or unable to breathe. In addition, she is not a crazed insect trapped without any escape. The lines (D1-4) feature a real/unreal SO; the real husband that is callous to the children, ignoring
his wife and children to fulfill his needs. Again the LM uses reversal and exaggeration effectively skewering domesticity. The TA is the female, driven to distraction by her domestic duties in D4.

E.

E1. Next morning, ask him to leave you a 'little money,' he looks at you as if to be sure that you are in your right mind, draws a sigh long enough and strong enough to inflate a pair of bellows, and asks you 'what you want with it, and if a half-a-dollar won't do?'

E2. Gracious king! As if those little shoes, and stockings, and petticoats could be had for half-a-dollar!

E3. O, girls! set your affections on cats, poodles, parrots or lap-dogs; but let matrimony alone.

E4. It's the hardest way on earth of getting a living.

E5. You never know when your work is done. Think of carrying eight or nine children through the measles, chicken-pox, rash, mumps, and scarlet fever,—some of them twice over.

E6. It makes my head ache to think of it.

E7. O, you may scrimp and save, and twist and turn, and dig and delve, and economize and die; and your husband will marry again, and take what you have saved to dress his second wife with; and she'll take your portrait for a fire-board!

E8. "But, what's the use of talking? I'll warrant every one of you'll try it the first chance you get; for, somehow, there's a sort of bewitchment about it.

E9. I wish one half the world were not fools, and the other half idiots."

Segment E: Line Categorization

Segment E concludes Fern’s short text and opens with a punch line (E1) that directs the reader’s attention to the economic dependence the wife experiences and the husband’s control in the embedded narrative. The punch lines (E7-9) summarize how the female views the husband’s
control with the sarcastic aside, “Gracious King!” Clearly this is a king without a loyal following, and, more importantly, a king who is unaware of the financial maintenance and care of his subjects. Lines (E3-E6) offer a series of jabs directed at matrimony. These lines open with an admonishment that pet ownership is preferred to matrimony; the state of matrimony is not a well-paying profession and that the work is nursemaid drudgery for the female (E5). The next jab line (E6) plays off Aunt Hetty’s ability to exaggerate inasmuch as the thought of matrimony touches off a physical symptom, a headache. The punch line (E7) to these jab lines points to the female as expendable, and easily replaced by the husband.

Hetty then takes center stage and returns the narrative to the sewing circle with a final jab line (E8) aimed at females anxious to marry. To those ends, Hetty compares marriage to a state of bewitchment. The punch line (E9) concluding the essay pokes at males and females indirectly by swiping at their intellectual capacities with the terms “fools” and “idiots” (p. 378).

GTVH KR Analysis

As mentioned earlier in the model, the SI, LA and NS are unchanged in the concluding passage. The LM used in the passage opens with an exaggeration that ignores the obvious in (E1) since the children must be clothed according to societal standards. Another exaggeration surfaces in the disrespect and sarcasm the wife uses to refer to her spouse in (E2); for example, the husband is called a “Gracious King.” In (E3) the narrative returns to exaggeration inasmuch as pet ownership is preferable to matrimony. In a similar fashion, lines (E4-E6) use exaggeration to build a case against matrimony by insisting that it is a poorly paid profession and causes physical ailments. Additionally, line (E6) makes use of reasoning from a false premise because a thought
cannot literally produce a headache. The LM at work in lines (E7-E9) include exaggeration and faulty reasoning inasmuch as the essay warns that marriage will lead to the young women’s death and subsequent replacement, while in line E9 exaggeration compares marriage-minded youth to “fools” and “idiots.”

The SO in lines (E1) contrast the real/unreal situation as the husband’s lack of knowledge regarding the family finances results in his less than generous response. Lines (E2-E8) employ the real/unreal opposition of the realities of marriage versus the idealization of the institution. Line (E7) focuses on the actual cause of dying early as a result of matrimony while lines (E8-9) use an actual/non actual opposition that equates the youthful interest in matrimony as foolish and idiotic.

In the passage females are TAs in lines (E1), (E5), (E7) and (E9). Males are TAs in lines (E2), (E6) and (E9). The ideology of matrimony appears as a TA in lines (E3-4) and (E8).

Conclusions

The analysis of “Aunt Hetty on Matrimony” demonstrates how Fern used the contradictions experienced by her contemporaries in the real life state of nineteenth century matrimony. The domestic sphere is a significant real/unreal SO signaled in the text more than once; for example, when the wife is portrayed as invisible to the self-absorbed husband; when Aunt Hetty announces that matrimony is a humbug, and finally, when the female character avoids self-reference and the absence of any female pronouns later in the text. This convention renders the female invisible within the narrative, and is a stylistic convention designed to emphasize the female character’s insignificance.
In the short piece, a pattern of anti-male humor plays against the cultural understanding of the social practice of marriage and surfaces as an explicit example of an ideological joke target (Karman, 1998). Social practices such as marriage or romantic love exemplify the inequalities inherent in the nineteenth century; women did not benefit from the institution but saw their rights, in many cases, diminished by the union.

In her homespun colloquial yarn, Fern targets the institution of matrimony (7x), males (11x), and females (10x) as the butt of a number of humorous asides. There are substantially more jokes that target male and female domestic stereotypes than institutions or ideologies in the model; however, the presence of jokes targeting an institution are significant and demonstrate the strength of the growing social awareness of this inequity. Fern, the earliest writer of the trio of author’s works that are examined in this dissertation, reflects the early stirrings of the women’s rights discussion. Fern’s textual approach to humor and women’s rights appears to be even-handed as it metes out a humorous parable on women’s lot in life, but through her humor she doles out quite a blow for women’s rights through the excoriation of matrimony as an inequitable institution.

These early attempts at using a situated use of humor suggest a certain kind of intention and reveal how author Sara Parton uses a character like Aunt Hetty to explore the boundaries of gender parity in “Aunt Hetty on Matrimony.” When Aunt Hetty chides the audience of young women, her long-winded discourse on the evils of matrimony uses the space of the cult of domesticity to ridicule the shared vision of marriage as a sham. The women are at a sewing circle; Hetty demands that the young women put down their domestic duties and pay attention to her advice. Husbands are dictators with the potential to stray, and the idealized vision of marriage the young women perpetuate is extinguished quickly after the ceremony. Hetty’s speech resists the
prevailing sentiments and belief systems regarding marriage. Through Hetty’s voice, Fern targeted the inequality of the social contract of marriage as it was practiced in her society.

Thus, by using the GTVH to study the text’s use of abstraction and ideological target, the analysis provides a language and audience centered analysis of the joke target and an opportunity to situate the text’s ideological targets in a meaningful fashion. For final consideration, here is the model as analyzed and presented in its entirety.

A1: "Now girls," said Aunt Hetty, "put down your embroidery and worsted work; do something sensible, and stop building air-castles, and talking of lovers and honeymoons.

A2: It makes me sick; it is perfectly antimonial.

A3: Love is a farce; matrimony is a humbug;

A4: husbands are domestic Napoleons, Neroes, Alexanders,— sighing for other hearts to conquer, after they are sure of yours.

A5: The honeymoon is as short-lived as a lucifer-match;

A6: after that you may wear your wedding-dress at breakfast, and your night-cap to meeting, and your husband wouldn’t know it.

B1. You may pick up your own pocket handkerchief,

B2. help yourself to a chair, and split your gown across the back reaching over the table to get a piece of butter,

B3. while he is laying in his breakfast as if it was the last meal he should eat in this world.

B4. When he gets through he will aid your digestion--while you are sipping your first cup of coffee, by inquiring what you’ll have for dinner; whether the cold lamb was all ate yesterday; if the charcoal is all out, and what you gave for the last green tea you bought.

C1. Then he gets up from the table, lights his cigar with the last evening’s paper that you have not had a chance to read;
C2. given two or three whiffs of smoke,-- which are sure to give you a headache for the afternoon,-and

C3. just as his coattail is vanishing through the door, apologizes for not doing that errand for you yesterday ,--thinks it is doubtful if he can today ,--‘so pressed for business.'

C4. Hear of him at eleven’oclock, taking an ice cream with some ladies at a confectioner’s, while you are at home new-lining his coat sleeves.

D1. Children by the ears all day; can’t get out to take the air;

D2. feel as crazy as a fly in a drum.

D3. Husband comes home at night; nods a ‘How d’ye do, Fan?’ boxes Charley’s ears; stands little Fanny in the corner; sits down in the easiest chair in the warmest nook; puts his feet up by the fire while the baby’s little pug nose grows blue with the cold; reads the newspaper all to himself;

D4. solaces his inner man with a cup of tea, and

D5. just as you are laboring under the hallucination that he will ask you to take a mouthful of fresh air with you, he puts on his dressing gown and slippers and begins to reckon up the family expenses; after which he lies down on the sofa and you keep time with your needle, while he sleeps till nine o’clock. ( p.377 )

E1.Next morning, ask him to leave you a 'little money,' he looks at you as if to be sure that you are in your right mind, draws a sigh long enough and strong enough to inflate a pair of bellows, and asks you 'what you want with it, and if a half-a-dollar won't do?'

E2. Gracious king! As if those little shoes, and stockings, and petticoats could be had for half-a-dollar!

E3. O, girls! set your affections on cats, poodles, parrots or lap-dogs; but let matrimony alone.

E4. It's the hardest way on earth of getting a living.

E5.You never know when your work is done. Think of carrying eight or nine children through the measles, chicken-pox, rash, mumps, and scarlet fever,—some of them twice over.

E6. It makes my head ache to think of it.
E7. O, you may scrimp and save, and twist and turn, and dig and delve, and economize and die; and your husband will marry again, and take what you have saved to dress his second wife with; and she'll take your portrait for a fire-board!

E8. "But, what's the use of talking? I'll warrant every one of you'll try it the first chance you get; for, somehow, there's a sort of bewitchment about it.

E9. I wish one half the world were not fools, and the other half idiots."

Having provided a discussion of the methodology of theory on which this study rests, the next chapter applies this method to selected examples of Fanny Fern's fiction.
Chapter III

Proto Feminist Humor in Fanny Fern

Introduction

After the first chapter reviewed background concerning women’s rights and humor, the second chapter modeled the methodology used in the study. More specifically, in those chapters I introduced the following ideas: first, I established the need to situate the evolution and development of feminist humor, and, second, I modeled the operation of the GTVH as a methodology to assess joke targets within longer humorous narratives. In Chapter III, I introduce selected works by Fanny Fern and analyze the joke targets Fern used in the service of what I call proto-feminist humor. That is, in this third chapter, I argue for the use of the term proto feminist humor as it applies to selected works of women’s nineteenth century humorous fiction; to that end, I analyze some of the humorous works of Fanny Fern by means of the methodology established in the previous chapter.

Before the analysis, this chapter opens with a discussion of the pro suffrage perspective presented in Fern and Holley’s humorous fiction, followed by an analysis of joke target used in selected works by Fanny Fern. In particular, the chapter opens with a general discussion of the popularity and marketing of these humorous works by Fern and Holley, and then provides a limited literacy biography and analysis of the joke targets used by Fern, aka Sara Willis Parton, in Chapter III. Next, I analyze the type of joke targets and ideologies Fern used in her fiction. This data is then used to provide perspective on the development of proto feminist humor in relation to pro suffrage humor. After identifying thematic groupings of joke targets and singular and
collective joke targets, this chapter then groups and categorizes joke targets according to use, function or type. Institutional or ideological joke targets are identified. Based on these groupings, I characterize the evolution of feminist humor in terms of the use of the target.

**Proto Feminist Humor**

Based on the familiar stereotypes of elder speakers who use dialect and offer acerbic social commentary or opinions, Fanny Fern and Marietta Holley’s humorous discourse allowed them unprecedented access to a predominately male-dominated field. Their humorous essays were distributed to a wide audience in the nineteenth century because the texts were largely sold by subscription. The texts were typically first available in newspapers or magazines and then collected into volumes and sold as books through mail order. These aggressively marketed volumes appeared on the literary scene as advances in publishing allowed for greater distribution and improved accessibility (Epps, 2006, p.100).

As Chapter I discussed, the use of stereotype literature, particularly in the development of a feminist humor, heightened the populist status of some of the works considered in this chapter. Some scholars argue that stereotype literature should be excluded from the canon because such mass-produced and widely distributed works suggest that the authors are somehow less legitimate or creative. In contrast, Epps (2006) discusses the widespread belief that “stereotypes” the contemporary response to the use of stereotypes in nineteenth century humor writing, particularly in relation to marketing and culture.

By virtue of ignoring, or dismissing, questions of the marketplace that complicate the place of stereotypes in literary history, these recovery projects sometimes
painfully stretch the reversal hypothesis, neglecting the authors’ far more commonly straightforward use of humor stereotype as an efficient means for promoting a politics and securing a living. (p. 99)

Here, Epps indicates that the stereotyped literature was, in fact, a practical means of challenging norms. The limits placed on this community of women writers, sentimentalist, humorist, or otherwise, are significant to the analyses of the joke targets because, as Epps appropriately suggests, the work to reclaim these texts often suffers from a similar stereotyping; that is, the monetary value lessens the literary value.

Additional attempts by contemporary scholars to clarify the relationships between stereotype and literature and literary value rely heavily on the reversal theory to explicate the use of stereotypes by women writers. Epps suggests that scholars adopt this position when he states that “for instance, Nancy Walker and Linda Morris have argued that stereotypes were often used by women humour writers for the purpose of reversal” (p. 100). As Epps explains, the reversal theory involves the intentional use of the stereotype by the author to overturn norms; consequently, the use is critical and worthy of analysis by literary scholars.

Epps reiterates that the use of a stereotype is intentional; as he suggests, this stance is not new and has been discussed by other scholars. Previous close considerations of stereotypes and women humorists by Nancy Walker (1988) posited that the use of stereotypes by women humorists reflected their perspective on and relationship to power. In fact, Walker pointed out that these uses by women writers are representative of the cultural roles women occupied as well as their outsider status within their culture.

It is for this reason that women’s humor so often seems to turn on and perpetuate traditional stereotypes of women: the gossipy spinster, the nagging wife, the
inept housekeeper, the lovelorn woman, the dumb blonde. These are some of the roles in which women have been cast by men and male institutions, and as such they, until quite recently, seemed fixed. What female humorists have done with these stereotypes is to subvert them. (p. 11)

To reverse the circumstances and constraints of their life, the stereotype affords these authors an exaggerated shield from public disapproval. Clearly, women humorists mined their outsider status for humorous context; by using a stereotype, these women writers chose a typical authorial stance on the world they inhabited—or knew intimately.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, understanding of the joke target selection by these women authors is assisted by information about the social circumstances and situations these women authors negotiated as a part of their daily living. When considered in this context, reversal becomes one part of a complex set of associations that support the study’s assessment of the joke targets these writers selected for use. In terms of nineteenth century women humor writers, expediency was a significant issue. Marketing of these works via subscription sales or syndication in magazines or newspapers offered financial security to these well-educated women; employed by a publishing company, women writers like Holley, Fern, and, certainly, Stowe understood how it was necessary to connect quickly and meaningfully with their intended audience. So, when these writers use stereotypes like a lovelorn spinster or an overworked housewife, the stereotype becomes a kind of cultural shorthand, and, more importantly, the use of these familiar images explains in part what determined the joke target selection by these authors—and why.

As discussed in the first chapter, Bing suggests that a feminist joke can be either inclusive or divisive; more importantly, the type of joke target selected allows critical social commentary
while avoiding insults or polarization. An ideological target is well-suited for these purposes. In Chapter II, I suggested that the typical ideological target functioned as a social corrective wielded against social practices and institutions that discriminate, or are perceived as unfair to a segment of a population. In the nineteenth century, women’s suffrage and rights were everyday topics of conversation for some members of the literate population of the country. As such, the use of humor masked the intentions of these women writers working from within the confines of the domestic sphere. Poking fun at institutions and oppressive social practices is not new; in fact, Findlen (1990) reviews the significance of early Renaissance works that continued in the tradition of ancient Greek Old Comedy and humorously excoriated and exposed social ills.

As seen in More’s Utopia and Erasmus’s In Praise of Folly, which dealt with the most serious political and theological subjects of the day by treating them with irony and humor, the late Renaissance naturalists framed their readings of nature through a series of reversals and transformation that highlighted the paradoxes of the natural world. (p. 294)

Thus, for centuries, targeting injustice demonstrated the absurdity of the oppressive social practice. Because these paradoxes offer sharp contrasts and pointed commentary, the type of target selected is significant. As I have discussed, significant use of inclusive humor indicates a piece of feminist humor, while a less significant use of inclusive humor indicates a proto feminist piece of humor.

Fanny Fern

Sarah Willis Parton (1811-1872), whose pen name, as indicated, was Fanny Fern, was reared in circumstances that encouraged literacy. Tonkovich (1997) provides evidence of the
literary activities of the Willis family through Parton’s account of her childhood and influences. The patriarch of the Willis family, Nathanial Willis, founded two newspapers and was well known as a journalist; however, Tonkovich suggests that his patriarchal influence was more likely indirect because Parton was schooled in boarding situations, far from her father’s direct scrutiny. Indirect or direct, the atmosphere in the Willis home fostered literate practices that all family members of the household practiced.

Like the Beechers, many of the nine children followed their father’s occupation. As Parton recalled, “Facility in composition was too common among them to be remarked, and they took to pen and ink as to a native element. They were brought up among newspapers and books” (Memoir, 32). Sara Willis and three of her siblings became professional journalists. (p. 36)

Parton’s account centers on the family practice of literacy as an accepted skill and is remarkable because of the clear inclusion of the Willis female family members. Graff’s (1979; 1991) study of nineteenth century literacy in Canada corroborates the realities of the everyday practice of exclusion based on gender when he states that, “[a]s with ethnicity, the achievement of education could not cancel the disadvantages of birth” (p. 88). This succinct assessment of education and economic success in the nineteenth century acknowledges that the female gender had very limited options. Certainly, literacy was achievable by either gender in the nineteenth century; however, that fact discounts the realities of a cultural narrative like the separation between public and private spheres as appropriate discursive spaces. For males, public life was accepted and encouraged; for females, entry into a public life reflected a violation of sanctioned space.
Tonkovich (1997) considers another primary influence on Parton’s literacy practices: her mother’s literacy. In a book written for children, Parton described her mother as gifted with an “unconscious” natural ability to write demonstrated within daily activities as a mother and wife.

Had [her] time not been so constantly engrossed by a fast increasing family, had she found time for literary pursuits, I am confident she would have distinguished herself. Her hurried letters, written with one foot upon the cradle, give ample evidence of this. She talked poetry unconsciously! The many gifted men to whom her hospitality was extended, and who were her warm personal friends know this.

(pp. 12-13)

The quotation, a glowing assessment of Parton’s mother as a writer, is unusual because the ability to write is expressed as a part of her mother’s maternal duties and roles. Drawn from Fern’s book, *A New Storybook for Children*, the text is significant because the intended audience is children practicing literacy. James Parton (1873) confirmed this opinion of Parton’s mother’s literary talent and influence when he stated “[i]t was unquestionably from their mother that N. P. Willis, Fanny Fern, and their brothers and sisters derived the talent which all of them, in some measure inherited” (p. 12).

However, even as Tonkovich assessed Fanny Fern’s children’s text as a part of a larger accounting of Fern’s nonfiction, Tonkovich noted the difficulties researchers faced when assembling the details of Parton’s life in association with the novel published by Fern, *Ruth Hall*. To many researchers, the “facts” of Parton’s life are obscured by the novel and its charge that the main character was “a self-made woman writer who succeeded without paternal assistance and in spite of active opposition from her already notorious elder brother” (p. 37). To others, *Ruth Hall* is an autobiographical novel and should simply be considered as such; Parton has acknowledged
that much of the experiences Ruth Hall endured were the life situations Parton encountered after her first husband's premature death, and after her subsequent scandalous divorce from an abusive second husband. The divorce was so contentious within her family Parton was left emotionally and financially without the typical means of family support (see Kelley 1984, 2002, p. 139; Warren, 2002, pp. 81-89).

According to Kelley, many of the problems experienced by Parton after these events can be traced to the type of schooling and training middle class women received during the nineteenth century.

The nurture and training of a female were not designed to produce a professional, financially successful writer. It is true that the peculiar circumstances of these women provided them with sufficient education to enable them to write, and they were able to benefit from the opportunity presented by the new commercial publishing industry. However the education these women received was not intended to prepare them for a career or financial independence. (p. 139)

Despite the uncertainty that surrounds Parton’s early literacy influences, that she was well-educated for a woman is not disputed. That she demonstrated considerable talent for humor and irony in composition at a very young age was recognized by Catherine Beecher and her sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Parton’s connections with Katherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe are multifaceted and extend from instructional to long cherished correspondents and friends. Parton was educated by Harriet Beecher’s Stowe’s sister, Catherine at the Hartford Female Seminary. Catherine Beecher, founder of Hartford Female Seminary, served as Sara Willis Parton’s supervisory teacher. Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) attended the seminary as a student and
later served as a teacher in the same institution. Kelley (1984; 2002) discusses Parton’s education at the seminary, describing Parton as a student who was gifted, creative and possessed of a talent in composition that was widely acknowledged by both Beecher sisters:

According to her husband, James, as a child Sara, (born 1811) had been surrounded by newspapers and books in her household and had had the good fortune to be reared by parents who were determined that their children receive the best education possible. For Sara, that meant attendance at Beecher’s Seminary and, in addition, the Emerson Ladies Seminary . . . and a school in Derry, New Hampshire headed by Zilpah Grant who would later establish the Ipswich Female Seminary with Mary Lyon. (p. 76)

Kelley suggests that Parton’s education ended after the seminary in Derry and that any further education was not considered suitable for a young woman in the nineteenth century. Johnson (2002) concurs that this was the type of training young women of this time received, noting that educational opportunities for young women were defined by the skills needed to run a household (p. 20).

Catherine Beecher’s Hartford Female Seminary valued the development of character over intellectual abilities (p. 76). Writings on education by Catherine Beecher confirm this perspective on moral and character development as well as household management (See Beecher’s *American Woman’s Home*, 1869). James Parton’s discussion of Fanny Fern’s education clarifies the relationship between Beecher, Stowe and Fern at the Hartford Female Seminary.

The *eclat* of her brother’s rising fame as a poet made his sister Sara, at the various schools that she attended a person of note from the beginning. The school of which she had the liveliest recollection was that of Miss Catharine Beecher, at
Hartford, where Miss Harriet Beecher was half teacher and half pupil, and in both characters beloved. Several letters are before me, mementoes of her Hartford school-days, and they all speak of her in the same tone, as a rosy-cheeked, daintily formed, gracefully stepping girl, with the torrent of yellow curls, who gave her teachers a good deal of trouble, and yet was liked by them all the better for it. (p. 35)

Kelley (1984; 2002) confirms the youthful Parton’s legendary resistance to the seminary curriculum, particularly mathematics, in a brief discussion that recounts private correspondence between Stowe and James Parton. In the letter, Stowe asks James Parton if he “has claim on a certain naughty girl once called Sara Willis in whom I retain an interest?” (p. 74). According to Kelley, Stowe was referring to an incident at Hartford Female Seminary in 1829 when the youthful seventeen-year-old Sara Willis, aka Sal Volatile, wrote a composition titled “Suggestions on Arithmetic.” Parton’s composition, a wry look at the effect of prolonged exposure to mathematics instruction, was well-received, according to Kelley, and included vivid, humorous imagery and ironic asides; for example, she affects the comic assertion that, upon waking, and facing an examination in mathematics, the young Sara Willis found that “to my great consternation, my hair, instead of forming itself as usual into flaxen circles, very deliberately erected itself into triangles, angles, and parallelograms all over my head” (Quoted in Kelley, 1984; 2002, p. 75). From childhood, Parton exercised skill in irony in humorous fiction; skills fostered by the Beecher Academy and its teachers. Upon maturity, Parton’s relationship with Stowe appeared to be that of literary equals, particularly in their later years; both women were accomplished and successful writers, sought after and well-paid for their work. That Parton’s education and social circumstances are similar to Beecher Stowe’s is not surprising, but proved to
be the educational catalyst Parton recalled as most nurturing of her emerging writing talent and abilities (Tonkovich 1997, p. 41).

Parton’s education and social circumstances as a young widow with two children may have formed her views on women’s suffrage and, in particular, the rights of women. The significance of this context must be taken into account when analyzing her humor. According to Kelley (1984; 2002) Parton openly acknowledged in *Folly as It Flies* the need for women’s rights, stating that she was “heart and soul with the women speakers and lecturers, and workers in public and private, who are trying to bring this about” (p. 332). This support appeared to be consistent and unwavering until her death.

**Fanny Fern and Irony**

As indicated, Fern’s writing was extremely popular and widely serialized across the United States. Any assessment of Fern’s humorous essays should begin by noting that Fern relies on alliteration, malapropisms, ironic asides, and parody to great effect within a relatively short essay form. According to Camfield (1998), the majority of her journalistic career was spent under contract to *The New York Ledger* as a part of a syndicate of writers.

She became the most highly paid journalist of her day, commanding in 1855 the unheard-of price of one hundred dollars per column for *The New York Ledger*. In her 1857 volume of collected journalism, *Fresh Leaves*, she wrote in the Preface she was including “‘The hundred-dollar-a-column story,’ respecting the remuneration of which, skeptical paragraphists have afforded me so much amusement. (N.B.—My banker and I can afford to laugh!)” (v). (p. 48)
Parton’s ready acknowledgement of the profit in her chosen avocation is a wry response to the critics who questioned her success, and, unintentionally, an acknowledgement of how expediency proved to be a profitable decision. It is commonly understood that Parton’s critics were vocal and inexplicably cruel. Wallace (1990) states that Fred Lewis Pattee described Fanny Fern as “the most tearful and convulsingly ‘female’ moralizer of the whole modern blue stocking school,” and, he claimed Fanny Fern was an “incredible vacuum in the history of American letters” (p. 205). Despite critics like Pattee, Fern’s admirers were equally lavish with their praise of her talent, including the author Nathaniel Hawthorne, who, in a rare moment, wrote a letter praising Fern’s writing and excluding her work from his well-known diatribe against female writers pursuing careers at the time (p. 204).

Camfield (1998) suggests that Parton used humor as an alternative to “rage as an appropriate response, not only to the domestic ideology, but to her own ambivalent acceptance of those constraints” (p. 61). While he admits that some of Fern’s humor and her mastery of a kind of ironic posturing allowed her to shift perspective and point of view with each sketch, this same chameleon-like persona might be sometimes “shocking to the late twentieth-century reader” (p. 60). Perhaps it is more evident that expedient purposes in securing income through the steady syndication of her writing determined how Parton negotiated nineteenth century cultural constraints. This is a significant aspect of Parton’s use of irony within the corpus of texts, establishing Parton as a serious humorist and stylist, rather than unfairly limiting her to “sentimentalist” fiction. This corpus, as established earlier, is based on direct or indirect reference to women’s rights, gender roles and equality, and suffrage. Within these texts, the mercurial, chameleon-like character of Fanny Fern flits from sly provocateur to steely-eyed conservative casting a clear gaze on the failings of all. The ironic gaze levels all sides of a disagreement.
For the purposes of this dissertation, I next establish an operational definition of irony; on this basis, the subsequent analysis of Parton’s joke targets are thoroughly explicated in relation to relevant literature involving feminist and proto feminist humor. The definition advanced by Attardo (2000) includes the basic understanding that ironic statements are meant to be interpreted dually; that is, most scholars agree that the typical ironic utterance contains a literal and an intended meaning (p. 794). Attardo also considers how sarcasm, “is an aggressive form of irony with a clear set of markers and a clear target” (p.795). Although Attardo’s discussion of irony combines a thorough review of relevant rhetorical and linguistic literature related to irony, the primary discussion of his article weds inappropriateness theory with the violation of one or more of the maxims in the Principle of Cooperation (CP) as a necessary condition in the ironic utterance. The article also assesses one stage and two stage processing theories of irony. According to Attardo, a two stage processing of an ironical utterance can be defined as “the processing of a meaning, the rejection of this interpretation on pragmatic grounds and the subsequent reinterpretation of the text.” In contrast, in one stage processing, Attardo suggests that “ironical meaning is arrived at directly without the mediation of a first interpretation that is rejected” (pp. 796-797). Attardo’s explanation offers a succinct appraisal of most one stage processing versus two stage processing theories of irony in favor of the two stage perspective, as in Gricean literature.

Still, the aspect of the inappropriateness theory which strikes me as most interesting is the fact that it links inappropriateness and the violation of the CP to the perlocutionary goals of S via the principle of least disruption. By doing so, the pragmatic functions of irony follow logically: if S is being inappropriate, he/she must have a goal for doing so, and this goal may be arrived at inferentially.
via the principle of Perlocutionary Cooperation (PCP; Attardo, 1997). Therefore, the present treatment of irony may claim to have provided at least a good starting point on answering the question of ‘why would S use irony?’ (p. 823)

This statement on irony and inappropriateness links with the use of reversal theory as a mask by the nineteenth century women authors discussed above. Thus, the reversal theory is relevant to the choices nineteenth century women authors made to increase their audience and secure their chosen avocation.

In addition to its links with reversal theory, irony has a rhetoric function which pertains to Parton’s use of it. Wayne Booth (1974) describes the interpretation of the ironic act in terms of stable and unstable. For Booth, stable irony is defined “as a kind of ironic act or utterance that is intentional, and a deliberate action” (p. 5). Additionally, Booth considers stable irony to be a covert action; by that, Booth indicates that the ironic act or utterance must be “reconstructed” by the hearer or reader; importantly, once that reconstruction has occurred, the reader generally assumes that the meaning is then “fixed” or stable, referring to this as the “finite” which Booth likens to “local and limited” meaning. According to Booth, if the reader or hearer continues to reconstruct additional meanings then the ironic utterance becomes unstable (pp. 5-6).

In contrast, unstable irony offers the hearer or reader the confusing choices of infinite ironies or meanings rather than the limited or local meaning of the stable ironic utterance. Booth uses contemporary exemplars to define unstable irony.

Poems produced by chance or mathematical formulas or machines force the reader to create meanings—if there are to be any. Whatever may be said for or against such works, they offer no handle for interpretation in our sense at all. They are deliberately indeterminate (p. 243).
To Booth, unstable irony and the creators of such ironies are intent on expressing some type of “overt assertions of the infinity of the ironic vision” (p. 245). That is, the phenomenon of unstable irony is at odds with the more familiar conceptualization of stable irony and its determinate local meaning.

Significantly, the two types of irony characterize the types of irony Parton used, the more familiar form of stable irony and the type of ironic statements with which she presented perspectives on taboo topics in nineteenth century discourse, topics like prostitution, and women’s rights. Parton even pens two short pieces on cross dressing that “plays with the definition of masculine and feminine to imagine what is essential and what merely customary” (Camfield 1998, p. 58). Here Parton uses unstable irony to negotiate explicit gender roles, bridging the controversies surrounding the taboo by using the ironic statement to point out the inequities involved with women’s fashionable dress when conducting everyday activities.

As discussed earlier in Chapter I, Classic treatments of language and rhetoric characterize the use of irony as a figure and a trope. Quintilian described this dual purpose.

Since in both cases we understand something which is the opposite of what is actually said; on the other hand, a careful consideration of the species of irony will soon reveal the fact that they differ. In the first place the trope is franker in meaning, and despite the fact that it implies something other than what it says, makes no pretense about it. (Quintilian, 1921, Book IX, II, pp. 44-45)

As described, the ironic utterance masks authorial intent; fact, Quintilian separates the two forms of ironical utterance (trope and figure) through the use of the authorial mask, claiming that in the figurative form of an ironical utterance the “speaker disguises his entire meaning, the disguise being apparent, rather than confessed” (IX, II, p. 46). Similarly, Parton’s artful use of the ironic
mask serves as a complete disguise (including a pen name) and a form of protection from rebuke when she chose to challenge the norms.

Hutcheon (1994), however, identifies ironic meaning as strategic and claims that “ironic meaning possesses three major semantic characteristics: it is relational, inclusive and differential” (p.58). To Hutcheon, how an ironic utterance is understood differs from many theoretical approaches because, as she suggests, “some theorists claim that we cannot consistently embrace both the literal and ironic meanings (Kaufer 1977, p. 97), but I would suggest not only that we can but that, if we do not, then we are not interpreting the utterance as ironic at all” (p.60).

Hutcheon (1994) also discusses the more contemporary understanding of the use of Signifying by oppressed populations, including women, acknowledging that “as in theories of black signifying, women’s marginalized and “divided” self (Ostreker, 1986, p. 11) is interpreted as the enabling precondition of irony’s distance (Walker 1988a, p. 208), doubleness (Walker 1988a, p. 12) and even duplicity” (p. 32). To Hutcheon, then, women’s use of irony is a strategy designed to simultaneously subvert and accommodate the dominant ideology.

Hutcheon (1994) links the strategic use of irony to the traditional African folk tradition of Signification. This idea is expanded upon and clarified by Elizabethda Wright (2001). To Wright, the use of irony and Signification (See Gates, 1984; Smitherman, 1977, pp. 118-119) by women, in particular, Fanny Fern, masked their identities to subvert the discourse of the domestic sphere as the only accepted place for nineteenth century women. As I indicated at this chapter’s beginning, Sara Willis Parton, aka Fanny Fern’s, humorous essays represent how critical the use of unstable irony is to early expressions of proto feminist humor, that is, for discussing taboo topics such as gender equality.
**Proto Feminist Humor**

To fully address the joke target selection in the Fern corpus, I next define proto feminist and feminist humor. In particular, I clarify these definitions with respect to existing applications of the term feminist humor to humor, literature and various social practices in contemporary society. Additionally, as stated in previous chapters, the term feminist humor has been applied to women writers who advanced any discussion of gender equality. Thus, with this perspective, women writers working in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Mary Wollenscroft and Christine de Pizan, for instance, are sometimes viewed as feminist writers, or proto-early feminist, depending on the scholarly perspective. Frequently, then, feminist concerns are referred to as outside the boundaries of traditional historical boundaries, even if the term feminism was hardly used in those centuries, in English or other languages. Margaret Ferguson (2004) summarized how this argument is shaped by modern feminist thinkers.

Translation across geopolitical borders is a central facet of feminism in its modern incarnation; translation and cultural appropriation, with their attendant political ambiguities are central also to earlier feminist thinkers, who are often called protofeminist. That word is as debatable, in my view, as the fashionable contemporary term postfeminist; both prefixes imply that feminism has a single, linear history. (p. 9)

To Ferguson, the development of feminism as a theoretical construct must not be considered in historical context. This idea, consistent with contemporary analyses of literature, emphasizes the historical development of the term feminism, and any associated meanings. To some feminist theorists, these challenges represent the transformative nature of scholarship by questioning
formerly intractable constructs. While Ferguson acknowledges the significance of examining the ideas behind traditional literary time periods as ascribed by an early patriarchal system, ultimately, works of literature exist within a particular time and place. Any study of language use must be situated within place or “time”; studies of language are considered synchronically because works of literature reflect the culture of the time they were created within.

Like Ferguson, Warren (2000) discusses the importance of using consistent values within contemporary feminist critical inquiry. Warren focuses on periodization and on the difficulty of accommodating nineteenth century women writers within canonical constraints. Briefly, periodization refers to the rejection of traditional chronological time periods in literary history as constructs of a previous largely white patriarchy. Warren refers to this rejection as a consequence; that is, challenges from emerging scholars in a variety of underrepresented disciplines including feminism question periodization in American literary history “to analyze what happens to theories of periodization when previously excluded or marginalized writers are factored in” (p. xv). To Warren, scholars must question the truth of established systems, pointing out that what has been regarded as “true” is in fact somebody’s creation” (p. xiii).

To recapitulate, in the nineteenth century, marginalized female authors used humor to great success in serialization and subscription sales. As discussed previously, since antiquity, humor has been historically marginalized as lesser discourse; therefore, it is significant that nineteenth century women humorists used humor as social commentary in populist American literature, embracing the “otherness” and challenging known boundaries to point toward women’s rights. Their humorous expressions thus reveal the development of an early feminist humor or more accurately, proto feminist humor. When Fern’s ironic jokes point towards this outsider status through her commentary on the inequities of marriage yoked to a “Lord of Creation,” these
types of targets are more than simple stereotypes of an inept or uncaring male, but are jabs at the institution of matrimony as well as its gatekeepers, “the Lords of Creation.” When Fern’s Aunt Hetty complains matrimony is “antimonial,” she masked her intentions to inform young females that the union of man and wife is a disastrous decision for the female. Her clever play on words targets the institution as unfair, so unfair it is like a toxic, suffocating metallic compound (antimony) in Fern’s humorous essay.

**Fern Corpus Joke Target Analysis**

The Fanny Fern humor corpus consists of thirty short essays that feature humorous commentary on relations between genders or refers to women’s rights. Additionally, the Fern corpus contains essays that target males for fostering inequality. All essays were first published in the *New York Ledger*, then collected into volumes and sold by subscription across the United States to a wildly receptive audience. Fern’s mastery of the short essay form presents a succinct clear analysis with a clear target and a shifting perspective that opposes, chastises or subverts the cultural milieu of the nineteenth century. As discussed in Chapter II, divisive jokes target males or females, and inclusive jokes target ideologies or institutions. For the purposes of the dissertation targets are categorized as divisive (male or female), or inclusive (type of ideology). As discussed in earlier chapters, Bing (2004) notes that although divisive jokes are considered part of feminist humor, she also questions whether the telling of divisive jokes by women serves to “reinforce gender polarization and strict categorization?” (p. 25).

Because the corpus is limited to essays associated with women’s rights, it is important to note that the institution targeted in these essays is matrimony/marriage. Equally important to
consider is that when the inclusive humor used in the corpus targets an ideology, I pay particular attention to these targets in the following analyses. For example, in the short essay that served as the model in Chapter II (No. 22), “Aunt Hetty on Matrimony,” the effects of the ideology are present in the female narrator’s limited perspective. Analyzing the use of pronouns in the passage unpacks several interesting observations that confirm the joke targets “matrimony” and “males.” First, the use of a male pronoun reference (23 occurrences of he, him, or himself) occurs more frequently than the use of an equivalent female reference in the passage (14 occurrences of you, yourself). Also significant is the lack of comparative female appellations used in the passage: Aunt Hetty refers to “husband” and “inner man” but offers no equivalent female referents in the passage. The empty subject parameter is a purposeful stylistic convention, and a significant discursive violation from the standard. Fern omits any reference to the unnamed female narrator, even in the execution of her duties, for example, “Children by the ears all day; can’t get out to take the air; feel as crazy as a fly in a drum.” Through the omission of naming the narrative emphasizes this feeling of trapped isolation. The unnamed female narrator is unable to escape her circumstances and is robbed of even an identity in the sentence structure, giving more authority to the male character in the narrative.

According to Aunt Hetty, the female character is burdened with family responsibilities while the male character avoids all meaningful interaction with the family, preferring the company of single unattached females. The depiction of these circumstances underscores the female character’s inability to thwart or change her circumstance. Her husband “takes” while the unnamed female “can’t get away.” The wife has no voice while the husband seeks his inner man. Although the narrator is the female Aunt Hetty, the frequency of the male pronoun referent in the
passage underscores the importance of the male characters reflecting the bias and significance toward males.

In addition, the actions of the male character impact the female in a limited but negative fashion. Even the offhand remark of possible infidelity is blunted by her role as a domestic. “Hear of him at eleven o’clock, taking an ice cream with some ladies at a confectioner’s” as she repairs his garments. She is confined by young children who require near constant care and burdened with an endless amount of household duties to manage. The male character, in contrast, has an existence beyond the domestic habitat and engages in activities with other women who are, from the wife’s perspective, inappropriate and self-centered. His control over the female character is evident: he engages in selfish activities that flatter his self-image and dismisses her requests as trivial. He delays fulfilling her requests because he is too busy with duties in his workplace.

These actions reveal his dominance over her daily activities, to the degree that he controls how and when she receives goods that she needs. Because the actions of both characters are dominated by the male, and these actions are roundly chastised by Aunt Hetty as a detriment to wedded bliss, it is clear the intended audience of “Aunt Hetty on Matrimony” includes young females easily persuaded by idealized visions of domestic life, and clearly that the ideology targeted is matrimony. The male’s lack of empathy and understanding express the opposite of an idealized domestic space in the nineteenth century.

As discussed previously, Wright (2001) suggests that Fern’s columns and novels were successful because she used a form of signifying practice to veil her message of resistance.

Signification, according to Smitherman (1977, 1997) “refers to the verbal art of insult in which a speaker puts down, talks about, needles—that is, signifies on—the listener” (p. 118). Signification, then, is characterized by its use of figurative language, puns, and ambiguous
meaning. Wright (2001) suggests that Fern uses a “strategy similar to Signification to argue for women’s rights and to be accepted by everyone” (pp.102-103). This strategy, Wright asserts is particularly successful because Fern’s texts “resist the societal attempts at homogenization . . . and make clear that the stable meaning does not exist” (p. 107).

In “How It Is” (No.23), a woman is reminded of the blessings that the institution of marriage bestows upon a woman; however, the “blessings” are ambiguously portrayed. Fern’s blessings include chores, thoughtless behavior (on the husband’s part), forms of emotional abuse, and even fear. Fern’s laundry list of misgivings about the sacred space and bliss of matrimony are masked behind a list of remembrances; ironically, the reader is encouraged to think of the advantages of the “Mrs.” Prefix. For example, the appellation “Mrs.” allows the reader to mend, clean, perform child-rearing duties, endure thoughtless behavior, and dread “disturbing your husband’s slumbers” with a fretful child. Fern portrays the husband as an inconsiderate stereotypical dolt. He cuts up his wife’s gown, and uses the pieces to clean his guns; he “litters shaving suds” on her toilette table, and leaves his clothes lying on the floor. The ambiguity in the text (is marriage good or bad?) allows readers to choose to participate in the humorous rhetorical game—or not.

Consistent with Wright’s (2001) characterization of the use of “Signifying” in Fern’s texts permits the text to be read (or misread) because meaning is not stable. The text is heteroglossic; that is, it is a text open to a multiplicity of interpretations, filled with competing voices, all clamoring for attention. Wright suggests that “Fern’s work makes people think, reevaluates assumptions regarding cultural stereotypes and beliefs, and shows that no language can claim an authentic, incontestable face” (p. 108).
In addition to signifying, this type of text is significant because Fanny Fern works within the discourse allocated to women; her text affirms the exclusivity of the domestic sphere through its reminder to the reader that “only a privileged few” are married. This discursive turn is an affirmation of the cult of “true womanhood” and yet her simple tale may also be read as a cautionary rejoinder against entry into the sphere, because the reader might be disappointed. While the text affirms and also negates the rhetorical space available to women, ultimately Fern’s text uses marriage as a joke target and tool to subvert the boundaries of gendered space.

The essay “Sunshine and Young Mothers” (No. 6), also targets marital inequity by declaring that marriage is bad for women and women need smelling salts to survive wedded bliss. Fern targets the duties of a young wife and compares matrimony to a “one-sided partnership.” In this essay, husbands are portrayed as vain, insensitive, fickle and unfaithful while young wives are “used up by twenty-five.” Fern’s humorous essay points to the chaos of motherhood and the endless parade of duties that claim the wife’s attention, forcing readers to pay attention to the difference in expectations for males and females. The male gazes at his reflection in the mirror, fusses with his clothing while the wife is swamped with morning duties.

In “Mrs. Croaker” (No. 11), Fern uses the stereotypes of an overbearing male and a manipulative female to illustrate the way that nineteenth century marriage is an unequal institution. Marriage is targeted by Fern through a narrative claiming that the present arrangement fosters manipulation. Fern employs reversal in this text to pit the wife’s ability to manipulate the husband against the husband’s dominant behavior. Fern accomplishes this by claiming that husbands are “managed;” however the management that Mrs. Croaker uses is limited by the domestic sphere, granting her quiet time to continue working on household chores without questioning by her husband regarding the cost of baking supplies. This reversal is significant
because it targets the institution of the domestic sphere. The wife’s manipulative ability is limited by her unequal position. All she can manipulate from her overbearing spouse is a bit of quiet time to continue baking.

In “A Model Married Man” (No. 28), Fern targets marriage using a sly role reversal that slams one of the key ideologies of domesticity. The best way to characterize this stereotype is that the married male is true blue; he is a good provider who is monogamous, obsessed with the beloved, always honorable and caring. As Fern suggests, this Prince Charming stereotype must be abandoned when confronted with the shortcomings of a faithless, flirtatious, and dissolute spouse in real life.

The essay “Indulgent Husbands” (No. 27) compares the male role in marriage to controlling a horse (the wife). This essay targets marriage and males via reversal, providing “guidance” to bachelors on appropriate conduct after marriage; as indicated the conduct consists of instructions to control the female similar to handling or training a horse. Significant is Fern’s use of the term “Lord of Creation” to reinforce the superiority of the male in marriage. Fern’s use of reversal in this essay forces the reader to confront a variety of inequities. The woman is portrayed as energetic and full of life until marriage; the male is counseled to use domination to control the wife and avoid the excesses of an “indulgent husband.”

To target the domestic ideal, Fern again attacks the ideology as represented by “Mr. True Flag,” a “Lord of Creation.” She accomplishes this by mocking the husband as inexperienced, a recent bachelor lacking practical knowledge of matrimony. The narrator counsels the spouse to train the wife like one would train a horse. The wife will resist, rear her head, and attempt to flee if the husband is not firm with the wife, and become an emotionless head of the household set on
restraining his spouse’s “saucy” spirit. The target reverses the ideal that marriage is any type of equal partnership, and that free will is part of the foundation for a successful marriage.

Also significant, the woman is compared to a child in the essay, someone willing to take advantage of, or manipulate the spouse given any opportunity. The spouse must represent dignity or lose his “connubial scepter.” Note that both partners are deficient in this essay and need to be “trained” to be successful in marriage. Note, too, the divisive nature of the essay--the spouses are opposed in attitude and demeanor. This is a good example of proto feminist humor inasmuch as the essay reflects some of the characteristics of a feminist humor text, but lacks a coherent world view. This essay reaffirms the need to categorize this work as proto feminist humor because although the text points towards a feminist sensibility regarding women’s place in the world, it also jabs females who accept or condone controlling behaviors in males, yet continues to work within the traditional sphere.

In the nineteenth century domestic sphere, individuals were expected to play ascribed gender roles. For instance, marriage and females must be “managed” by males in the essay, “Sam Smith’s Soliloquy” (No. 16). This essay targets marriage and males through the narrative. First, Sam Smith lists the qualities a proper wife should possess; for example, a “good” nineteenth century wife should be under seventeen years of age, attractive, and unintelligent. Another redeeming characteristic is height; the proposed wife should be shorter than the groom. Next, Sam Smith recounts two tales of married men and the advantages of the state for males, comparing matrimony to a great invention for males. Thus he leaves the reader wondering if the invention of matrimony is as kind to females.
The prose piece1 “Hourglass Thoughts” (No. 17), is a series of ironic statements that are shocking and even provocative in the oppositions they pose. Marriage is targeted three times in the short piece; the first statement is a wry, deceptive pairing: The bride stands waiting at the altar; the corpse lays waiting for burial. Fern forces readers to contemplate “what” matrimony signals for the female partner in a nineteenth century marriage: an ending, rather than a beginning.

Marriage is also portrayed as confining work for females when Fern contrasts marital roles: “The wife pure patient loving trustful sits singing by the evening fire repairing with the busy fingers of economy” while the spouse is described as “flavored by darkness, seeks with stealthy steps and costly gifts the syron of the hour” (p. 124). Clearly, the roles are long established and unequal; the male is dissolute and unfaithful and the wife is patient and hard working.

In the third example, marriage is targeted through a role reversal that portrays women who “rant of their Women’s Rights” as neglectful when they cast aside the spouse and familial responsibility in the quest for equality (p. 124). Here, Fern reverses matters of gender roles and uses marriage inequality and gender roles to reinforce the domestic sphere and the duties of a wife. In this ironic contrast roles are reversed; the male is portrayed as neglected by the wife’s activities in “Women’s Rights.” and forced to “eat bad dinners and tend crying babies” (p. 124). This statement is significant demonstrating that Fern’s humor, at times, reinforces the status quo. Here we see Fern use a stereotype as a corrective issued to the female married members of the suffrage community. The stereotype reinforces the status quo; so much so, it demeans the wife for seeking equality and leaving her husband to “bad dinners and crying babies.” As discussed

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1 This piece is not an essay, but a series of disconnected ironic statements, unnumbered.
previously in Chapter I, some types of women’s humor appear to be more conciliatory or accommodating to the domestic sphere and women’s social role, rather than an offering an overt response to oppression. As such, the humor in this piece should be considered subversive. The subversive humor seems aligned with the early stirrings and realizations of equality—more correctly we see the corrective offered to the community. This is a proto feminist expression, that is, women’s humor that possesses many of the characteristics of early feminist humor but lacks some significant elements such as the appropriate audience.

In “Mr. Pipkin’s Ideas on Family Retrenchment” (No. 19), Fern targets marriage inequality and money management in a typical nineteenth century marriage; more specifically, in this world the male controls money and all aspects of married life so completely that the wife must obey his pronouncements, even if these restrictions show callous disregard for the welfare of his family or his spouse. Mr. Pipkin is a stereotype of a nineteenth century male; vain, cruel, concerned about money but only concerned with restricting household expenditures. However, his access to funds to continue his personal vices is unrestricted. The joke is on women who marry males like Mr. Pipkin in this cautionary tale that shows the financial aspects of marriage in the domestic sphere.

Published in 1870, two years before Fern died, “What Mary Thought About John” (No. 20) is one of her later pieces collected in the volume, Gingersnaps. In the text, Fern presents Mary’s thoughts about her husband “John’s” vices such as tobacco and his selfish, fickle attitude. These thoughts present a vivid contrast to the text’s description of her exterior: quiet, weary from sewing her husband’s coat while he lounges, reading three newspapers from front to back. Mary resents the fact that her husband has ample free time to read the paper while she is mending his jacket. Mary believes that John should read some of the interesting stories aloud so that she is
engaged mentally while she is sewing; however, John ignores or rebuffs her attempts to engage him in conversation.

Here, Fern probes inequality in marriage from one of its most basic nineteenth century tenets: male dominance takes precedence in all domestic matters—and male silence signals one of its most potent responses—his—disapproval. Fern uses the name John and “Johns” throughout the short piece to great effect; previous scholarship has noted the usage as significant. While referring to another of Fern’s short essays, Camfield (1998) points out that “we can assume Fern is using the word [John] in two of its other slang forms: one, as a synonym for “man,” “guy,” or “fellow,” and two, through her quick juxtaposition of “John” with “Thomas,” as a synonym for penis” (p. 51). Although I can agree that the usage of the folksy “Johns” in this piece is meant to evoke a stereotype of “guys,” I can only speculate as to other authorial intentions. Clearly, Fern employed a sophisticated sense of irony giving her license to tease, cajole, or tweak any side of an issue.

Finally, my analysis of the corpus revealed two other clear joke targets. The first is a feminized male stereotype, and the second, a radical suffrage stereotype that neglects her maternal role in her quest for equality. Fern exploits these divisive stereotypes fully in several essays; for example,” Men’s Dickey’s Never Fit Exactly” (No. 8) targets males who pay undue attention to physical appearance. The stereotype is a parody of a vain fashion-conscious female—the reversal emerges in that it is a male obsessing about his appearance and an ill-fitting dickey in a vain attempt to appear attractive. The feminized male stereotype is also clearly seen in “I Can’t” (No.25), a short essay that claims that males that “whine” are unmanly, more female than male.

Fern trades on divisive targets related to females, also. In “A Model Husband” (No. 26), women who eschew traditional modes of dress and action are targeted. In this short piece women
that wear “bloomers” are irresponsible females that hold extreme views related to suffrage and neglect the duties of the domestic sphere.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that the humor in the corpus relies on divisive humor rather than inclusive humor with one clear exception: the targeting of the institution of marriage. That is, the majority of the jokes are, as Bing (2004) described in her article, considered “divisive” and directed against people, males (18) and females (9); however, the texts also offer “inclusive” jokes that target the institution of marriage (11) in a fairly consistent manner. Coupled with a clear use of irony, the two types of joke targets, and the numerous jabs at the institution of matrimony, the texts represent proto feminist humor. In other words, Fanny Fern’s fiction is similar to feminist humor, but is proto feminist humor rather than feminist humor because of the reliance on divisive jokes. A brief summary and table of the Fanny Fern Corpus follows and concludes Chapter III.

Chapter IV features several examples of humorous fiction by Marietta Holley and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Long form analyses of these works provide further evidence of proto feminist humor as used by Holley. Additionally, the use of anti-feminist humor by Holley and Stowe is analyzed in relation to proto feminist humor.
Table 2

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type/Target</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Punch</th>
<th>Significance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Male/ LANGUAGE DOMINANCE</td>
<td>“Interesting Husbands” (1853, 1888) Fern Leaves From Fanny’s Portfolio First Series. Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Co. Fern Leaves 1</td>
<td>P: Male Stereotype/Silence</td>
<td>Language use as a form of dominance= Female silenced by silence</td>
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<td>Targets: male middle of the road attitudes/no beliefs</td>
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<td>2. Silence/Male Dominant: Passionless Patriarch</td>
<td>”Mr. Smith” 1 (1853, 1888). Fern Leaves From Fanny’s Portfolio First Series. Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Co. Fern Leaves 1</td>
<td>P: male= silent/death</td>
<td>“expressed essence of chloroform” Silence as death/loss of consciousness</td>
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<td>4. Male attitudes toward women. Stereotype predatory male that preys on young innocent females</td>
<td>“Model Widower” (1853, 1888). Fern Leaves From Fanny’s Portfolio First Series. Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Co. Fern Leaves 1</td>
<td>P: Husband hangs his first wife’s portrait in the attic-shrouded in a blanket</td>
<td>-Fickle Husband forgets about first wife and marries a playmate for his oldest daughter</td>
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<td>5. Married males as superior. Jealous stereotype of possessive angry male. Silence as a form of male dominance.</td>
<td>“Curious Things” Fern Leaves from Fanny’s Portfolio, 2d Series;2d series</td>
<td>P: “curious that whenever you ask him for money, he is so busy reading the newspaper, that he can’t hear you” (p.48)</td>
<td>Male controls money and wife through use of silence.</td>
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<td>6. Marriage Male, vain self-absorbed young motherhood</td>
<td>“Sunshine and Young Mothers” Fern Leaves from Fanny’s Portfolio, 2d Series; 144.</td>
<td>-bad for young women/good for men. Narrator needs “smelling salts” to survive</td>
<td>Marriage targeted through duties.</td>
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<td>10. Single man as stupid Incapable of managing a household</td>
<td>“Bachelor Housekeeping” Fern Leaves 1 Parton, Sarah. (1853, 1888). Fern Leaves From Fanny’s Portfolio First Series. Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Co.</td>
<td>Marriage good for males</td>
<td>-benefits of marriage to males Reversal is the benefits of marriage for males =exploitation of female</td>
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<td>12. Stereotype of predatory woman seeking new husband</td>
<td>“The Model Widow” Fern Leaves 1  Parton, Sarah. (1853, 1888). Fern Leaves From Fanny’s Portfolio First Series. Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Co.</td>
<td>State of “widowhood” should be used</td>
<td>Widowedness=position used to gain sympathy and attention</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Male gossip/ prying neighbors; women=morally loose</td>
<td>“Meditation of Paul Pry” Jun.; Fern Leaves from Fanny’s Portfolio, 2d Series; p.141;</td>
<td>Gossip=Moral Reform</td>
<td>P: “Suppose it hadn’t been her brother now! It’s astonishing the ingratitude of people. It’s enough to discourage all my attempts at moral reform.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Untrained males are males that treat females as unequal -Wife as manipulative to gain vacation</td>
<td>“What Mrs. Smith Said” Fern Leaves 1 Parton, Sarah. (1853, 1888). Fern Leaves From Fanny’s Portfolio First Series. Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Co.</td>
<td>Manipulation in marriage is natural to female</td>
<td>Feigned illness as manipulation by a female with doctor’s assistance</td>
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<td>16. Bachelors are dirty Women must be managed Marry a stupid woman Marriage</td>
<td>Sam Smith’s Soliloquy 1854. Fern Leaves from Fanny’s Portfolio, 2d Series; 105.</td>
<td>P: Blue-eyed women are stupid; illiterate</td>
<td>Women are “obstinate little monkeys”</td>
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17. Bride at the Altar compared to corpse waiting for burial (Marriage)  
Brothers clad in purple linen...fared sumptuously /Sisters in linsey-woolsey, toil in garrets (Males)  
Wives vs. Husbands (male/marriage)  
Women’s Rights Protester  
Wife vs. husband at home (women’s rights at the expense of maternal role)

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<tr>
<th>“Hourglass Thoughts” 1854. Fern Leaves from Fanny’s Portfolio, 2d Series;123-24.</th>
<th>Significant piece—series of equal-opportunity ironic statements that are ironic and skew social attitudes from all perspectives, conservative or liberal, pro suffrage and anti-suffrage positions.</th>
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18. Male that believes in the stereotype of an educated woman as unmarriageable/unable to tend to domestic sphere  
Male stereotype educated women upended by friend’s wife. “...and Harry took his leave in a very indescribable and penitential frame of mind, doing ample penance for his former unbelieving scruples, by being very uncomfortably in love with a "Blue-Stocking."

| “A Practical Bluestocking” (1853, 1888). Fern Leaves from Fanny’s Portfolio First Series. Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Co. | Male stereotype educated women upended by friend’s wife. “...and Harry took his leave in a very indescribable and penitential frame of mind, doing ample penance for his former unbelieving scruples, by being very uncomfortably in love with a "Blue-Stocking."

| “You had better dismiss your nursery girl this afternoon; that will begin to look like retrenchment” | Significance is the use of the stereotype reversed. Educated women better able to manage home. |

19. Male/self-absorbed/controlling Marriage  
“Mr. Pipkin’s Ideas of Family Retrenchment” 1854. Fern Leaves from Fanny’s Portfolio, 2d Series; 237.  
“You had better dismiss your nursery girl this afternoon; that will begin to look like retrenchment”  
Woman’s life in marriage controlled in all facets by male. Male blames wife for children.

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<tr>
<th>“Mr. Pipkin’s Ideas of Family Retrenchment” 1854. Fern Leaves from Fanny’s Portfolio, 2d Series; 237.</th>
<th>Woman’s life in marriage controlled in all facets by male. Male blames wife for children.</th>
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20. Male/self-absorbed All “Johns” or “Adams” that behave like this (wield silence or other dominant behaviors to control). Marriage  
P:”The woman thou gavest to be with me”—she did thus and so; and therefore all the Adams from that time down, have whimpered, torn their hair, and rushed forth to the long-coveted perdition, over the bridge of this cowardly excuse.  
Fern ponders the objections male raise when they discuss the “woman question.  
Ironic use of “Johns” by Fern has been noted in other research (See Camfield, 1998).

Ironic use of “Johns” by Fern has been noted in other research (See Camfield, 1998). |
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<td>21. self-indulgent women/neglect familial duties</td>
<td>“Model Lady” (1853, 1888). Fern Leaves From Fanny’s Portfolio First Series. Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Co.</td>
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<td>Idealized domestic female stereotype</td>
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<td>24. Vain/Non-literary female</td>
<td>“Advice to Ladies” Parton, Sarah. (1853, 1888). Fern Leaves From Fanny’s Portfolio First Series. Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Co.</td>
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<td>27. Males as stupid Lords of Creation marriage</td>
<td>“Indulgent Husbands” Fern Leaves 1(1853, 1888). Fern Leaves From Fanny’s Portfolio First Series. Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Co</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Males that flirt Insincere males Marriage</td>
<td>“A Model Married Man” Fern Leaves 1(1853, 1888). Fern Leaves From Fanny’s Portfolio 2d Series. Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Co. p 139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Women stereotype as too smart= unattractive to male Not marriageable</td>
<td>“A Chapter on Literary Women” Fern Leaves 1(1853, 1888). Fern Leaves From Fanny’s Portfolio First Series. Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Co. p.175</td>
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Chapter IV

Marietta Holley, Harriet Beecher Stowe and “The Woman Question”

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I analyzed representative examples of some of Fanny Fern’s short fiction and assessed the joke targets, building a case for using the term proto feminist humor rather than feminist humor to characterize her work. Now, this chapter advances the opening argument by first advocating a reconsideration of Marietta Holley’s early use of humor related to women’s rights. As discussed previously, Holley’s body of work has been considered feminist by many critics (see Blair, 1942; Curry, 1984; and Camfield, 1989). Despite this acknowledgment, critical studies of women’s literature and feminist rhetorical histories have neglected these practitioners of early feminist humor and their contributions to the development of the genre in the nineteenth century.

Given that this gap exists in both disciplines, I address the topic, arguing that humor used as a rhetorical tool by nineteenth century women writers deserves such attention. More specifically, I argue in this chapter that the term proto feminist humor is a more accurate representation for Holley’s early attempts at raising public awareness about social problems such as women’s suffrage, rather than feminist humor. Additionally, I argue that Holley also penned anti feminist humor, specifically in support of the conservative suffrage movement. This point is significant, considering Holley’s deliberate crafting of Samantha Allen to suit more conservative religious elements—and male members of her reading public (see Armitage, 1980).
The chapter first focuses on Marietta Holley’s life, social circumstances, and literacy; this opening material is followed by a discussion of Holley’s use of satire and parody. Finally, the chapter assesses representative joke targets used in fiction by Marietta Holley using the GTVH. Because Holley produced novel length works, I apply the extended method by the addition of semantic frames (see Chlopicki, 1987; 2000) to accommodate the longer narrative styles this chapter analyzes. As in the Fern analyses, the jab lines are analyzed, providing a window into the ways the target is characterized in the text.

Holley is known for her episodic novels; the piece I analyze is an early example of fiction from *My Opinions and Betsy Bobbet’s* (1873; 1891). Holley’s early work is important to my argument that her work exemplifies proto feminist humor; as previous chapters discussed, the type of joke targets Holley used can be systematically assessed. Doing so reveals that they are early, pre-1894, expressions of a proto feminist humor. In contrast, at the time, the term feminist is not considered a typical part of the lexicon associated with women’s suffrage after that time.

After discussing Marietta Holley’s early work, I analyze Holley’s essay, “Interview with Theodore and Victory” as humor targeting Victoria Woodhull and more radical elements of the early suffrage movement. This analysis provides additional evidence that Holley’s early humorous works cannot simply be called feminist humor; the evidence rest on the character, Samantha Allen’s, indictment of Woodhull. In the essay, the opinionated Allen spars with Victoria Woodhull, Theodore Tilton and Isabelle Beecher Hooker on the topics of free love, “megunness”(see page 131 below), and the scandal surrounding Henry Ward Beecher¹ and Tilton’s wife, Elizabeth. Samantha Allen rejects Woodhall’s ideas and lifestyle because

¹ Stowe’s brother was a well-known minister when Woodhall exposed Beecher’s affair with a married congregant.
Woodhull does not represent “megumness” in attitude or demeanor. Samantha Allen’s position in this essay demonstrates how Holley’s dependence on “megumness” affected her ability to support more radical members of the early women’s movement.

Harriet Beecher Stowe’s anti-suffrage position in My Wife and I concludes the analyses by assessing how Harriet Beecher Stowe also used ridicule and parody to express clear opposition to women’s suffrage advocates such as Victoria Woodhull, a vocal proponent of women’s suffrage and “free love.” Stowe’s work was serialized in a popular religious newspaper, performed on the stage, and collected into novel form and marketed. Woodhull had long threatened to expose Beecher’s affair, and, partially in retaliation for Stowe’s harassment, eventually exposed Henry Ward Beecher’s affair in her newspaper; Woodhull was prosecuted for obscenity. The obscenity charges resulted in a tumultuous five year scandal that was well-covered in the popular press, and ended with Woodhull’s decision to leave the country.

The chapter then reviews the effectiveness of satire and parody as strategies used by nineteenth century women humor writers to further the aims of suffrage or to control the more radical members and ideas within the movement. After this discussion, I conclude with some suggestions for future research related to the development of feminist humor.

Marietta Holley

Marietta Holley (1836-1926) was born in upper New York State and resided in the area her entire life, eventually building a home near the site of the Holley family farm. Holley’s life and circumstances presented a unique opportunity for Holley to pursue the literary arts as a

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2 The Christian Union 1871 (see Gabriel, 1998)
profession when employment options for women were very limited. Winter (1984) noted that Hollay, the last child born into an impoverished farming family was educated at the local district school until financial concerns intervened, and subsequently ended her formal education.

Paper was not the only thing the family lacked. When Marietta was fourteen there was no more money for her schooling. With the boys gone west to make their fortunes, the girl was needed to work on the farm. She kept up her share and even helped to absorb Angeline’s after she married D. Page and moved to her own farm a little way off. A near neighbor who had a daughter about Marietta’s age recognized the girl’s abilities and continued Marietta’s education informally by giving her private lessons in botany and various other disciplines. (Winter, p. 20)

The fact that Hollay lacked a typical middle class women’s finishing school education did not preclude her eventual literary successes; in fact, Walker (1988) acknowledges that “Marietta Holley’s many books featuring her outspokenly feminist narrator Samantha Allen had rivaled the works of Mark Twain in sales and popularity” (p. 8). Holley’s popularity has been readily acknowledged by numerous scholars (See Epps, 2006; Morris, 1992; Walker, 1988). Ross (1989) characterizes Holley as an author who wrote “against the grain of typical nineteenth-century American humor and produced a new kind of humor which can rightly be termed as ‘feminist humor’ ” (p. 13). In so doing, Ross concurs with critics that labeled Holley a feminist humor writer. As discussed, this distinction is significant because the term feminist has been used (inaccurately, I argue) for many decades to describe women’s humor during this time period, and, more specifically, in relation to the humor of Marietta Holley (see Blair, 1937; 1942).
Holley’s early education continued outside a formal school setting. In addition, Holley’s strong support for women’s suffrage and equal rights likely developed because of her social circumstances: she became the sole support of her mother and invalid sister soon after her father died. In return, Holley’s mother provided her with unconditional love and support for her writing; as a consequence, from the sale of Holley’s first novel in 1873\textsuperscript{3}, Marietta Holley forged a successful literary career. The numerous comic novels she penned following that initial success provided a comfortable existence for the small family of three women. Holley’s love of literacy continued throughout her life. Winter (1984) claims that when Holley’s estate was settled following her death, the contents of her personal library revealed “that Holley read most of the literature that was considered to be requisite for a sound education” (p. 65).

Holley’s upbringing in a close knit farming community informed her ability to strike a populist chord with her audience and offered her a unique opportunity to reach a wide audience with her novels. Her character, Samantha Allen offered readers a humorous cracker box philosopher expounding on a variety of contemporary issues of the time, including the “Woman Question.” Her ability to connect with diverse audiences was soon recognized by women who were well connected leaders in the suffrage movement; these leaders, in turn, quickly learned how to use popular forms of media for their purposes. Holley’s novels were sold by subscription; the volumes were marketed door to door and through printed advertisements. They were oversize, heavily illustrated, beautifully packaged and printed by Elijah Bliss’s American Publishing Co. (see Epps, 2006).

This use of humor as a marketing tool for the suffrage movement is documented informally through an invitation extended to Marietta Holley by Susan B. Anthony. Winter

\textsuperscript{3} My Opinions and Betsy Bobbet’s, 1873
(1984) affirms that Anthony and other leaders of the suffrage movement and the temperance movement attempted to befriend Holley and use her popularity to disseminate their respective messages. The following quotation details how closely connected movement leaders were to the popular author.

Susan B. Anthony wrote a loving letter thanking the author [Marietta Holley] for *Sweet Cicely*.

> We have read it aloud here [in Washington]—Miss Spofford and I and her sisters and laughed until we cried over it!! A very bright newspaper scribbler in Philadelphia—Anna McDowell—says she cannot stand it much longer with Josiah—it is time to kill him off and for Samantha to marry a smarter man!

Anthony then urged Holley “to come to Washington, D.C. and give a real earnest talk to Congress in person!! I believe you could speak if you would try.” (p. 90)

Winter (1984) argues that this and other longstanding invitations for Holley to appear at conventions and speak on suffrage was not limited to simple public lectures, but to mold public discourse through Holley’s fictional characters. Anthony and Willard encouraged Holley to shape the Samantha Allen stories to fit the twin agendas of suffrage and temperance. Winter (1984) states that Holley was “enjoined to appear with them, write for them and finally even to tailor the Samantha novels to suit their goals by killing off Josiah” (p. 6). Averse to public speaking, Holley declined to actively campaign for suffrage, and she refused to kill off her character “Josiah.”

Still, she voiced her positions on female equality and suffrage through the philosophical musings of her popular character, Samantha Allen. This clear stance on women’s rights continued through the publication of her volume *Josiah Allen and the Woman Question* in 1914.
As previously discussed, contemporary research (see Bing, 2004) suggests that feminist humor depends on a significant use of an inclusive target; that is, the humor targets an ideology or institution rather than an individual. This suggests that the scholarship which casts feminist humor as humor that ridicules males is inaccurate. Bing (2004) states that “[p]aradoxically, the most empowering feminist jokes are not those that frame males as oppressors and females as victims, but those that celebrate the values and perspectives of feminist women” (p. 22). If Holley’s humor is feminist, its humorous targets should be ideological rather than aimed at stereotypical male as oppressor jokes.

As also discussed in Chapter I, feminist humor is created for the feminist community. This means that Holley’s humor, would, in fact, have been written mainly for women, and enjoyed as such. The evidence that supports this is scant. Holley’s Samantha Allen opined on a number of subjects, including race relations, temperance, suffrage, and gender parity within the religious community. Curry (1983) discusses Holley’s popularity with women readers in the nineteenth century as a “hunch,” rather than any type of supported documentation (p. xvi). To that end, Curry refers to the fact that leaders in the WCTU were interested in how Holley could assist their movement, also (p. 3). Indeed, the move to push Holley’s point of view in one direction or another was not instigated by Holley, but by members of these social movements (see Curry 1983; Winter 1984). As discussed, some of the leaders of these movements were avid fans of the staunch defender of women’s rights, Samantha Allen, and the foolish, vain Josiah. However, that Holley refused to kill off Josiah and mold Samantha Allen’s character as Stanton and others in the suffrage movement suggested is very significant, also. Had Holley only been interested in advancing the cause of women’s suffrage, she might have followed Susan B. Anthony’s suggestion to kill Josiah and find Samantha a spouse more amenable to women’s rights.
In spite of repeated urging, Holley declined any and all invitations to speak in support of suffrage or women’s rights. Winter (1984) claimed Holley’s indifference to travel, and her shyness were among the many reasons she was reluctant to leave the family home to promote her books or research locations (p. 62). As such, although Samantha’s message was widely read and enjoyed by a general audience, any overt messaging regarding suffrage and gender equality must be filtered through the constraints of Holley’s resistance to full participation in the suffrage movement. Moreover, Holley most certainly supported the fictional positions espoused by her character Samantha Allen; however, her reluctance to fully participate in the suffrage community may have affected her ability to message and serve as a messenger of the cause. Finally, Holley’s popularity with her reading public was unaffected by her reluctance to engage in overt political activities (Ross, 1989, p. 14).

Holley’s refusal seems a pragmatic rather than passionate move; it was more likely to assure the continuing literary success of the Samantha Allen series; and, as important, assuring the family’s financial security. Holley achieved financial stability and success during her lifetime, but as the cause of women’s rights advanced, Holley’s novels slipped into obscurity. Holley never received the kind of critical attention as did peers such as Mark Twain.

Templin (1998) discusses the central issue that prevented Holley from achieving the kind of critical acceptance Mark Twain, who was a peer in the American Publishing Co. stable of authors. To Templin, the most significant obstacle to Holley’s literary reputation was her gender. Although Holley’s gender limited her role in nineteenth century society, Templin suggests that Holley was so successful at imbuing Samantha with authenticity that many readers even rejected the idea that she was unmarried or female.
Her books became best sellers partly through the support of a male audience, many of whom must have enjoyed her simply in her manifestation as literary comedian. "If it was not the argument that won her readers," Winter suggests, "it may have been the good-humored vision of rural life with its quirky customs and manners" (61). There was a persistent rumor that the writer of the Samantha novels was a man. (Winter quoted in Templin, p. 79)

Holley’s appeal to a wide audience is important to reassessment of Holley’s early work as proto feminist. It is undisputed that Holley’s humorous fiction was popular and enjoyed a wide reading audience; however, there is no strong evidence to suggest that the majority of her readers were strong advocates of women’s rights, particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth century when her first books were published (1873; 1876). Until shortly before her death in 1926, Holley worked on film adaptations of some of her works, and, from 1918 until 1923 worked on an autobiography she titled, *About My Books and Interesting People I Have Met*. Winter (1984) noted that portions of this text were published in Holley’s hometown newspaper, *The Watertown Daily Times*, following her death (p. 149).

Holley’s literacy and social circumstances mirror Parton’s (Fanny Fern) in a few specific circumstances; Holley was well-educated, versed in classical texts, and gifted in composition. Because of these attributes, publication was a viable and practical solution to the small family’s financial security, so Holley pursued that end diligently. Thus, like Parton, the exigency of economic need was experienced firsthand, and became the necessary incentive to seek out publishing opportunities. Holley’s success was not immediate; in fact, by the time she decided to query Elijah Bliss of American Publishing Co., and sent him a small portfolio of her work, she had already established some small but not insignificant publishing credits as a poet. Winter
(1984) discusses how Holley’s determination to be considered a poet and “serious” writer led to initial “disappointment” when Bliss insisted that she follow up on a sketch she submitted to him; in particular, Bliss asked her to pen a novel based on a sketch of Yorker dialect speaker Allen and her spouse, Josiah (p.41). Holley’s initial resistance to Bliss’s request for dialect humor likely reflects long held cultural beliefs regarding serious literature. To Holley, dialect humor was less significant than material in standard English; still, she included the Yorker dialect comic sketch in the initial portfolio she sent to Bliss, and she agreed to pen the novel as he requested (pp. 40-41).

An examination of Holley’s early work must discuss her choice to use dialect as a humorous device. This choice was risky because the dialect use makes the character appear to be an unintelligent buffoon; nonetheless, Holley gave her main character a voice with a regional dialect. Samantha Allen misspells words, and lacks relatively standard knowledge about literature and culture. These issues of dialect use, misspellings, and assumptions made about the speakers of those varieties have been studied in various linguistic contexts. Although DuBois and Horvath (2002) are primarily interested in transcribing actual speech in conversation, they also describe this problem from a linguistic and literary perspective.

[I]t is often the intention of the writer to take advantage of the negative meanings associated with misspellings: that is, the misspellings are intended to show the speaker in an unfavorable light, to deliberately, and often humorously, display the speaker as socially and intellectually inferior. In such cases, writers may well take artistic license and exaggerate the differences between the dialect and the local variety of the standard spoken language to achieve the intended rhetorical effect. (pp. 265-266)
DuBois and Horvath clarify the discussion on the use of dialect as a humorous device by characterizing the linguistic and rhetorical relationships between dialect use in spoken and written language. Whether used in either context, dialect, DuBois and Horvath suggest, is used intentionally to the manipulation of meanings and based on how dialect is culturally perceived. Given that, Holley’s use of vernacular language as a humorous device is typical of the time. I suggest that Holley meant Allen’s language to be understood as the musings of a wise mother sage who dispenses wisdom to the uninformed. The common sense that Marietta Holley’s character, Samantha Allen dispenses is meant to be understood as the musings of a wise mother sage who dispenses wisdom and dismisses the foolish using the homespun language of the common Yorker dialect.  

Holley’s use of dialect humor is also stylistically very similar to the literary comedians who were widely read and circulated during the nineteenth century, also. Winter (1984) suggested that “From them, Holley borrowed several tricks: misquoting Scripture and the classics; making incongruous catalogues; and using puns, mixed metaphors, anticlimax and cacography.” (Blair, 1942 quoted in Winter, 1984, pp. 43-44). Historically, literary scholarship acknowledges the popularity of these literary comedians. Some of the literary comedians\textsuperscript{5} wrote humorous travelogues, adopting the persona of an innocent observer on a journey (See Blair, 1937, 1942; Curry, 1983; Epps, 2006; Winter, 1984).

\textsuperscript{4} Vernacular language use was a regular part of humor writing in the nineteenth century. Curry (1983) characterized Holley’s work as part of the horse sense tradition. (p.xiv). Horse sense, or “common sense” according to Curry, “refers to a way of thinking and the kind of ideas a person gets for thinking that way” (xiv).

\textsuperscript{5} Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, Petroleum Nasby are a few examples cited by nearly all scholars as members of the “Literary Comedians.”
For the purposes of this discussion, the term “popular press” is defined as any form of public discourse widely circulated and available to the general reading public, both male and female. Elijah Bliss understood the popular press. With his guidance, Holley soon mastered this popular form of entertainment. Her episodic novels featured visits with notable nineteenth century personalities such as Horace Greeley and travels to large public events such as the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair Exposition. As noted earlier, Holley was known for writing on social problems including race, suffrage and temperance. Holley’s Samantha did not pontificate on the “woman question” alone, but also offered advice on a variety of contemporary situations including suffrage.

Epps (2006) points out that Holley’s heavy reliance on stereotypes to sell volumes was “entirely in line with subscription publishing’s effort to secure a repeatable predictable audience for agents and readers, an effort that importantly is the same for any producer in a mass culture industry, and one that is consistent with the interests of promoting women’s suffrage” (p. 108). That Holley’s stereotypes convey her message humorously is rhetorically significant, and, consistent with contemporary uses, supports this critical reexamination of her early fiction, one focused on the emergence of feminist humor in the nineteenth century popular press. As the analysis demonstrates, Holley managed to transcend these boundaries of her gendered space to discuss women’s rights and appeal to a general audience in the popular press.

Nan Johnson (2002) explores the distance between gender and the public discourse in nineteenth century North America, clarifying how gendered rhetorical space was represented. Johnson’s close reading considers “turn of the century, rhetorical pedagogies designed for a popular audience, such as elocution manuals and letter-writing handbooks and other instructive commentaries about rhetorical behavior” (p. 2). While Johnson does not discuss humor, her
discussion indicates that humor discourse would have been conceived and received in a gendered speaking (writing) space reserved for nineteenth century females. It was in this gendered space that nineteenth century female writers, Holley among them, were using humorous stereotypes to promote discussion on women’s rights.

As the analysis demonstrates, Holley used culturally acceptable forms such as stereotypes and her northern New York community’s native vernacular as culturally acceptable modes of transmission; that starting point enabled Holley to move beyond the gendered speaking space as she promoted the ideals of female equality and suffrage to great success.

“Megumness” and Marietta Holley: The Female Mark Twain

While misspellings, malapropisms, and the nineteenth century stylistic convention of dialect humor featured prominently in Holley’s texts, she was also an adept satirist, creating social commentary on a variety of nineteenth century social issues and ills, and advocating “megumness” as a responsible ideal for all citizens. To Holley’s Samantha Allen, “megumness” is the quality of common sense moderation, a quality to which all nineteenth century citizens should aspire in their daily living. Unlike Holley, Samantha Allen was well-traveled, socializing with many famous people, and offering advice to all. Holley’s works were widely read and discussed by literate populations in nineteenth century America. Templin (1998) discusses Holley’s texts and fame in comparison to Mark Twain.

Marietta Holley (1836-1926) and Mark Twain (1835-1910) were contemporaries with remarkable similarities. They were not only highly popular writers of comedy in the tradition of the cracker barrel philosopher, but they also had the
same publisher, the same illustrator, and were marketed in the same way—by subscription—to the same public in upstate New York and elsewhere. So comparable were their reputations in their own lifetimes that Twain was reportedly jealous of Holley (Winter 135). (Quoted in Templin, p. 75)

As Templin shows, the literary success Holley achieved during her lifetime is significant; although the iconic status Holley enjoyed (along with the frequent comparisons to Mark Twain) continued throughout her writing career, critics pronounced her works and writing style “crude and without distinction” in the next decade (Templin, 1998, p. 76). Templin explains that Holley’s omission from literary canons is because of Holley’s gender, claiming that Holley’s work was so closely linked to the idea of “female autonomy” that her body of work “exacerbated her marginalization” (p. 76). Templin’s thinking may well be accurate; examining two current anthologies for American Literature (The Heath Anthology of American Literature; Norton Anthology of American Literature) reveals that Holley is completely absent from the authors listed in the Norton anthology. One chapter from her book, Samantha and the Brethren is listed in the Heath anthology. Mark Twain, of course, is well-represented (and deservedly so) in both texts; most of one novel is included in the Norton, and six short stories are included the Heath.

Interestingly, two contemporary anthologies for women’s literature (Longman and Prentice Hall) contain no works by Holley. Clearly, as Templin pointed out, Holley is not a canonical figure. However, her omission from women’s literature anthologies supports my contention that her work was also considered less significant because she used the lowly vernacular dialect in all of her works. Armitage (1980) provided some support for this supposition when she reminded readers that Holley was labeled a crude propagandist for woman’s rights by critics (p.193). In contrast, Mark Twain was never viewed as disseminating
propaganda but only as a sly satirist capably exposing society’s ills. Again, this difference suggests that Holley’s writing was considered lesser by subsequent critics because she was a woman, and a propagandist for women’s rights. Additionally, that she used lowly vernacular language in her humorous works may have impacted their later critical reception (on this point, Twain was also at times denounced).

That Holley remains absent from contemporary anthologies suggests, on some level, that stereotypical attitudes towards gender and humor continue. Thus, this analysis is intended to at least, in part, recover her work and explicate it within this exploration of the development and use of feminist humor. Because Holley is often characterized as a satirist and parodist, I next define satire and parody.

**Holley, Satire, and Parody**

*Satyr, satura* or satire is one of the earliest genres of humor, according to classical scholars. In ancient Greece, playwright Aristophanes penned a number of satirical comedies (See Chapter I, p. 4 on *The Clouds*), and the poet Horace is considered to be one of the earliest Roman satirists who discussed what the genre entailed. To Griffin (1994), Horace’s ideas about satire should be approached as advice, rather than dogma because “they come down to us not as theory, but as dramatic utterances enmeshed in particular satiric poems as the genre was being shaped” (p. 8). According to Griffin, Horace believed that “the satirist, speaking out freely, seeks to laugh men out of their follies” (p. 7). To that end, Griffin points out that Horace’s model of satires or *sermones* differ from Old Comedy satirists such as Aristophanes because Horace’s satires are “oblique, rather than blunt, smiling and hinting rather than attacking directly. And the theory of
satire that he maintains misrepresents his own range of interests” (p. 8). Summarizing the Roman rhetoric teacher, Quintilian, Griffin suggests that Horace also marked the significance of “freedom of speech” as one of the key weapons an adept satirist uses (p. 8).

As discussed previously, Holley was well aware of the classics; she disguised her satire by the use of dialect, malapropisms, and misspellings. The effect of Holley’s episodic novels, then, is deceptively simple, when they are in fact, quite sly. Curry (1983) notes that Holley’s series was successful, because “of course, though dialect humor was waning, horse sense still won out over book sense for many Americans” (p. xiv).

As stated, Holley used well-known nineteenth century stylistic conventions of dialect humor, malapropisms, and misspellings to great literary success. Even more significant, according to Curry, through the use of dialect humor Marietta Holley created a character whose purpose was to “subvert the established order by putting potentially unpopular notions in the mouth of sensible Samantha” (p. xv). Holley was very conscious of her marginalized status as an unmarried female and shaped her Allen, a cracker box philosopher, to appeal to all readers. Armitage (1980) claims that Holley’s Samantha Allen novels were constructed to reach a general audience.

Thus, all of the Samantha books are authored by "Josiah Allen's Wife," whose "unfashionable" judgments were accepted as sound for two other reasons. Holley made Samantha respectable according to the values of the period by making her religious. Holley also managed to "put a good deal of our common human nature into the characters," thus making her husband, Josiah, spinster Betsey Bobbett, as well as Samantha, strongly identified with ideas and real people. (p. 194)
To Armitage, Holley’s characterizations were based on “Samantha's dichotomous role of male and female traits, for in Betsey Bobbett and Josiah, Holley created straw men who were humorously felled by Samantha's example” (p. 194). Holley’s deft mixing of common male and female stereotypes delivered a marginalized message to a mainstream audience. Additionally, Holley’s satiric reversal of stereotypes in her key characters confirms her significant use of exaggeration.

While these stereotyped characterizations and reversals added to the humorous experience for all readers, Camfield (1989) also discusses how Holley’s use of satire, in the carefully crafted Samantha series, unintentionally undermined the power of Holley’s lessons. To Camfield, Samantha’s malapropisms and misspellings are stereotypes that hinder, and sometimes even counter, the effectiveness of her message.

Samantha never learns, but as readers, we do. At the least we learn how narrow Samantha is in her ignorance. In a larger sense we learn the importance of a catholic perspective. Of course in creating a self-defeating mouthpiece Holley makes it difficult to carry her points. When she shifts to satire the whole fabric of her argument tends to collapse in a vortex of irony. But at her best, Holley holds irony in check by making her main characters sympathetic in their intentions. (p. 106)

Because of this mitigating effect, I argue that Holley’s early humor is proto feminist humor rather than feminist. To that end, my analysis addresses how Holley’s satire provoked more negative critical assessments. Camfield (1998) describes satire in Holley’s early works in terms of similar difficulties Twain encountered.
While satire has its own satisfactions, it makes a hash out of humor, and, again like Clemens, Holley struggled, both within individual books and over the course of her career, with the conflicting pulls of satire and humor. As it did to Clemens, the duty of satire, inasmuch as it was reinforced by gender roles, gradually pulled Holley out of her humor and turned her into a monistic, preachy, self-righteous satirist—the very kind of person she loved to make fun of in her books (p. 104). As such, Holley’s satire, coupled with Samantha Allen’s propensity to moralize, diminished the strength of Holley’s message. However, as Camfield asserts while Twain and Holley experienced similar difficulties in the use of satire, Holley’s satire proved a harsher limitation.

As discussed previously, effective satire exposes the inequalities within an unjust society. However, satire can also be received as awkward and preachy, rather than as satirical commentary on social injustice. This is the case with Holley’s satires, influencing her subsequent characterization as a writer of feminist humor. As discussed, Holley’s characterization of Samantha Allen has been described by contemporary scholars as feminist (see Winter, 1984; Curry, 1983; Morris, 1992; Walker, 1988; Epps, 2006; Ross, 1989; Templin, 1998) beginning with critical assessments by Blair in 1942, continuing through the twentieth century when Blair and Hamlin Hill (1978) dismissed Holley as “a feminist” and “an unschooled rustic with sound mare sense, a Christian, a loving wife and a model housekeeper” that lacked relevance to contemporary readers (p. 496).

Templin (1998) argues that Blair and Hill’s comments reflect gender biases within canonical studies. Templin argues, “This question-begging account, which confuses the unmarried Holley with her artistic creation, is indicative of the gender biases past and present that pervade the thinking of the cultural authorities who create canons” (p. 84). By assessing critical
treatment of Holley’s work as “rustic” and “irrelevant” Templin affirms a kind of gender bias and stereotyping regarding Holley’s use of humor that has continued since Blair. Other scholarship states this bias directly. Habegger (1976) characterizes Holley’s committed efforts with suffrage and temperance groups as so fully involved that Holley’s characterization of Samantha Allen was shaped by the movement.

Samantha Allen was fiercely devoted to women's rights. Her creator, who was in touch with Susan B. Anthony and Frances E. Willard (head of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union), invented and used Samantha in order to influence public opinion. Although Samantha's character is rich in down-home detail, she by no means represents a realistic or local color portrait. Her speech has too many features—malapropisms, well-articulated sermons, transcendent allegories that point to other, more didactic literary traditions. Yet she is an original character and the pivotal figure in nineteenth-century female humor, for she was the great nineteenth-century superwoman—a sort of populist superwoman who wore domestic homespun and spoke vernacular humor. (p. 892)

Much of Habegger’s quotation appears at odds with the later scholarship on Holley’s fiction which characterizes her work as feminist. Instead, Habegger views the entreaties of the women suffrage leaders as proof that Holley actively collaborated to make Samantha Allen a message bearer for the early suffrage movement. As previously discussed, most scholarship has argued that Holley declined any active involvement with the movement, though she had developed correspondence and friendly relations with many of the early suffrage movement speakers such as Stanton. As noted, Holley never agreed to speak or shape her characters according to movement needs, despite direct requests from movement leaders. That said, clearly Holley sided with the
conservative suffrage agenda, and the fictional Samantha Smith Allen did show strong support for women’s rights. Habegger’s characterization of Samantha Allen also summarizes another position that some critics have adopted regarding Holley’s work. In many respects, Samantha Smith Allen is too limited by the stereotypes Holley used to give voice to her viewpoints.

Winter (1984) comes closest to painting a realistic portrait of the characterization of Samantha Smith Allen when she claimed that Holley meant for Samantha’s character to be read as a Christian feminist. According to Winter, Holley believed that Samantha’s views would be acceptable to the general public if the character was presented as pious, hard-working, married and properly respectful of her husband (p. 50). Holley was a practicing Baptist, devoted to daily study of the Holy Bible; when Holley molds Samantha’s piety to conform to the conventions of the religious and domestic sphere of nineteenth century middle class America, Holley demonstrates her concern with her audience’s response—and the reception of her message of women’s rights to a general reading public.

The importance of these competing interests also begins the process of critically examining Holley’s episodic novels as expressions of an early proto feminist humor regarding women’s rights; that is, Holley endowed Allen with enough characteristics to be seen as a mouthpiece for gender equality, even as this character’s virtues as a housekeeper and wife to her spouse remained above reproach and presented model behaviors for nineteenth century females. To achieve that end, Holley crafted her character to conform to the conservative values of a Christian feminist.

Winter (1984) elaborated on Samantha Allen’s popularity, claiming that “part of her appeal lay in her criticism of the radical feminists of the time; her conservatism and pragmatism based on a sense of justice and expediency won audiences that would otherwise be antagonistic to
her feminist ideals” (p. 51). Consequently, because Samantha Smith Allen was crafted by Holley for a general reading audience, it is also possible that choices like using the Yorker dialect, malapropisms, and misspellings fulfilled Bliss’s demand for dialect humor and secure her finances while the “allegorizing” and “moralizing” on Women’s Rights or other social problems were fueled by Holley’s interest in the particular issues she addressed.

As discussed, having the main character speak in the vernacular dialect risking the reader viewing that character is as a buffoon or fool. Samantha Smith Allen is not exempt from this weakness. Camfield (1997) expands upon Samantha’s credibility and authority as a narrator when he asserted that, “Throughout her visit to the Centennial for example, Samantha accosts strangers and gives them a piece of her mind. Time and again she gets the point wrong, and when her auditors turn beet red with suppressed laughter, she assumes they have been affected as she intends by her speeches” (p.105). To Camfield, Samantha’s malapropisms represented her narrow perspective, while the textual emphasis on dialect speech flagrantly reinforced Samantha’s ignorance of culture and literature. Samantha’s narrative credibility strained even though her support of “megumness” as the attitude to foster social enlightenment and societal progress never wavered.

**Parody**

Because Holley’s satires frequently contain parodies of the famous and infamous as the source of Samanatha’s moralizing lectures on “megumness” or women’s rights, this dissertation next offers a brief review of parody as humorous device. Originally, *Parodia*, or parody, was briefly mentioned in Aristotle’s *Poetics* and considerably expanded upon by Quintilian. Rose
(1993) offers a thorough etymology of parody from its most ancient origins to contemporary understandings. From the beginning, the term parody has been connected to mock-epics and imitation.

Connections are also made between the earlier use of the word *parodos* to describe an imitating singer and the word *parodia* because both have been said to apply to the singing of songs in imitation of Homer which were of a mock heroic or mock epic nature. As Householder has noted, Aristotle had applied the word in his *Poetics* to Hegemon of Thasois, a near contemporary of Aristophanes. (p. 11)

Expanding on the original definition in which parody is a kind of lesser imitation, Rose tracks the expansion of the definition of parody to include ridicule and critical debasement in associated meanings (p. 23). Rose notes that more contemporary uses of parody include the more negative aspects of ridicule and mockery as a rule, while for the ancients, parody as often included a mixture of mockery and admiration (p. 24).

The majority of works to which words for parody are attached by the ancients, and which are still known to us in whole or in part, suggest that parody was understood as being humorous in the sense of producing effects characteristic of the comic, and that if aspects of ridicule or mockery were present these were additional to its other functions and were co-existent with the parody’s ambivalent renewal of its target or targets. (p. 25)

While Rose is most interested in tracing the historical and critical background of the word parody to advance more contemporary definitions of the word, it is significant that nineteenth century...
parodies included ridicule and broad stereotypes as discussed earlier (Epps, 2006). Holley and Stowe’s parodies of Victoria Woodhull used ridicule and exaggeration of negative qualities to criticize Woodhull and, by association, the more radical members of the suffrage community, such as Isabella Beecher Hooker.

Clearly, “Interview with Theodore and Victory” was meant to ridicule; the parodies of Woodhull and Tilton used to mount a partial defense of Beecher, and indict Woodhull as immoral and too radical. Later in Chapter IV, analysis of the character “Audacia Dangyereyes” in Stowe’s novel *My Wife and I* demonstrates again how parody and ridicule were used for similar aims. In this novel, parody and ridicule are used to campaign against the idea of “Free Love” as well as the members of the suffrage movement that supported Woodhull and adopted these ideologies.

When considered in relation to popular entertainment, and mass culture, Samantha’s finger wagging ridicule is not surprising. In fact, Samantha’s assessment and condemnation of “Victory” mirrors much of mass culture at the time, offering support to the idea that Holley’s parodies of Victory and Theodore Tilton were meant to level personages that Samantha Smith deemed immoral or lacking appropriate “megumness,” Unfortunately, the illogical, unsupported arguments Samantha posed in Holley’s early work, “Interview with Theodore and Victory,” do little to inspire confidence in Samantha’s credibility as a narrator—or as a supporter of women’s rights.

Although Holley consistently discussed “the woman question,” her deference to “megumness,” or advocating a middle ground, seems more a plea for gender parity with concessions. Holley’s Samantha Allen highlighted her reservations against Victoria Woodhull’s perspectives on marriage, fidelity and equal rights for women, characterizing them as issues of
right and wrong, and submission. Holley uses a conversation between Victoria Woodhull and Samantha Allan to illustrate the differences of opinion the two harbored.

[Victoria Woodhull] I married a man, I never promised God nor man that I would love, honor or obey the wild beast he turned into. I was free from him in the sight of a pure God, long before the law freed me.

[Samantha Allen] I let her have her say out, as Josiah Allan’s wife is one to let every man or mouse tell their principles if they have got any. […] But as she stopped with her voice kind of choked up, I laid my brown cotton glove gently on her shoulder, and says I “Hush up Victory,” I says, “wimmen must submit to some things, they can pray, and they can let their sorrows lift them nearer to heaven, makin angels of ’em. (p. 104)

Here the staunch supporter of women’s rights, Samantha Smith Allen corrects Woodhull for what Josiah Allen’s wife believes are moral lapses. The stand Samantha Allen takes is not supportive of women—or women’s rights in general. Instead, what Samantha offers Victory is subjection to the domestic ideal and submission to the propriety demanded by public opinion. Further discussion of this limitation follows in the analysis section.

Associating parody with stable irony, Booth (1974) identifies clear intention in the use of parody when he states that “The same can be said for that form of satire called parody, in which the victim’s style is imitated and distorted” (p. 123). Booth’s quotation is relevant inasmuch as he makes clear that ridicule is an integral part of the contemporary parody. To Booth, parody is intentional—the person parodied referred to as a “victim.” The ancient understanding of admiration co-mingled with reproof is absent in the contemporary definition of parody. This shift
is significant, marking how parodies of Woodhull not only victimized her reputation, but might have played a role in disrupting the forward trajectory of the early suffrage movement, also.

The Holley Episodic Chapter Analysis “Interview with Theodore and Victory”

In the following episodic chapter, “Interview with Theodore and Victory,” Samantha Allen visits with Victoria Woodhull, Theodore Tilton, Isabelle Beecher, and other figures of the early suffrage and Free Love movement to discuss the morality of their point of view. The analysis focuses on one episodic narrative chapter selected from the first of Holley’s humorous novels: My Opinions and Betsy Bobbet’s. Like the Fern material, the chapter contains the indirect or direct reference to women’s rights, women’s suffrage, or gender equality. Joke targets and jab lines are assessed in the example; additional information on type of humor is also categorized. Semantic character frames precede the analysis to account for the recurring characters of Samantha Allen, Josiah Allen and Betsy Bobbet as they appear within a long form narrative. Additionally, the characters of “Victory” Woodhull and Theodore Tilton occur as primary foils for Samantha Smith Allen’s moralistic lecture; for the purposes of this analysis, these characters are discussed in the analysis, also.

Semantic Frames

As previously discussed, I incorporate semantic frames (Chlopicki, 1987; 2000) into the analysis of Holley’s early fiction. The frames are a useful descriptive tool, a concentrated close character reading that focuses on person, place, and situation. Because Holley addresses women’s
rights in her works, it is also necessary to briefly explicate a few pertinent ideologies that present in this analysis. The recurring ideologies that present in Holley’s works are Women’s Rights, Sentimental Attitudes and Poetry, The Cult of “True Womanhood”, and Free Love. This is a significant amount of ideologies, enough present within this chapter that it is easy to see how Holley was branded as a writer of feminist humor. However, Holley was a sophisticated reader and writer, easily able to use reversal to opine on Victory Woodhull’s private life. This is the Samantha Smith Allen about whom Camfield (1998) writes, the Samantha of the monistic satires, voicing her narrow perspective and displaying self-righteous bombast. In effect, Samantha Smith Allen does become the very character she enjoys ridiculing, as Camfield suggests. This chapter exemplifies that shift. For the purposes of the dissertation, semantic frames of the major characters or ideologies present in Holley’s chapter are explicated.

As indicated previously, Holley’s recurring character, Samantha Allen, was crafted to appeal to a wide and general reading audience. Samantha possessed the following admirable characteristics: She was hard working, appropriately pious, and always respectful of her spouse in spite of his weaknesses, and excesses. Physically, the character is a substantive person. Samantha is solidly built, weighing 200 pounds, while Josiah is described as gaunt, weighing one hundred pounds. Samantha Smith Allen believes that her book “will shine a beacon of light” on women’s rights in nineteenth century America. Samantha Smith Allen also believes that “megunness” in all issues is the answer. Allen is a vocal supporter of suffrage and temperance, and expresses her opinions to a variety of personages throughout the course of the twenty-plus episodic novels in which she appears.

Samantha Allen often refers to herself as Josiah Allen’s wife. Holley, often self-referenced as the same, and for a time used Josiah Allen’s Wife as her byline on the books she
published (see Winter, 1984). This suggests that her life and art comingled closely; Holley’s personal beliefs were the “pillows”\(^7\) of support that crowned many of Samantha Smith Allen’s moralistic lectures. The scandal surrounding Woodhull is inviting territory for Samantha Smith Allen’s commentary on morals and divorce.

Josiah Allen is balding, flighty, vain, sometimes illogical and occasionally silly. He ridicules Samantha’s efforts at writing, claiming people won’t want to read a book written by Samantha. He is often derisive of women’s rights, and believes that women do not need equal rights. Josiah Allen is certain that his opinions are correct as the patriarch of the household.

Betsy Bobbet rounds out the main characterizations that recur in the episodic novels; Bobbet is portrayed as a lovesick, sentimental spinster with bad teeth, sallow skin, and thinning hair. She is the antithesis of an attractive and therefore “marriageable” female; however, because a woman should aspire to achieve marriage to be a “true woman,” Bobbet is relentless in her pursuit of a spouse.

Bobbet represents a demeaning stereotype for women; her character feigns sentimental and helpless attitudes, believing that these attributes are womanly. Bobbet has no options as a single or married woman in nineteenth century America, yet she does not see these clear limitations placed on her gender. She is only interested in the marriage-ability of any man she meets. Bobbet is a reversal of stereotype, a carefully constructed foil to Samantha Smith Allen’s moral and ethical perspective.

In Holley’s fictional works the character of Samantha Smith Allen is always presented as a godly and conscientious married wife, while Bobbet consistently represents the opposite female stereotype: a predatory female spinster in endless pursuit of a spouse. It is worth noting that when

\(^7\) In Samantha Smith Allen’s dialect “pillows” refers to pillars.
Bobbet finally finds a spouse, he is a widower with seven children. In the novels, Bobbet manages to convince him to marry her while he is weak and recovering from illness. After the wedding, she is portrayed as mistreated and overworked, but proud of her status as wife.

**Victoria Woodhull, Joke Target**

Holley’s chapter, “Interview with Theodore and Victory,” targets Victoria Woodhull and her ideas on marriage and divorce. “The Woodhull” was a common target for ridicule in the American suffrage movement, providing social and cultural context of the use of humor to subvert fringe elements. Because Woodhull’s views were considered radical and immoral, her ideas galvanized anti suffrage activists into active resistance. In particular, her ideas were parodied; her actions and point of view were ridiculed in serialized newspapers and magazines across the country.

The chief proponent of this radical movement to reform relations between the sexes, Victoria California Claflin-Woodhull, was born in Homer, Ohio, to an eccentric traveling medicine show family. As a young girl, she and her sister, Tennessee, learned the art of persuasive discourse as they “delivered spiritualistic faith-healing while their father, Buck Claflin, sold nostrums to the sick” (McGarry, 2000, p. 11). Given their spiritualistic enterprises, it seems reasonable to assume that the Claflin sisters, Victoria and Tennessee, understood from an early age the power of public discourse. Their early exposure to persuasive rhetoric through spiritualism, faith-healing, and the art of the sale led both sisters from the back of a traveling caravan in southern Ohio to national exposure for their very “public” discussions of private discourse. Both sisters entered the halls of Wall Street history as the first women stock brokers.
They followed this career with the establishment of a weekly newspaper, *The Woodhull and Claflin Weekly*. Because Woodhull editorialized on free love, women’s equality, and social ills that exploit women such as prostitution, the paper, and the sisters became leading—and infamous—figures in the women’s suffrage movement (Frisken, 2000, p. 11).

Woodhull’s status as a “public woman” is closely linked to the understanding that, as a public woman, she was a fallen woman. Thus, her position as a defender of female rights was overshadowed or marked by her admission that she advocated sexual equality. Her views were blunt and often perceived as acrimonious. Although the sisters claimed that marriage for security was prostitution, both chose financially secure men to marry, and married multiple times. Woodhull, for example, was married three times and had a number of publicly acknowledged relationships. Critics claimed Woodhull advocated promiscuity as a lifestyle choice. Amanda Frisken (2000) suggests that Woodhull represented a threat to class and privilege, and was a figure of controversy during the nineteenth century.

Woodhull aggravated tensions between proponents of missionary and democratic rationales for suffrage, revealing a striking class difference between Woodhull and most suffragists. Pictorial tabloids used her family squabbles as stock to lampoon all suffragists. Antisuffrage women exploited tawdry Woodhull representations to discredit the movement as a danger to class privilege. Yet Woodhull maneuvers among these contradictory positions, reconfiguring herself (with partial success) as a martyr to the cause. (p. 99)

Woodhull stood in opposition to the public discourse of the time; her story is significant inasmuch as her rhetorical presence galvanized two separate conservative factions to unite to thwart her “Free Love” position as immoral and un-Christian like. Women orators such as
Woodhull commanded large fees for speaking out in favor of women’s rights. Her unconventional views on marriage and divorce coupled with her views on Spiritualism and her status as a spokesperson for the Spiritualist party increased her lecture circuit appeal. This platform allowed her to publicly accuse the popular minister Henry Ward Beecher of adultery. Woodhull called out Beecher in her newspaper, and claimed he was a hypocrite and a secret practitioner of “Free Love.” The national scandal that ensued erupted into a furor when Woodhull and her sister were arrested and charged with dispensing obscenity for exposing the affair in their newspaper.

In the chapter “Interview with Theodore and Victory,” the Theodore in question is Theodore Tilton. Tilton was a noted publisher of a liberal religious newspaper; he was married to Elizabeth Tilton, the married congregant involved with Henry Ward Beecher. Theodore Tilton wrote a glowing biography of Victoria Woodhull; he was considered one of her followers and, later became her lover. Tilton was also devoted to Beecher; so much so he assisted his wife in covering up the affair to spare Beecher’s position as a minister (Gabriel, 1998, p. 115).

**The Cult of “True Womanhood” as ideology**

As discussed earlier, Holley’s fiction was part of the popular press which disseminates news, commentary, opinion, fiction or fact on ideologies, points of views and items of interest gauged to interest a general reading public. It seems reasonable to suggest that if an idea was widely circulated in society, some portion of the popular press would indeed disseminate it, such as the idea of “True Womanhood”. Barbara Welter (1968) confirms the emergence of this culture ideal for women in the early nineteenth century. Welter defined the cult of “True Womanhood” as
a set of standards that women were expected to follow in the nineteenth century. She discusses these ideas in terms of characteristics.

The attributes of “True Womanhood”, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power. (p. 152)

Welter succinctly describes the ideology of “True Womanhood” exemplified in the character Samantha Allen. Recognizing what Allen represented, helps explain how Holley negotiated her confined rhetorical speaking space using predominant cultural values. That is, as an example of “True Womanhood” and “megumness,” Samantha Allen represented logic and commonsense on any issue, including women’s rights.

Johnson (2002) discusses the phenomenon that blossoms from the “True Womanhood” movement. As she notes, the dissemination of this ideology during the nineteenth century created a confined rhetorical space for women: their platform to speak was limited to the domestic sphere through the use of parlor rhetoric and conduct manuals. To Johnson, the cult of “True Womanhood” is a foundational ideology “that the climate of nineteenth century rhetorical life can be accurately described only when the ideological impact of the ‘True Womanhood’-cult of domesticity context is taken into consideration” (p. 4). With this, Johnson discusses a similar role expected of women in society. These strict roles demanded that women be considered observably religious, obedient and capable home managers (p. 4).
Free Love: the ideology

The Cult of True Womanhood was a social construction enacted, as least partially, as a response to radical suffrage ideas like Free Love. Woodhull and the reformers coalesced around Free Love as an ideology advocated loudly for abandoning the shackles of matrimony. McGarry (2000) suggests that “free love ideology, in its various manifestations, comprised an individualistic, antiauthoritarian attack on the sexual, economic, and legal inequities of marriage” (p. 11). This particular branch of the suffrage movement used inflammatory language and compared marriage to chattel slavery.

Gabriel (1998) defines Free Love and its followers as “opposed to marriage because it discriminated against women. They believed that existing marriage laws bound a woman to sexual relations with a man even when she no longer loved him or was mistreated by him” (p. 96). This counter discourse stands in clear opposition to the accepted cultural and social practices in nineteenth century America, and, as McGarry points out, instigated a movement among more conservative factions to stamp it out. Goldsmith (1998) points out that for many people, “the concept of free love was broad and murky and could encompass everything from amending the constitution of the nation regarding women’s enfranchisement to allowing one to indulge in sexual relations with whomever one chose” (p. 183). To most nineteenth century Americans, free love was a phenomenon limited to the educated middle and leisure classes. It is against this backdrop that Marietta Holley wrote the Samantha Allen series.
Analysis “Interview With Theodore and Victory”

The chapter was part of Holley’s first episodic novel, *My Opinions and Betsy Bobbet’s*, which was published in 1872. As discussed, the chapter is part of this episodic novel. The following information relates to this chapter’s significance as a piece of topical anti feminist humor.

First, even the most basic premises which Samantha Smith Allen raises to correct “Victory” Woodhull are based on misinformation and popular opinion rather than on any knowledge of the facts and circumstances regarding the Beecher-Tilton Scandal. For example, Samantha Smith Allen asserts that Victory should not care for her ailing, alcoholic ex-husband because the act does not appear to conform to public ideals. When Victory protests, claiming he was her husband and bedridden and that she took care of him until he died, Samantha tells her she should have placed him “in a horsepittal or tarvern” (p.104). Overall, Allen’s response reflects conservative public opinion regarding Woodhull. It focuses on lurid details (two husbands) and on sensationalistic half-truths. The chapter, interestingly enough, allows Woodhull to voice objections, but Samantha ignores Victory’s pleas for justice and continues to chastise her as immoral. This is an interesting reversal of the strong support for women’s rights Holley typically adopts. Holley, in effect, uses a clever reversal to further the aims of conservative Christian feminists. As such, she exploits the roles of “True Womanhood” to prove that Woodhull is immoral and that Free Love is not godly. Samantha’s stand seems to be the antithesis of her position in any other circumstance: in this essay, Samantha Smith Allen clearly advocates that

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8 Numerous reprinting of all of Holley’s works followed in the intervening years. For this analysis, I compared the 1872, 1875, and the 1891 editions and found no discrepancies in the text. For ease of access, the 1891 edition collected in the Curry (1983) text, *Samantha Rastles The Woman Question* was used for this analysis. Page numbering reflects the Curry text.
married women do not have the same rights as single women. In this regard, it is important to remember that Samantha Smith Allen represents “True Womanhood,” and when she holds Victory Woodhull to those values she finds that Victory is not only lacking in them, but that she “is in the right on it and you are in wrong on it, says I, and I come clear from Jonesville to try to get you right where you are wrong” (p. 103).

Also significant, Samantha judges by appearance—one of the very sins she rails against. This is significant because Samantha is known to advocate equal rights; in this case she argues that married women are subject to their husbands and their positions in the domestic sphere. It seems therefore that Allen’s initial reaction to Woodhull is to advocate for limited equal rights for some women, excluding Victory Woodhull. Samantha makes a point of claiming her righteousness, stating that their handshake was cool, because their points of views differed (p. 105).

In the chapter, Samantha intentionally lavishes laudatory praise on the sister of Henry Ward Beecher, Isabelle Beecher Hooker. At the time, Hooker was a follower of Victoria Woodhull. In the chapter, Hooker is repeatedly venerated for her relation to Henry Ward Beecher in the chapter. The praise compares Henry Ward Beecher to a king, and claims that “not once in 100 years does Nature turn out such a man as HWB. It takes her longer than that to get her ingregiences [sic] and materials togather [sic] to make such a pure sweet nature, such a broad charity and such an intellect as hisen [sic]. . . . He is God’s own anointed” (p. 102). The praise Samantha attributes to Beecher is larger than life. Note that Holley seems to exaggerate his attributes and aligns them with the virtues discussed as part of the concept of “True Womanhood.”
Interestingly, Samantha also interjects a trivial aside into her long-winded praise of Beecher. This jab line and humorous aside pokes at Samantha’s credibility as a narrator when she claims that she would rather be Beecher’s sister than the King of England’s sister (p. 102). These exclamations are naïve, based on Holley’s stereotyping of popular opinion. Samantha’s unequivocal support for Hooker is ironic given that Isabella Beecher Hooker believed that her brother was involved in adultery, and had broken off relations with him. Hooker’s relations were also strained with the rest of the Beecher family because she supported Victoria Woodhull and “a more radical and multidimensional feminism” (Boydston, Kelly, and Margolis, 1998, p.262).

As indicated previously, Camfield asserts that Holley’s satires are monistic. This assertion is supported by the factual errors about the scandal Samantha Smith Allen makes in the chapter. She venerates Beecher, and history proves the assertions about his affair were correct. Samantha praises Hooker for her familial connection to Beecher, yet, in reality, Hooker supported Woodhull, and was estranged from her family because of the scandal.

Finally, Samantha accuses Woodhull of adultery without evidence. That said, these errors also confirm that Allen’s perspective is that of Holley’s; forged out of her conservative Christian feminist ideals, and conscious of “True Womanhood” as an ideal.

Holley’s chapter was published in 1873, shortly after details of the scandal emerged in the popular press. As discussed previously, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s brother, Henry Ward Beecher, a prominent minister had been named as an adulterer by Woodhull in her weekly newspaper in 1872. The publication had numerous subscribers, and Henry Ward Beecher’s private love affair became national news at the time when Victoria Woodhull publicized the details of the affair in her newspaper.
Marietta Holley was an ardent fan and follower of Henry Ward Beecher. Winter (1984) discusses Holley’s meeting with Beecher years before the scandal and comments on Holley’s favorable opinion of the minister (p. 59). The publication of Holley’s novel occurs after the serialization of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *My Wife and I* and the play performed on Broadway adapted from Stowe’s work during 1870-71. In fact, the exposure of Beecher’s assignation happened after a long period of public ridicule of Woodhull and her beliefs by Stowe and others concerned with anti-suffrage (see Gabriel, 1998).

The long standing ridicule was subsequently countered by Woodhull’s 1872 publication of an article that charged Henry Ward Beecher, a prominent minister and leader in the suffragist movement with adultery. Beecher was not only an abolitionist, a minister, and well-known orator, but he was also the brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Catherine Beecher. These women, according to McGarry (2000), “had little respect for Woodhull’s radical opinions and publicity mongering” (p. 12).

The publication of the affair and the consequences of public scrutiny, in turn, led to the enmity and division between the Beecher sisters regarding women’s rights and Victoria Woodhull. The sisters, Harriet and Isabella were divided over the issue of women’s suffrage and at odds over the influence of Victoria Woodhull and her attitudes toward marriage, divorce and equal rights. McGarry also suggests that Woodhull’s disclosure of Beecher’s affair in the newspaper was calculated, not to highlight or emphasize the adulterous actions of the participants but to expose Henry Ward Beecher as a man who “practiced free love in private while upholding monogamous marriage in public” (p.12).

To Woodhull, and Claflin, the Beecher-Tilton scandal represented an attempt to dislodge the double-standard that existed between the sexes; McGarry remarks that Woodhull’s sister,
Tennessee Claflin explained their motivation to publish the scandal as prompted by a need to level stereotypes. “We have tried to make “rake” as disgraceful as “whore” We cannot do it. And now we are determined to take the disgrace out of whore” (p. 13).

**Holley Jab line and Joke Target Analysis**

Jab line analysis in the chapter is revealing. First and significantly the piece lacks any description of surroundings. Holley’s chapter has no setting other than an announcement that Samantha and Betsy arrived at Victory Woodhull’s house. Instead, Holley delivers short descriptions of her characters or their situations. Because most of Holley’s work follows a similar format it is easy to see how Holley’s reputation has been hurt by comparisons to other more descriptive authors. As such, Holley’s work is still overlooked, and labeled crude and irrelevant. This position fails to account for Holley’s role as a practitioner of proto feminist humor. Holley’s reputation should be informed by that insight, especially because Holley also penned antifeminist humor targeting Victoria Woodhull. In so doing, Holley contributed to the eventual development of feminist humor.

As discussed, satire and parody are aggressive forms of humor and should be studied as such in relation to their use by nineteenth century women in the . Like the Fern analysis, the jab lines are analyzed regarding type of target to compile an overall picture of the kinds of targets lampooned by women writers in the nineteenth century writing about women’s rights. Note that the jab lines are interspersed throughout the chapter somewhat evenly. On average, Holley introduces no more than two or three clear jab per page. Some pages lack any jabs, but offer thick description of a women’s rights leader. As indicated, the chapter lacks any description of the
surroundings; in fact, it is so devoid of detail that the reader is forced to pay attention to the ideas expounded upon in the text. Jab lines can be divided into the following types and are addressed in the analysis from most to least: Woodhull, Samantha, Betsy, Tilton, Free Love, Male, and Female.

Jabs directed at Woodhull are the most numerous in the text; there are 13 such clear jabs directed at Woodhull; the majority of the jabs are directed at her morals (8). Additionally, she is targeted as not conforming to the ideals of “True Womanhood” several times, and for being “different,” or not like Josiah Allen’s wife, twice. Holley uses the language of “True Womanhood” to bolster support for her beliefs. Words like purity, submission, and piety occur at various times in the text to describe Henry Ward Beecher, or point out how Victory falls short of achieving one of the above mentioned domestic virtues. It is also very significant that Woodhull is jabbed as “a well bread woman” and immoral, living with two husbands at the same time, while Beecher is portrayed as anointed by God.

Other jabs provide significant information. The next category of jab lines targets Samantha (4). Part of the rustic persona she adopted for her character is her inability to stay on topic without lapsing into a story or anecdote. Samantha admits these verbal lapses are failings, and targets her loquacity and occasional topic-shifting comically with several self-deprecating jabs.

The next categories are as follows: Theodore Tilton (3), Betsy (3), males (3). These categories are followed by two low number categories: Women who are frivolous (2) and Free Love (2). Significantly, within the entire corpus of 30 jab lines, only Free Love occurs as a targeted ideology—and it is only clearly targeted twice. Woodhull refers indirectly to the ideology in the chapter when she claimed to believe in “free divorce, free love, freedom in
Significantly, in this example, the majority of jabs are directed at people, rather than ideas. As discussed, part of the analysis examines the types of jab lines in the text in an attempt to assess the targets. The near complete absence of inclusive jokes in this corpus is significant; particularly when considering that inclusive jokes encourage solidarity, and are not directed at individuals.

This analysis reveals the strong presence of divisive jokes directed at people. A good example is Samantha Allen’s disdain for the beliefs she encounters during her conversation with Tilton and Woodhull. Her scorn is made plain when the tear that escaped her eye during the course of their conversation, and that Samantha was ready to blot with her 25 cent handkerchief, “turned around and traveled back to where it came from. I thought I had used mildness long enough” (p. 109). Clearly, Holley uses stereotypes to parody a popular joke target in her culture; this position was adopted to rebuke and silence radical ideas about suffrage and one of its loudest voices, “Victory Woodhull.”

**Stowe and Anti Feminist humor**

Much has been written about Harriet Beecher Stowe. Stowe’s acquisition of literacy and her circumstances as highly educated are well-documented and unique for a nineteenth century woman. Yet, Parton and Holley also acquired education and training in literary arts and more traditional sciences. While Stowe and Parton share very similar early backgrounds economically, educationally and socially, Holley attained a similar level of economic comfort and advanced literacy later in life through study and self-discipline.
Stylistically both Holley and Stowe show more concern with the moral and ethical interiors of their character, so much so that details of physical attributes or settings are sometimes sacrificed to lengthy explanations of character or personality traits.

Stowe, the eldest of the three authors, was known as a domestic writer and “considered the domestic and the literary entwined” (Boydston, Kelley and Margolis, p. 48). Equally prolific in output as Parton or Holley, Stowe’s training as an educator shaped her ability to hold and enthrall an audience; the child of a minister, her knowledge of the rhythm of sermons gave her stories the rhetorical sense of audience and the cohesiveness most readers seek out in their fiction. In many respects, Stowe is the most diverse and well-rounded writer of the three; however, it is also important to note that Stowe’s parody of Woodhull is anti feminist humor designed to ridicule radical suffrage and its proponents through the actions of the outlandish Audacia Dangyereyes in *My Wife and I*. Stowe portrays the question of women’s rights by means of a negative connotation associated with “True Womanhood.”

Stowe’s novel is a domestic comedy, the story of Harry Henderson’s search for the perfect wife. The journey from single to married life is accompanied by secondary plots that ridicule women’s rights and suffrage as ungodly and destructive to the domestic order. Stowe makes this attitude plain in the novel when “the woman question” is discussed, after a surprising meeting with Miss Audacia Dangyereyes. In Stowe’s novel, the father of Harry Henderson’s intended, Eva Van Ardel, explains the role of a good woman after a first encounter with the emancipated Audacia and her passion for women’s rights. “You good women are not fit to govern the world because you do not know and you oughtn’t to know wickedness that you have got to govern,” (p. 261). Here, Stowe offers the typical domestic stereotype that women must be cloistered from public life to support excluding women from the vote.
Eva’s mother agrees, and her conclusions regarding “the woman question” are as dismissive as her husband’s. To Mrs. Van Arsdel, women were not ready to vote, “until a generation with superior education and better balanced minds and better habits of conservative thought shall have grown up among us” (p.261). The ideals of “True Womanhood” are supported by the Van Arsdel’s and, again, used to ridicule suffrage and equality for women.

*My Wife and I: Domestic Comedy as Anti Suffrage Humor*

The composite character Audacia Dangyereyes in Stowe’s *My Wife and I* serves as a satirized figure and target for the lampooning of all that Stowe deemed a violation of the role of a woman in nineteenth century society. Like the strategy employed by Fern, and later Holley, Stowe organizes the text around a series of jab lines that poke holes in the decency of Audacia. Frisken (2000) suggests that Woodhull was lampooned on stage and in the popular press by Harriet Beecher Stowe in Stowe’s play “My Wife and I.”

[T]he bold intrusion of Audacia Dangyereyes (a satiric blend of Claflin and Woodhull) marks the beginning of an unwelcome association with a “female bully” who “dragooned” him into taking a subscription to her paper, “a paper that a man who reverenced his mother and sisters could scarcely read alone in his own apartments without blushing with indignation.” (p. 99)

The play was a success, and subsequently serialized in the *Christian Union* newspaper in 1870-71 (Frisken, 2000, p. 99). A work of ironic oppositions, the play supports a model of “True Womanhood.” To that end, the play presents as proper female behavior gendered silence and women as nurturers of hearth and home. Stowe accomplishes this first through Harry
Henderson’s search for the ideal wife to create a domestic haven; and, second, through an exaggeration of the character traits embodied in “Audacia Dangyereyes.” In the play, Dangyereyes is portrayed as sexualized; she is profane, an outspoken, brash bully who displays “mannish” behavior, the antithesis of “True Womanhood.” The creation and subsequent popularization of the play exemplifies how the use of aggressive humor can be wielded by one group against another to perform a social corrective. Hayden (2012) confirms that the ridicule by Stowe and other rhetoricians such as Jennie Willing continued long after Stowe’s original ridicule and negative characterization of Audacia Dangyereyes.

Jennie Willing’s 1887 rhetorical theory treatise, The Potential Woman, dispenses practical advice for women speakers but cautions them against certain “unlady-like” speaking behaviors: I need not warn you against mannerisms, loudness, coarseness of voice or words, the giggling habit, the Auducia Dang-yer-eyes style as set forth by Mrs. Stowe, offending good taste by its lack of modesty . . . your own common sense protests against all of these faults (216). (As cited in Hayden, 2012, p. 451)

Boydston, Kelley, and Margolis (1998) claim Stowe’s views on suffrage were molded by her belief that a woman’s primary role and duty was to be a wife and mother. To Stowe, and as the analysis indicates, the ideology of “True Womanhood” took precedence over any expectation be it of personal freedom or voting rights, and was a woman’s duty as directed by God (p. 260). Hayden (2012) expands on this idea when she claims that for Stowe, and other rhetoricians, the objections to the unrefined language use of speakers like Audacia Dangyereyes represent differences that are rooted in class. “Thus their objections to Audacia are increasingly class-
based: they hold her to middle class standards of femininity and education and find her speech lacking in both” (p. 467).

**Semantic Frames for My Wife and I**

As previously discussed, I introduce semantic frames (Chlopicki 1987; 2000) to analyze the longer narrative form. As explicated earlier in the chapter, the following semantic frames are necessary: Free Love, “True Womanhood,” and Victoria Woodhull (as basis for character Audacia Dangyereyes). Semantic frames specific to the Stowe analysis include Jim Fellows, Harry Henderson and Audacia Dangyereyes.

**Jim Fellows**

In Stowe’s novel, Jim Fellows is Harry Henderson’s friend. Fellows is portrayed as an “agreeable creature, born with a decided bent for gossip” and “the best natured fellow breathing” (p.136). He is Harry’s roommate and collaborator at the newspaper that employs Harry. Jim is described as a “coxcomb” (confident) and offers to help Harry find available “P.Gs.” (pretty girls) (p. 154). Jim is not opposed to marrying for money because “a fine girl is none the worse for fifty thousand dollars” (p. 155). Jim does poke a bit of fun at Harry, because Harry sincerely believes that he will find the ideal woman to wed. Jim asks Harry if he will meet his bride through some act of “divine providence” when Harry decides to marry (p. 155). Jim remains a bachelor after Harry weds.
**Harry Henderson**

As the main character in Stowe’s novel, the reader follows Harry Henderson on a journey to maturity and wedded bliss within the domestic sphere. Harry is described as handsome, and his morals and ethics are exemplary. When Jim Fellows urges Harry to accompany him “to see New York by gaslight,” Harry reminds Jim that “a fellow must be industrious to make anything, and my time for girls isn’t come yet” (p. 154).

Harry is a write, and considers himself “an observer of life and manners” (p. 156). At one point, Harry meets the girl of his dreams, a proper example of “True Womanhood,” Eva Van Arsdel. After some minor misunderstandings, and the loss of the Van Arsdel wealth, Harry proves his love for Eva, and marries her. According to Stowe, the married couple lived happily following the roles prescribed by nineteenth century American society.

**Audacia Dangyereyes**

As discussed earlier, Audacia Dangyereyes is a composite portrait of Victoria Woodhull, and her sister Tennessee Claflin. Stowe uses this portrait to stereotype emancipated women seeking women’s suffrage and to ridicule their ideas and behaviors as immoral and ungodly. Stowe describes Audacia’s physical appearance as “jaunty” and “dashing.” Audacia calls on Harry without a chaperone present; she is straightforward, frank and is portrayed as a dialect speaker. As mentioned previously, Stowe, as other writers of the era, uses dialect intentionally. Audacia’s dialect should be read negatively, and as a class-based difference. In Harry’s first encounter with Audacia, for instance, Harry is shocked by her bold declaration that “I claim my right to smoke, if I please, and to drink if I please; and to come up to your room and make you a
call, and have a good time with you” (p. 241). In her speech and her habits Audacia violates the concept of “True Womanhood;” the violation, in turn, reverses proper behavior for a woman.

Stowe Jab Line and Joke Target Analysis

Stowe’s use of ridicule in *My Wife and I* takes a clear moral stance against the question of women’s rights through the effective use of an ironic role-reversal in Stowe’s portrayal of Audacia Dangyereyes. To demonstrate this use, one passage in the text that satirizes Audacia’s beliefs is analyzed. Here is the passage in its entirety.

‘Dacia was in high spirits, jaunty as ever, and informed me that the millenium was a-com ing straight along and favored me with her views of how they intended to manage things in the good time.

The great mischief at present, she informs me, lies in possessive pronouns, which they intend to abolish. There isn’t to be any my or thy. Everybody is to have everything just the minute they happen to want it, and everybody else is to let ‘em. Marriage is an old effete institution, a relic of barbarous ages. There is to be no my of husband and wife, and no my of children. The State is to raise all the children as they do turnips in great institutions, and they are to belong to everybody. Love, she informed me, in these delightful days is to be as free as air; everybody to do exactly as they’ve a mind to; a privilege she remarked that she now took as her right. “If I see a man that pleases me, I shall not ask Priest or Levite for leave to have him.” This was declared with so martial an air that I shrank a little, but she relieved me by saying, “You needn’t be frightened. I
Here, and throughout the novel, Audacia is presented as coarse, ungrammatical, and unabashed at entering a young man’s quarters to solicit funds for her newspaper on women’s rights; this attribute is recounted in the opening encounter with Harry Henderson, and a second, similar incident is recounted in a letter in the novel’s concluding pages. In this second meeting, Jim, a secondary male character has a similar experience with Audacia and recounts the experience to Harry in a letter. Jim Fellows is writing to his friend Harry Henderson, a man who married an exemplary model of “True Womanhood.” Jim Fellows, a bachelor, covets Harry’s role within the confines of the domestic sphere, and like Harry, rejects the model of an emancipated woman. Because these men desire a model of “True Womanhood,” Audacia is viewed as particularly outlandish and unattractive.

My analysis of the jab lines and punch line reveals that the role reversal continues throughout and ends with the final punch line which feminizes Jim’s actions and response while those of Audacia are masculinized: “You needn’t be frightened. I don’t want you. You wouldn’t suit me. All I want of you is your money.” Whereat she came down to business again.” Note that the role reversal in the punch line portrays an aggressive, brash Audacia that frightens Jim, so much that he is described as shrinking from her perceived advances. It is easy to see how stereotypes for aggressive females and shrill women’s rights advocates emerged and took shape in the portrayal of Audacia Dangyereyes. Stowe’s portrayal of the sexualized woman demanding equal treatment is meant to be viewed as mannish behavior that eschewed nature and God’s primary role for women.
Jab lines 1 and 2 contrast male/female roles and possession. Audacia, rejecting the cult of domesticity, marks possession as the enemy instead of the right of males to possess the female. Because submission and subjection are part of womanly virtues, Audacia’s statement is ridiculous. The statement is also far-fetched because the idea to change language use related to personal ownership is foolish, making the utterance fallacious. Here, Stowe ridicules the ideology of Free Love, and Woodhull as its mouthpiece. In the passage, Stowe uses the word “they” to refer to the ideology of Free Love and the people who believe such fallacies. Note too, that the dialect choices such as “a-coming” convey Audacia’s language skills and mark her as an uneducated Appalachian or Southern speaker. Woodhull, as stated previously, was born in southern Ohio, in an area where Appalachian is spoken and had only “three years of elementary school, which she attended off and on between ages eight and eleven” (p. 9). As such, Stowe uses language and dialect to convey negative connotations about class, the ideas and the speaker. This pair of jab lines skewers Audacia/Woodhull and Free Love as an ideology equally.

Dacia was in high spirits, jaunty as ever, and informed me that the millenium was a-coming straight along and favored me with her views of how they intended to manage things in the good time.

1. The great mischief at present, she informs me, lies in possessive pronouns, which they intend to abolish.

2. There isn’t to be any my or thy.

Jab lines 3 and 4 poke fun at beliefs that are nonsensical and outside the norm, and beliefs that violate the godly virtues women should manifest such as patience, hard work, deferred gratification and selflessness. These qualities moreover, are those espoused by the ideology of “True Womanhood.”
3. Everybody is to have everything just the minute they happen to want it, and everybody else is to let ‘em.

4. Marriage is an old effete institution, a relic of barbarous ages.

In addition, the jab lines feature dialect use (‘em), and marriage is cast aside as an out of date value. As in the previous analysis, this pair of jab lines pokes fun at Audacia/Woodhull and Free Love.

Jab Lines 5 and 6 exaggerate aspects of Free Love ideology to emphasize how Free Love beliefs lie outside social norms. Like the previous lines, this pair of jabs attacks Audacia/Woodhull and her beliefs about Free Love, so the jab lines reflect the link between ideology and person. The radical lack of family structure associated with Free Love as well as the way the ideology encourages the intrusion of the State into the sacred space of the domestic hearth and home is also attacked, reinforcing the lack of morals and behavior the ideology manifests. Accordingly, Free Love is not appropriate to a society based on biblical principles and nineteenth century domestic culture. Children were owned by the patriarch, part of the traditional family structure. Again, Stowe brings forward the exaggerated idea and holds it up to ridicule. Children are not raised by the State as turnips, and as earlier, the dropping of the concept of ownership and family structure absurd.

5. There is to be no my of husband and wife, and no my of children.

6. The State is to raise all the children as they do turnips in great institutions, and they are to belong to everybody.

In offering this exaggerated idea, Stowe holds it up to ridicule. After all children are not raised by the State as turnips; as mentioned earlier, the notion that children are not owned is absurd.
Jab Lines 7 and 8 links Audacia to free-thinking, immoral, sexualized attitudes about love and sex. As a nineteenth century woman, such freedom was unheard of, in any woman other than prostitutes. By focusing on these matters, Stowe jabs Audacia/Woodhull while alluding to speculation about Woodhull’s past that includes prostitution as a young married woman in California (Goldsmith, 1998, p. 66). Again, Stowe neatly links attacks on the ideology of Free Love and Audacia/Woodhull. Life without threat of moral judgment is “as free as the air” and implies no substance or order. In short, the ideology of Free Love thwarts the moral and social order.

In addition, Audacia/Woodhull displays carnality and is dismissive of biblical principles when she states that “I shall not ask Priest or Levite to have him.” Here Audacia defiles the ideology of purity and fidelity in marriage by declaring that she can have the man she desires when she desires, without benefit of marriage.

Jab Line 8 is extremely outrageous as Audacia declares that Judaeo-Christian ethics and laws are not applicable to her—and other people that follow Free Love:

7. Love, she informed me, in these delightful days is to be as free as air; everybody to do exactly as they’ve a mind to; a privilege she remarked that she now took as her right.

8. “If I see a man that pleases me, I shall not ask Priest or Levite for leave to have him.”

This final position jab is also significant because it moves the text through the most outrageous of the jab lines towards the Punch Line.

By reversing stereotypical responses, the Punch Line (lines 9 and 10) completes the role reversal that takes place between Audacia/Woodhull and Jim Fellows; that is, Jim Fellows
becomes modest and frightened of Audacia/Woodhull’s bold sexualized stance while Audacia becomes a predatory, mannish character who dismisses Jim’s response as trivial—and unimaginable. The punch line brings closure to the passage and allows Jim to return to the primary narrator of the letter in the brief section.

   This was declared with so martial an air that I shrank a little, but she relieved me by saying, “You needn’t be frightened. I don’t want you. You wouldn’t suit me. All I want of you is your money.”

   Whereat she came down to business again. (p. 436)

In the punch line, note that Stowe returns the reader’s attention to Audacia/Woodhull’s immoral, improper behavior by focusing on her original intention: the business of persuading Jim to subscribe to her newspaper, and thus gain his subscription fees.

Conclusions

The analysis of the Stowe passage contributes to current understanding of how feminist humor developed; specifically, it shows how Stowe used humor rhetorically to address more liberal forms of women’s suffrage. In this example of humor that I call anti-feminist, Stowe reverses the conventions of feminist humor: the words and actions of Audacia/Woodhull emphasize the immorality and ungodly while the characters of Jim Fellows and Harry Henderson take on a passive opposite role when confronted by the aggressive Audacia/Woodhull exemplifying virtuous behavior. Thus, the radical suffrage movement, and one of its key voices, is silenced by patriarchal ridicule through the role reversal. Audacia/Woodhull is portrayed as someone who has no credibility because her ideas are too far from the mainstream. Jim and
Harry, on the other hand, represent the mainstream values of nineteenth century patriarchy and domesticity. Recall that Holley achieves a similar outcome, holding Victory up to the ideals of “True Womanhood” and showing readers that Victory and Free Love threaten the moral order.

Additionally, the analysis offers insight into the use of ideology to promote anti-feminist writing. The passage as analyzed demonstrates an equal number of jabs directed at Woodhull and Free Love. Thus it seems evident that anti-feminist humor developed at about the same time as these early examples of proto feminist humor. While Holley’s work aimed at promoting women’s rights from within the domestic sphere, anti-feminist humor as written by Stowe and Holley criticizes the ideas guiding the growing suffrage movement. Both forms are significant to our developing portrait of the rhetorical use of humor by women in the nineteenth century. The analyses also reveal that the sophisticated use of ideology is present in anti-feminist and proto-feminist humor. Both forms of humor make use of satire and parody to ridicule, providing a clear picture of how women used humor to further the aims of the early suffrage movement, or control the more radical members of the movement.

Having analyzed Holley and Stowe’s use of anti-feminist humor in Chapter IV, the final chapter of the dissertation summarizes results and points to future research in the field.
Chapter V
Conclusions

This dissertation has examined selected humor works by three nineteenth century women writers, demonstrating that their works are not all or merely feminist, thereby complicating current understanding of the development of feminist humor. To that end, Chapter I provided historical and scholarly contexts on matters related to women’s use of humor. Chapter II explained and modeled the methodology demonstrating the jab line analysis using the GTVH to conduct the line analysis (Attardo 1994, 2001). Chapter III then examined 30 short essays by Sara Parton Willis, explicating Fern’s consistent proto feminist status, followed by Chapter IV and its analyses of anti-feminist humor by Holley and Stowe.

In the previous chapters this dissertation provided an overview of the production and reception of the early use of proto feminist humor and anti-feminist humor through analyses of selected humorous works by Sara Willis Parton, Marietta Holley and Harriet Beecher Stowe. To achieve those ends, I discussed how feminist humor, proto feminist humor, and anti feminist humor have been understood in the scholarship and defined, and ridicule, irony, satire and parody in and of themselves as used within early nineteenth century proto feminist humor. Joke targets and jab lines were analyzed according to the GTVH (Attardo, 1994, 2001). And, I offered Bing’s (2004) theory to assess joke targets in terms of inclusive and divisive jokes in the corpus.

Thus, the analyses in this dissertation expand current understanding of how nineteenth century women used humor as a linguistic and rhetorical tool. More specifically, analysis of the example texts demonstrated that proto feminist humor developed before feminist humor.
Additionally, the dissertation analyzed early anti-feminist humor through the satiric lampooning of nineteenth century suffrage advocate Victoria Woodhull and her ideas on “free love” and women’s suffrage. The analysis disclosed the use of anti feminist humor by women to promote the continuation of the ideals of “True Womanhood” and control radical women’s suffrage, and one of its more extreme speakers, Victoria Woodhull.

These analyses also expand on previous characterizations of Holley as a feminist writer by including her use of anti-feminist humor. Holley’s conservative Christian feminist ideals were disguised as “megunness” as she used parody to control the discourse of more radical ideas about women’s rights. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s ridiculing of Woodhull and radical suffrage provided further evidence of the use of ideology in these early expressions of anti feminist humor, also. Examining the ideologies these women humor writers targeted during these developing years of women’s rights, indicates that for all three writers, marriage was the central ideology targeted, whether in support of, or in resistance to the nineteenth century ideals of domestic life and the roles ascribed to males and females.

As discussed, of all three writers, Sara Willis Parton offered the most consistent support for women’s rights. Through her skilled language use, she expressed more radical opinions on dress. Parton demonstrated a keen ability to play with language in a way that embraces multiple readings. Although Parton’s use of ideology was limited to marriage, her humor focused on the use of an inclusive target and unwavering support for women’s rights.

It is significant, if not startling, how many divisive jokes Holley used in the chapter, “Interview with Theodore and Victory.” They reveal the split between conservative and radical suffrage movement members in two writers: Holley and Stowe.
The nineteenth century community of emerging feminists divided into factions to control the ideas and discourse of the women’s rights movement. Holley created a counter discourse that controlled the rights of married women and restored subjection as central to women’s duty in the prevailing social order. My analysis and argument invites reconsideration of Holley’s status as simply an early writer of feminist humor (Blair 1942). Instead, Holley’s use of reversal parodies Victoria Woodhull as immoral, ungodly and lacking “megunness.” Such reversals, reversals which evoke anti-feminist humor and control Woodhull, paint a more complex portrait of Holley as a person, and a writer. Holley ridiculed and parodied Victoria Woodhull and the radical suffrage movement to correct what she considered immoral behavior; Holley’s anti-feminist humor offers feminist scholars interested in nineteenth century humor an opportunity to reclaim these early examples of humor targeting the women’s rights movement.

Woodhull was a common target during the Beecher-Tilton scandal; it is significant that both Stowe and Holley attack Victoria Woodhull as too radical and a threat to the moral order. The evidence is at odds with the historical scholarship regarding Holley’s unconditional support for women’s rights. In this case, Samantha’s presumed love of “megunness,” Henry Ward Beecher, and religion shifts her unconditional support of women’s rights to reproach and submission to male authority in law and marriage. According to Samantha Allen, Woodhull had no right to divorce.

For Stowe, the decision to weigh in on the “Woman Question” began in response to the threat Stowe perceived by the ideas of radical suffrage and its proponents. For Stowe, the personal became political as she mounted a defense of her brother, and an assault on radical suffrage at the same time. Stowe’s family situation and the discord between family members provided historical significance when viewed in concert with the power of Stowe’s pen in the
popular press. Although Stowe’s attempts to ridicule Woodhull were part of a larger movement to contain the radical suffrage ideas of Free Love, Beecher was hounded by the press and faced accusations for years after. Woodhull’s reputation, already a prominent source of ridicule, was further tarnished by the publication of the scandal when McGarry notes that Woodhull was charged with disseminating obscene materials through the United States mail. Although the charges were eventually dismissed, Woodhull and her sister were imprisoned for several weeks, and spent a significant portion of their respective fortunes fighting the charges. Clearly, the conservative forces that had united to silence Woodhull’s “profane” message of sexual equality through ridicule achieved their aim of discrediting “The Woodhull” and her followers through a process that exposed how Woodhull violated the rhetorical space accorded to American women in the nineteenth century rhetorical arena (McGarry, 2000, p.14).

In reality, Woodhull’s attempt to challenge the boundaries of her rhetorical space resisted assumptions regarding class and race privileges in nineteenth century America. Woodhull’s position as an advocate for women’s equality is subverted and subsequently used by conservative anti-suffrage activists to resist Woodhull’s platform of sexual equality. Her violation of rhetorical space is thus effectively contained, silenced and marginalized by the ridicule delivered by anti-suffrage activists.

White (2003) suggests that the repercussions of the Beecher Tilton scandal were divisive to the suffrage movement, also.

Both Beecher and the Tiltons were proponents of woman suffrage, so it was easy for anti-feminists to make the age-old association of women’s rights and sexual profligacy. Isabella Beecher Hooker, Beecher’s sister and a friend and colleague
of Stanton and Anthony, believed her brother was guilty and refused to repudiate Woodhull, leading her to be ostracized by her family and friends.

In one of her letters, Stanton made an eloquent statement of the principle involved:

> We have had women enough sacrificed to this sentimental, hypocritical, prating about purity. This is one of man’s most effective engines, for our division, & subjugation. He creates the public sentiment, builds the gallows, & then makes us hangman for our sex. Women have crucified the Mary Wollstonecrafts, the Fanny Wrights, the George Sand’s, the Fanny Kemble’s, the Lucretia Mott’s[sic] of all ages, & now men mock us with the fact & say, we are ever cruel to each other. Let us end this ignoble record, & henceforth stand by womanhood. (428) (font size in original)

Of course, both Victoria Woodhull and Elizabeth Tilton were eventually “crucified.” (p. 138)

White’s comment regarding Woodhull and Tilton’s end as a kind of crucifixion marks the conclusion of the Stanton quotation and demonstrates the success of the humorous portrayals and parodies of “The Woodhull.” Victoria Woodhull’s exit from the United States and the political scene of the pro-suffrage movement after 1872 is one of a number of significant setbacks during this time period that hindered the growth of the pro-suffrage movement (see Frisken, 2004). Holley’s uninformed position assumed Woodhull was immoral; this position certainly reflected the conservative faction of the early suffrage movement. Ultimately, the internecine feuding escalated between the two factions and the suffrage movement as a whole suffered major
setbacks. I question whether Holley’s early writing can be considered successful propaganda for the early suffrage movement, particularly since women did not achieve the right to vote until 1920.¹

Holley and Stowe’s use of ridicule and parody to target Woodhull in anti-feminist humor, a use intended as a kind of social correction, stands in sharp contrast to the pro woman perspective Fern consistently expressed in the works this dissertation analyzed. In contrast, Stowe’s position was well documented before, so her use of anti-feminist humor to target Woodhull is not so surprising; however, the analysis offers more support that Stowe did not support suffrage and targeted threats to nineteenth century social order, and her brother’s reputation.

The threat that suffrage and equality represented to the cult of domesticity cannot be discounted, particularly when Stowe, Holley, Fern and other popular writers weighed in on “the woman question” in serialized magazines that were mass-distributed. Clearly to Holley and Stowe, philosophies like “Free Love” and women like Victoria Woodhull represented a threat to the moral order that the domestic sphere maintained. These writers took the early conventions of this emerging feminist humor and used reversal to parody Victoria Woodhull and other members of the Free Love movement. To Holley and Stowe, the message of “True Womanhood” was used to enact social control on the emerging suffrage movement, and create works that were anti feminist humor, also. These works supported the status quo and used stereotype and ridicule to attack members of the suffrage community that held more radical points of view.

¹ The disruption and subsequent failure of the early suffrage movement has been discussed by a variety of historians (see Friskin, 2004). Some scholarship attributes the negative publicity garnered by radical feminists such as Woodhull as contributing factors in the delay of voting rights for women.
For writers like Parton and Holley, humor and stereotypes allowed them to subvert the language of their oppressors and to get their works published and distributed widely through the popular press. For Stowe, the use of parody to ridicule Woodhull was primarily to preserve marriage, restore moral order, and express outrage over the threat to her brother’s reputation.

**Implications for Future Research**

First, because I was not able to test my hypothesis, my study was limited. The next steps are to look into reviews and assemble publication and distribution data on all three authors. Other promising avenues for future research in the emergence of feminist humor are evident in Holley and Stowe’s corpus. Within the development of anti-feminist humor, further remapping of Holley’s work should be considered from a rhetorical perspective to examine the use and development of anti-feminist humor. Too little has been done to explore the rhetorical uses of humor by early women writers like Holley and Parton. Too often, their works have been negated as stereotyped and dated; however, the fact that these writers were able to distribute widely read works of humor and engage readers in consideration of women’s rights is significant. Winter (1984) stated that “at the height of its power and visibility in the nineteenth century, the movement “had the active support of less than 10% of the women in the United States” (p. 61).² This statistic provides compelling evidence that these early women writers used stereotypes to develop characters who could reach a general audience. Subscription sales meant security in the harsh economic realities women in the nineteenth century faced. The fact that the “Woman

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² Winter credits the source as Helen Waite Papashvily, *All the Happy Endings* (1890) New York:Funk and Wagnalls, p. 204.
“Question” was part of their personal experience, and that their opinions differed, but that all used humor to address the question, is an important and neglected part of feminist rhetorical history. Feminist scholars should reclaim stereotypes and women’s humor as worthy of attention; that reclamation should move from a rhetorical perspective. Within this, current notions of proto feminist humor and anti feminist humor would help clarify how feminist humor developed.


Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistic Society (pp. 360-371). Berkely: University of California.


Holley, Marietta. (1913, 1983). *Samantha rastles the woman question*. Jane Curry (Ed.). Urbana: UIP.


